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The Interminable Monopoly  
of the Avant-Garde

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All “postmodernisms” had in common an essential scepticism about the existence of an objective reality, and/or the possibility of arriving at an agreed understanding of it by rational means. All tended to a radical relativism. . . . the modernist avant-gardes had . . . extended the limits of what could claim to be art . . . almost to infinity.

—ERIC HOBSBAWM<sup>1</sup>

In matters regarding the art of our time, the avant-garde enjoys a virtual monopoly, one that is so entrenched as to seem to be without end. Its influence is felt everywhere, from kindergarten classrooms and the halls of academia to museums, the *New York Times*, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Those who optimistically predict a renaissance of traditional values and craft in painting and sculpture engage in wishful thinking. Ironically, many such optimists, while critical of the avant-garde, inadvertently lend it support by regarding its products as art, thereby granting them an ill-deserved legitimacy. In truth, the term “avant-garde art” is a misnomer, for the work it refers to is, as I will argue, not art at all.<sup>2</sup>

The ceaseless proliferation of avant-garde art forms began early in the twentieth century with the invention of abstract painting, which broke with all previous practice and opened the door to the notion that anything could “claim to be art” (to borrow a phrase from my epigraph). It gained new force with the advent of Abstract Expressionism around 1950, and has accelerated with each succeeding decade, with new genres (or variants of the old) invented at will, spurred on by technology and the inventiveness of would-be artists and rank charlatans alike.<sup>3</sup> The end to this madness—for it is in large measure a form of cultural pathol-



ogy—will require a re-birth of objectivity in philosophy, leading to a broad cultural consensus regarding what art is. Until an objective theory of art informs our educational and cultural institutions, the avant-garde will become ever more dominant.

To oppose the avant-garde effectively, its critics must first recognize how pervasive and deeply entrenched it is. The task is more easily managed if one puts a human face on it, or rather, faces, since the monopoly in question is guarded by a host of individuals (collectively known as the *artworld*), who have a vested interest in perpetuating the myth that “art” cannot be defined. At the top of the heap are philosophers of art, since philosophy deals with the fundamental principles upon which all else rests. Among the others are art historians with a particular interest in avant-garde work (including abstraction), as well as the representatives of auction houses and galleries, collectors, art critics, and sympathetic members of the public (the “artworld public”). Not least in the mix are the avant-garde artists themselves.<sup>4</sup>

## Some Definitions

Before I proceed to unravel this web of diverse interests, let me pause to consider the definition of a few key terms. By *art* I mean what is often referred to as *fine art*. My view of art is based on the theory formulated by philosopher-novelist Ayn Rand (1905–1982), who analyzed the nature of the traditional art forms in relation to human cognition, perception, and emotion. She defined art as “a selective re-creation of reality” in which the creative process is guided by the artist’s fundamental values and “sense of life.”<sup>5</sup>

The term *avant-garde* is defined by Britain’s Tate Collection (which includes Tate Modern, the most prominent avant-garde institution in the U.K.) as “that [which] is innovatory, introducing or exploring new forms or subject matter.” Applied at first in the 1850s, to the realism of Gustave Courbet, the Tate explains, the term *avant-garde* refers to the “successive movements of modern art,” and is “more or less synonymous with modern.” According to the Tate, “the notion of the avant-garde enshrines the idea that art should be judged primarily on the quality and originality of the artist’s vision and ideas.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, America’s National Gallery of Art defines *avant-garde* as referring to “work that is innovative or inventive on one or more levels: subject, medium, technique, style, or relationship to context”—work that “pushes the known boundaries of acceptable art sometimes with revolutionary, cultural, or political implications.”<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, today's avant-gardists themselves hardly ever use the term *avant-garde*. *Postmodern*, or *postmodernist*, is preferred, but even more common is *contemporary*. The artworld ignores the original sense of that term, however, which is simply "occurring, or existing, at the same period of time." In the latter part of the twentieth century, the term took on the meaning of "modern" as in "contemporary furniture" and "contemporary art." The Department of Contemporary Art at Boston's venerable Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), for example, at one point noted that, while it began in 1971 by "avidly pursuing the works of color-field [abstract] painters of the day," it had since "broadened its definition of Contemporary Art to include work from 1955 through the present."<sup>8</sup> Not *all* such work, however, certainly not academic or Classical Realist painting or sculpture. Contemporary art museums throughout the world, in fact, focus exclusively on such avant-garde forms as "conceptual art," "installation art," "video," abstract work, and so-called painting and sculpture that is "realist" yet still not art.<sup>9</sup>

## An Early Warning

It is worth recalling here the sober admonition voiced in 1912 (about a year after the Russian modernist Wassily Kandinsky produced one of the first completely abstract paintings) by the noted painter and critic Kenyon Cox. In a remarkable paper entitled "The Illusion of Progress" (an historical overview of poetry, architecture, music, sculpture, and painting), delivered before a joint meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Institute of Arts, Cox declared that he and his fellow Academicians were to some degree "believers in progress," who saw their golden age "no longer in the past, but in the future." He then observed:

[A]s the pace of progress in science and in material things has become more and more rapid, we have come to expect a similar pace in arts and letters, to imagine that the art of the future must be far finer than the art of the present or than that of the past, and that the art of one decade, or even one year, must supersede that of the preceding decade or the preceding year. . . . More than ever before "To have done is to hang quite out of fashion," and the only title to consideration is to do something quite obviously new or to proclaim one's intention of doing something newer. The race grows madder and madder.

As Cox noted, just two years after he and his audience had first heard of Cubism (invented by Picasso and Braque in 1907), the Futurists were

calling the Cubists “reactionary.” Even critics, he lamented, had abandoned traditional standards in their effort “to keep up with what seems less a march than a stampede.” And abstract painting had not yet taken hold. In his wildest nightmares, Cox (who died in 1919) could not have imagined just how much “madder” the race would become. But he had identified the essence of the avant-garde—*innovation for its own sake*—against which he issued this trenchant admonition:

Let us clear our minds . . . of the illusion that there is in any important sense such a thing as progress in the fine arts. We may with a clear conscience judge every new work for what it appears in itself to be, asking of it that it be noble and beautiful and reasonable, not that it be novel or progressive. If it be great art it will always be novel enough, for there will be a great mind behind it, and no two great minds are alike. And if it be novel without being great, how shall we be the better off?<sup>10</sup>

How indeed.

## The Visual Arts

In the discussion that follows I focus on the visual arts, because it is in that realm that the avant-garde is the most pervasive and resistant to reform. While all the arts are adversely affected by avant-garde theory to some degree, most are relatively hidden from general public view. Experimental music, opera, theater, and dance are largely confined to concert halls and theaters, far removed from the lives of most people. Avant-garde fiction and poetry are read by relatively few individuals. Avant-garde visual art, however, is everywhere in evidence. A mere glance at the arts pages of newspapers or magazines, or at the covers of art periodicals on newsstands, is sufficient to register its existence. In the cultural or business district of any large city, moreover, one is bound to encounter abstract or postmodernist “public art.”<sup>11</sup> Television news programs occasionally cover exhibitions by avant-garde or abstract artists, but never the work of contemporary academic or Classical Realist artists. Coverage of contemporary visual art has been dominated by PBS. Most notably, the award-winning biennial series *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, produced by ART21—billed as the “pre-eminent chronicler of contemporary art and artists,” and aimed at teachers and students, as well as the general public—features only avant-garde figures.<sup>12</sup>

## The Root of the Problem

Controversy is woven into the very fabric of intellectual discourse. Have an opinion on a hot social or cultural issue? A full-blown theory perhaps? Meet your adversary, who begs to differ and is eager to engage you in debate. However contentious the topic—in areas ranging from philosophy and religion to abortion and the war on terror—there is no shortage of advocates on either side. Competing ideas pour forth and are hotly debated in academia, as well as in mainstream periodicals. Regarding *the definition of art*, however, virtually all philosophers, their purported differences notwithstanding, agree in effect that anything and everything can be art. On this issue there is no controversy and, therefore, no debate. Symptomatic of this tendency is the following open-ended declaration by the American Society for Aesthetics (ASA), the principal organization of philosophers of art:

The “arts” are taken to include not only the traditional forms such as music, literature, landscape architecture, dance, painting, architecture, sculpture, and other visual arts, but also more recent additions including photography, film, earthworks, performance and conceptual art, the crafts and decorative arts, contemporary technical innovations, and other cultural practices, including work and activities in the field of popular culture.<sup>13</sup>

As “include” implies, the list of “recent additions” is far longer. Apart from film (if by that term is meant feature films, including musicals and comedies, and not action movies or documentaries), none of the examples cited above should be considered art in my view. In this, I agree with Rand that the basic forms of art (painting, sculpture, music, dance, drama, fiction, poetry) were all “born in prehistoric times” because they “do not depend on the *content* of man’s consciousness, but on its *nature*—not on the extent of man’s knowledge, but on the means by which he acquires it.” Film, she persuasively argues, is a subcategory of literature, by virtue of its basis in a screenplay.<sup>14</sup> ASA’s inclusion of “landscape architecture” and “other visual arts” among the “traditional forms” of art—not to mention its addition of “conceptual art” and “contemporary technical innovations”—suggests that other new forms will follow *ad infinitum*).

Among philosophers of art, the “institutional theory” (which holds, in effect, that something is art merely if the artworld says it is) has long held sway as documented in Stephen Davies’s *Definitions of*

*Art*, a survey of philosophers' failed attempts over a thirty-year period to pin down the precise nature of art. Instead of attempting to formulate a definition himself, Davies offers this utterly circular and non-sensical observation:

Something's being a work of art is a matter of its having a particular status. This status is conferred by a member of the Artworld, usually an artist, who has the authority to confer the status in question by virtue of occupying a role within the Artworld to which that authority attaches.<sup>15</sup>

Davies defines *artworld* as an “informal institution” that is “structured in terms of its various roles—artist, impresario, public, performer, curator, critic, and so on—and the relationships among them.” An *artist*, in his view, is “someone who has acquired (in some appropriate but informal fashion) the authority to confer art status” (87).

In view of such confused reasoning, a remarkably candid position paper presented to the American Council of Learned Societies in 1993 is telling. It listed several “seemingly intractable” central issues posing a threat to the “utility, status, and integrity” of esthetics as a philosophic discipline. Prominent among these issues was the central question, *What is art?* That question, observed the author, is thought to be “increasingly frustrating as the energies of artists . . . are directed in increasingly unconventional ways.” Few philosophers of art today would be likely to admit that the question “What is art?” poses a threat to the “utility, status, and integrity” of their profession. But it does, however much they may avoid it.<sup>16</sup>

## Art History Corrupted

As one might expect, art historians also tend to hold that art cannot be defined, and accept as art anything declared to be such by the artworld. Authors of the leading art history texts in the latter half of the twentieth century all began their surveys by raising the question, *What is art?* yet never answered it, or even explored its implications. No doubt they posed the question merely to win over readers, many of whom to this day are skeptical of the art status of abstract and avant-garde work of the sort covered in the final chapters of their tomes.<sup>17</sup>

Most art historians today would no doubt largely agree with the late Thomas McEvelley, a noted postmodernist critic and “Distinguished Lecturer” in art history at Rice University, who chaired the Department of Art Criticism and Writing at the School of Visual Arts in New York City:

It is art if it is called art, written about in an art magazine, exhibited in a museum or bought by a private collector. It seems pretty clear by now that more or less anything can be designated as art. The question is: Has it been called art by the so-called 'art system'? In our century, that's all that makes it art.<sup>18</sup>

McEvelley's avant-gardism is also evident in his book, *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (McPherson, 2005). As Michelle Kamhi has argued, however, and as commonsense suggests, "anti-art" is not art.<sup>19</sup>

Robert Rosenblum (1927–2006), a professor of art history at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, and a curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City went so far as to declare: "By now the idea of defining art is so remote that I don't think anyone would dare do it." What made something art in Rosenblum's view was "consensus . . . among informed people—[that is,] artists, dealers, curators, collectors"—the *artworld*, in a word.

In the twenty-first century, authors of standard introductions to the history of art have embraced the views expressed by McEvelley and Rosenblum wholeheartedly, paying much greater attention to avant-garde work than even their predecessors did. The chapters covering the twentieth century in the fifth edition of Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Cothren's *Art History*—"Modern Art in Europe and the Americas, 1900–1950" and "The International Scene since 1950" (titled "The International Avant-Garde Since 1945" in the early editions)—of course cover modernism and postmodernism. Everything from early abstraction and Cubism to Abstract Expressionism and the steady stream of bogus postmodernist art forms that followed—conceptual art, performance art, Pop Art, installation, video, digital art, and all the rest—make an appearance. What of the genuine art by painters and sculptors who have carried on the academic traditions of the nineteenth century? Their existence is simply ignored.<sup>20</sup>

During the second half of the twentieth century, the most popular art historical survey by far was H.W. Janson's *History of Art*, first published in 1962. When Janson died in 1982, his son Anthony F. Janson took over, issuing several revised editions until his retirement two decades later. In order to combat the growing impression that the book (which had been renamed *Janson's History of Art: The Western Tradition*) was behind the times, its publisher took the unprecedented step of issuing a major new revision in 2006 that would, among other changes, devote more space to avant-garde work of the past and near present. As one sympathetic critic

approvingly observed, the new seventh edition more closely reflects “changes in scholarship that began to place art more solidly in a social and political context . . . [using it] much more as a way to discuss race, class, and gender.”<sup>21</sup>

The College Art Association—the principal organization of art historians (its members also include artists, curators, collectors, and art teachers)—not surprisingly pursues a decidedly avant-garde agenda in its approach to contemporary art history and criticism, setting the standards for instruction in art history at most academic institutions, as well as influencing museum scholarship. In many respects it is comparable to the ideologically driven Modern Language Association (MLA), the chief professional organization of literary scholars. As noted by a disgruntled former member of the MLA—who helped to found, two decades ago, an alternative organization dedicated to traditional scholarship, the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics (ALSC):

It was during the 1980’s . . . that the Modern Language Association passionately embraced the politics of race, class, and gender, and aggressively championed wholesale revision of the canon, while at the same time drastically reducing commitment to traditional scholarship and criticism. Discontent was widespread, but isolated and unfocused. And dissent was becoming dangerous: dissenters were marginalized and in some cases disgraced.<sup>22</sup>

While continuing to eschew political issues, the organization now also seeks to “explore the literary dimensions of other arts, including film, drama, painting, and music.”

In 1997, a small band of intrepid art historians formed the Association for Art History as an alternative to the radical College Art Association, and issued this forthright statement of purpose:

The Association [for Art History] seeks to provide regular occasions for sharing insights derived from systematic study of . . . art . . . through discussion which is free of jargon, ephemeral ideology and doctrinal rigidity. . . . [B]y asserting the importance of the philological, humanistic, and scholarly aspects of art history as a research discipline and by insisting upon the centrality of the art object itself, the Association nurtures and sustains the venerable but ever-maturing discipline of art history, while promoting an intellectually coherent approach to the comprehension of the object, its image and its meanings.<sup>23</sup>

Sad to say, the association never progressed much beyond the early planning stages, although it managed to attract a few thousand members at

its peak. With distinguished scholars such as co-founder and copresident Bruce Cole of Indiana University (a specialist in Italian Renaissance art) at the helm, the organization seemed primed for success.<sup>24</sup> In late 2001, however, it was in virtual limbo, and Cole became chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Until an organization for art history informed by an objective definition of art takes root, the avant-garde will continue its dominance in academia, influencing not only future art historians but other students as well. Consider, for example, the course content of “Masterpieces of Western Art” in Columbia University’s famed undergraduate core curriculum. It deals not only with painting and sculpture but also with that distinctly postmodernist catch-all category “other media.” Of the ten figures cited in the course syllabus, the two Americans included are not esteemed, academically trained artists such as the painter Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) or the sculptor Daniel Chester French (1850–1931), but rather, Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) and Andy Warhol (1928–1987)—both icons of the avant-garde. Moreover, the only elective undergraduate course in twentieth-century art offered at Columbia claims to examine “the entire range” of art in that period but focuses instead on its “two predominant strains of artistic culture: the modernist and the avant-garde.” It was formerly taught by the radical post-modernist Rosalind Krauss, University Professor of Twentieth-Century Art and Theory. Its required textbook is *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, by Krauss and three other of the “most influential and provocative art historians of our time.”<sup>25</sup>

## Master of Fine Art?

A telling indication of the avant-garde’s monopoly of the visual arts in higher education can be found in the national standards promulgated by the College Art Association for the Master of Fine Art (M.F.A.) degree. As revised in 1991, the standards read:

[The M.F.A.] is used as a *guarantee* of a high level of professional competence in the visual arts. It is also accepted as an indication that the recipient has reached the end of the *formal* aspects of his/her education in the making of art, that is to say, it is the terminal degree in visual arts education and thus equivalent to terminal degrees in other fields, such as the Ph.D. or Ed.D.<sup>26</sup>

The M.F.A. purportedly certifies that the recipient has achieved a high level of “technical proficiency” and “the ability to make art,” and has

gained a knowledge of “modern” and “contemporary” (i.e. postmodernist) art history, theory, and criticism through seminars in those fields. In truth, however, few who are awarded the degree have attained any technical proficiency in the making of art at all, for they can neither draw, paint, nor sculpt competently. Learning to draw—from casts perhaps, then by copying the work of old Masters, and after that from life—is no longer considered “relevant” to the needs of future painters and sculptors, still less to the far more numerous future conceptual, installation, video, and abstract “artists,” not to mention photographers.

Like “master,” the term “fine arts” in the degree’s title is an egregious misnomer. The M.F.A. is now awarded for study in areas having little or nothing to do with the “fine arts,” as that term has long been understood. At one state university in the southwest, for example, candidates can major in what have been traditionally regarded as *craft* media—ceramics, fibers (weaving and painting or printing on fabric), metals (jewelry)—or in invented “intermedia” art forms such as installation, performance, sound, video, and Web art. Its sculpture curriculum “runs the gamut of the contemporary sculpture environment,” including instruction in both “neon” and “kinetic” sculpture.<sup>27</sup>

The work produced in such programs is exemplified by an exhibition at Michigan State University in the spring of 2005, which featured projects by six degree candidates in “studio art.”<sup>28</sup> One “graphic design” piece consisted of a multichannel video and “mixed-media” installation and was entitled *Crossings . . . Time in the Midst of the Pressures of Chaos*. Its maker explained her approach to art as follows: “In this post–September 11th age, drawing upon studies in visual communications and anthropology, I aim to obscure, disorient, re-orient, and engage the viewer in new angles of understanding, using design and media as tools for social change and promoting a peaceful coexistence.” Another graphic design student exhibited a thirty-second movie entitled *Anger* (an online still from the film displays computer-generated white lines criss-crossing at sharp angles on a square gray field).<sup>29</sup> Three of the works in the exhibition—abstract paintings in acrylic and mixed media, oil, and collage and mixed media—were accompanied by the following “artist statements”:

[*First painting*] I see landscape as a point where the terrestrial plain meets the sky and as a primal human condition, which acts as a metaphor for the public and private self. My work sources structures from molecular, biological, anatomical, and cultural systems, all of which provide multiple views of a constructed self.

[*Second painting*] One role of art is to voice the ineffable through allusion and abstraction. In painting/sculpture I wish to evoke this essential function through entanglement of intuition, nature, and constructions of time, history and knowledge. In doing so I find myself absorbed by the awe and beauty of the sublime.

[*Third painting*] Nature connects the interlocking knowledge passed from generation to generation. Here forces of geological, ancestral, and historical time fuse into repetitions and cycles to be observed and understood. It is in this delicate balance between creation and destruction—chaos and pater—disorder and order—that my work is centered.

The pretentious artspeak of these students, as well as the meaningless work it purports to explain, merely reflects those of their professors, and of the artworld at large.

## The Critics

Art critics now writing for general-interest periodicals are cut from the same postmodernist cloth as the philosophers, historians, and professors cited above. But unlike that of academics, their work is aimed at general readers. Roberta Smith and Grace Glueck (now retired), both of the *New York Times*, typify the breed. Smith once confided to readers that she cut her “art-critical eye-teeth” on the dictum “If an artist says it’s art, it’s art,” while Glueck declared that something is a work of art if it is “intended as art, presented as such, and . . . judged to be art by those qualified in such matters.”<sup>30</sup>

The avant-garde monopoly of art criticism is starkly evident in the results of a nationwide survey entitled “The Visual Arts Critic,” conducted in 2002 by the National Arts Journalism Program (NAJP) at Columbia University. Designed to assess arts coverage by general-interest news publications, the survey queried 169 critics (writers whom the public would view as “shapers of opinion on matters of visual art”) from ninety-six daily newspapers, thirty-four alternative weeklies, and three national newsmagazines, whose combined readership was estimated at some sixty million. The findings prompted András Szántó, NAJP’s associate director and author of the survey, to observe that the artworld is “a cultural realm singularly lacking in precise boundaries and definitions” and that this “singular situation” makes the job of the art critic more difficult owing to “the continuing proliferation of art of all kinds.” As he further noted: “The once seemingly linear course of art history has splintered off into a kaleidoscopic array of interdisciplinary experimen-

tation. Dozens of trends, old and new, now compete for critical attention, with no widely followed movement claiming superiority among them.” It seems never to have occurred to him that what is needed is an objective definition of art and a rewriting of contemporary, as well as twentieth-century, art history.<sup>31</sup>

According to Szántó, visual art is popular among the general public, attracting more “spectators” (an unfortunate term) than professional sports. In his view, the survey findings highlight the need for increased investment in visual art criticism by the nation’s newsrooms, particularly in smaller communities, “where some of the most noteworthy artistic developments are taking root.” Without saying what these developments are or why they are noteworthy, he concludes that “in order to flourish, these endeavors need the scrutiny, validation and exposure the popular news media can provide.” The notion that an art critic *validates* the art status of an object merely by writing about it (or that a museum curator does so by selecting the object for exhibition) is a key component of avant-garde critical theory. One thing is certain: the “endeavors” Szántó has in mind do not include those of artists working in traditional realist or academic styles.

People become art critics, Szántó observes, because the job enables them to “function as a stakeholder and champion of the art world, not simply as a dispassionate observer of the scene. There is a proselytizing, missionary aspect to the enterprise.” *Dispassionate* implies “objective,” of course, but that would not do for a “stakeholder” bent on “proselytizing” on behalf of “art of all kinds . . . splintered off into a kaleidoscopic array of interdisciplinary experimentation.” As one critic of a mid-size daily candidly admitted, “most readers would . . . rather look at yet another Impressionist exhibition than a well-curated exhibit of contemporary [avant-garde] art.” Szántó adds that many critics feel they are “estranged from average readers,” a frustration evident in this observation by a survey respondent:

Contemporary art critics face a dilemma. Unlike movie critics or drama critics, they regularly deal with esoteric and obscure art forms that the average newspaper reader might find completely baffling. The critic speaks the [artworld] language, understands the motives behind the art. His job then is partly one of the translator, to explain “difficult” art to the reader.<sup>32</sup>

It usually does not work. Most ordinary readers remain skeptical.<sup>33</sup>

The survey findings that most reflect the avant-garde bias of critics are reported in a section entitled “Taste and Influence.” As Szántó notes:

“Criticism is ultimately a manifestation of taste, which informs the fine distinctions critics make in their evaluations of artists and artworks.” He observes that critics’ preferences “mirror the conventional hierarchy of art forms, but only to a point.” Those surveyed prefer to cover exhibitions of paintings (which do not always qualify as art), followed by photography (not art, as Kamhi and I—and others—have argued) and sculpture (a completely open-ended concept in avant-garde circles). Postmodernist genres such as “installation art” and “conceptual art” are also favored by critics, while others such as “performance art” and “video” do not fare as well. Szántó further reports that “eclectic tastes and respect for marquee names emanate from the art critics’ rankings of living artists” (selected from a list of eighty-four),<sup>34</sup> the twenty-five highest-rated of whom constitute a “pantheon” of the “contemporary” artworld. The top ten, in order, are: Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Maya Lin, Louise Bourgeois, Chuck Close, Ed Ruscha, Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, and Frank Stella. Johns and Rauschenberg, Szántó notes, are “in a class of their own,” being the only ones liked by more than nine out of ten critics, and liked “a great deal” by more than fifty percent of them. Taste, it seems, trumps logic—which, if applied, would suggest to critics that the work of none of the ten (or of any of the rest) qualifies as art.

The critical repute of the top-rated Johns (who first stunned the artworld in the 1950s with his paintings of American flags and targets) clearly bespeaks the lamentable decline of standards in today’s culture. He was voted one of the top six living artists in a 2013 *Vanity Fair* magazine poll of “top artists,” professors of art, and curators.<sup>35</sup> In the view of John Elderfield, chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Johns’s “drawing” *Diver* (1962–63) is “one of the most important works on paper of the twentieth century” and “the most profound and intense work of art that Johns has created in any medium.” Nearly seven feet tall and six feet wide, this crude sketch (said to be worth more than ten million dollars) is scarcely intelligible, except for the slight suggestion of human hands at the ends of two barely implied arms, which are utterly detached from any further human context.<sup>36</sup> Guy Wildenstein, president of the elite Wildenstein and Company gallery in New York City (best known for dealing in Old Master, Impressionist, and post-Impressionist work) recently opined that Johns is the “greatest living artist today,” and the Paris-based Wildenstein Institute is preparing a catalogue raisonné of Johns’s work—its first ever for a living artist.<sup>37</sup>

The future of art criticism is not promising. A telling indicator is the MFA program in Art Writing at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York. Founded a decade ago, it is described as “one of the only graduate writing programs in the world that focuses specifically on criticism.” Its first director was Thomas McEvelley, whose avant-garde bias I cited above. According to his initial statement for the program, “the function of art and the nature of art criticism have both undergone change and expansion. Art has . . . expanded its purview into social engagement and critique.” Current SVA literature notes that the program has “a special emphasis on the history and current transformations of the image.” Judging from the work of “notable” faculty members and guest lecturers, anything “innovative” can qualify as art, while “traditional” contemporary work is ignored.<sup>38</sup>

## The NEA

The slogan “A Great Nation Deserves Great Art” was long emblazoned atop the home page of the National Endowment for the Arts website.<sup>39</sup> Images fading in and out beneath it ranged from that of a conductor lifting his baton to those of ballet dancers, a theatrical presentation, and a detail from a realist painting. The “disciplines” supported by the NEA included far more than just the traditional fine arts suggested by these images, however. Projects were also funded in such areas as “design” (including urban planning and landscape architecture) and “media arts” (film, radio, and television). Grants for new work in the visual arts were often described in such general terms—for example, “a professional development program for artists,” “residencies for artists to create new work,” and “an exhibition series featuring the work of emerging visual artists”—that the avant-garde character of the work was not evident. But it was often quickly revealed by a visit to the website of the organization receiving the grant, as it was by the frequent use of the term *contemporary*. One could be certain that none of the recent grants supported the work of academic or Classical Realist sculptors or painters.

Some of the grant descriptions clearly reflected the NEA’s avant-garde bias (which affects even the traditional disciplines). In one “collaborative public art project,” for example, the alleged artists would work with the residents of a public housing complex to “address the use of public space within the various buildings.” In another case, a large-scale public art work would “cover a section of a building in a heavily trafficked neighborhood,” and would “resemble a vertical sheet of rip-

pling water.” A San Francisco organization received a grant to support a survey exhibition by a single individual, which would include a new public artwork, a catalogue, a Web component, and screenings documenting his contributions to the “emerging [i.e. avant-garde] genres of video, installation, and performance art.”

Grants were also awarded to projects dealing with environmental issues. One was for an exhibition and catalogue “examining contemporary concerns regarding water and its conservation.” Another supported a project in which “the artist” would create an unspecified work in which he would “use [a] river edge as the subject of intense ecological and aesthetic study.”

The groundwork for support of these and countless other similar projects was unwittingly laid by Congress in 1965 when it passed the legislation establishing the NEA. Under the influence of its artworld advisors, the Congress decreed that the key term “the arts” is not limited to such traditional arts as music, sculpture, and drama, but also includes a host of other “major art forms,” from industrial and fashion design to documentary film, television, radio, video, and tape and sound recording.

In testimony before Congress on April 1st, 2004, Dana Gioia, then Chairman of the NEA, declared that “the arts are an essential part of our American identity and civilization.” Referring to “our Nation’s artistic legacy,” he extolled its “artistic excellence,” “indisputable artistic merit,” and “artistic ideals.” He also evoked the notion of “great art.” Surely he could not have been thinking of any of the works cited above when he intoned these words, nor of such projects supported by the NEA that year as the “experimental” documentary film and “installation” called *Milk*, which would examine “the controversies surrounding the many uses of this fluid food,” or this one from the prior year: a “public, site-specific installation” in the Centennial Park of Lynden, Washington, which the city itself would later describe as a “house-sized interactive sculpture created from interwoven twigs” by a “twig artist.”

The NEA’s public reputation derives mainly from its grants to reputable arts institutions—museums, orchestras, and dance and theater companies, among others—and on such estimable “National Initiatives” as “Shakespeare in American Communities” and “NEA Jazz Masters.”<sup>40</sup> Less well known, however, is “Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience.” Aimed at U.S. military personnel and their families, it was concerned in part with giving servicemen and women the chance to write about their wartime experiences in workshops taught by novelists and poets.<sup>41</sup> Such activities, commendable though they may be, had little to do with fostering work of “indisputable artistic merit.” As

Gioia (himself an accomplished poet and critic) should have known, other workshops, taught by historians and journalists—on writing *essays*, *memoirs*, and *personal journals*—did not belong to “the arts” at all.

The ill-named “American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius” (an ambitious program launched by the NEA in 2005) promised to “introduce Americans to the best of their cultural and artistic legacy.” Grants in its Visual Arts Touring component would be awarded to museums for mounting exhibitions that would then travel to other museums. The exhibitions could “focus on schools, movements, [and] traditions” that included but were “not limited to” the Hudson River School and American Impressionism. Among the other categories were “Aspects of American Art Post-1945 [artspeak for “avant-garde”] to the Present.” Given the NEA’s bias, exhibitions of work by painters continuing in the tradition of the Hudson River School and the Impressionists would surely not qualify for grants.<sup>42</sup> Touring grants would also support exhibitions in categories that did not, in fact, qualify as art (“fine art”), among them, photography, decorative art, industrial design, architecture, and costumes and textiles. The original initiative was reduced in scope at the start when music and dance were dropped to concentrate on the visual arts.<sup>43</sup>

By lending legitimacy to avant-garde work and to other non-art projects, the NEA (whose grant-making influences that of state and local funding agencies, as well as that of corporations and foundations) has since its inception had a mostly deleterious effect on the contemporary practice of art. Though it no longer directly supports individual avant-gardists, it makes grants to arts organizations, theater and dance companies, museums, universities, and foundations that do. The NEA’s lifetime achievement award, the National Medal of Arts, moreover, has honored numerous avant-garde figures—abstract painter Helen Frankenthaler, “sculptor” George Segal, Minimalist (abstract) painter Agnes Martin, and Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein, among others—thus further legitimizing their lofty status in the culture.<sup>44</sup>

## Cheating the Young

The avant-garde monopoly in art is most disturbing of all in the realm of education, where it can have a pernicious effect upon impressionable students. They, after all, include our future artists, philosophers of art, art historians, critics, and teachers. And it is they who will be the audiences for art as well.

The situation is dismal. Art instruction in today’s schools consists mostly of studio art, in which students learn little from teachers, many

of whom are ill-equipped to teach traditional skills, if they teach them at all. When art history is taught, the great traditional artists of the twentieth century and the present day are largely ignored. Students are led to believe, in effect, that the sort of art created from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century was no longer, or only rarely, made, and is not made at all by today's artists. In *ArtTalk*, a widely used art history survey aimed at high-school students, Rosalind Ragans suggests that *innovation* marks the art of the first half of the twentieth century, and continues to do so: "One style replaced another with bewildering speed. With the invention and spread of photography, artists no longer functioned as recorders of the visible world. They launched a quest to re-define the characteristics of art."<sup>45</sup> Artists prior to the twentieth century did not merely record the visible world, however. They re-created it. As for the "characteristics of art," those were determined in pre-history, not by artists launching quests to define or redefine them, but because (as Rand argued) they met the needs of human consciousness.<sup>46</sup>

After 1945, Ragans further explains, artists continued to make "many changes in artistic approaches, styles, and techniques," from Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art to Minimalism. But "Americans harbor a love for realism," she tells students, and "[m]any American artists continue to portray subjects in a realistic style," utilizing "new forms" of realism.<sup>47</sup> She cites Duane Hanson, whose "sculptures" of people are "made of bronze painted to look lifelike [and] are dressed in real clothes and accessories," including glasses, watches, and handbags. She also cites the painter Richard Estes, whose photorealism is characterized as "art that depicts objects as precisely and accurately as they actually appear," and Chuck Close, who is "not a painter of people [but one who] creates paintings based on large photographs taken of friends and family." That is followed by the ludicrous suggestion that Close's recent works were similar to paintings by "the Impressionist Claude Monet" because both use "brilliant colors."<sup>48</sup> Needless to say, none of the work by this trio is art.<sup>49</sup>

In the opening paragraphs of Laurie Schneider Adams's *History of Western Art*, a college-level text used in Advanced Placement and art appreciation classes in secondary schools, a list of materials used in "modern" sculpture—including "glass, plastics, cloth, string, wire, television monitors, and even animal carcasses"!—hints at the author's avant-garde bias.<sup>50</sup> A page or so later, Adams acknowledges that for ordinary people avant-garde art is a hard sell. "Is it art?" is a familiar question," she notes. Indeed it is, but why? She makes no attempt to explain, hiding instead behind the claim that the question "expresses the

difficulty of defining ‘art.’” While it is true that the concept of art is difficult for ordinary people to define, most do not even try. They have an intuitive sense of what art is, which prompts them to ask such questions as “Why is that art?” or “That’s *art*?” What those questions imply is the sense that something regarded as art by experts may not be, or is not, art.

At the end of an earlier edition of her book, Adams left the reader with this parting thought:

Having entered the twenty-first century, we are presented with a proliferation of artistic styles and expanding definitions of what constitutes art. The pace of technological change . . . spawns new concepts and styles at an increasing rate. . . . It will be for future generations to look back at our era and to separate the permanent from the impermanent.<sup>51</sup>

To grasp just how entrenched the avant-garde is in schools across America, one need only consider the makeup of the National Art Education Association (NAEA), which was founded in 1947. Its more than 22,000 members (many of whom refer to themselves as “art educators”) teach at every level of instruction from kindergarten through twelfth grade.<sup>52</sup> While the vast majority are no doubt well-meaning and hard-working, albeit often ill-trained, a vocal minority are activists who proselytize their students regarding social and political issues involving race, gender, sexual orientation, the environment, and the war on terrorism, at the expense of *art*.

The most influential members of NAEA, however, are the professors who teach future art teachers. They are the ones who occupy most of the key leadership positions in the organization, and who edit its two periodicals.

*Studies in Art Education*, the more scholarly of the two NAEA journals, features such articles as “Students Online as Cultured Subjects: Prolegomena to Researching Multicultural Arts Courses on the Web.”<sup>53</sup> Scholarly jargon (as in the title) and flawed syntax render it virtually unintelligible—not only to ordinary art teachers but probably to many academic readers as well. (As one retired professor of art and education has observed, “trying to make sense of written and oral presentations in our profession is like swimming in a sea of molasses.”)<sup>54</sup> Consider, for example, this excerpt from the article’s abstract:

[R]esearchers need to recognize mechanisms by which students can be constituted as cultured (gendered, racialized, etc.) subjects, and that many of these mechanisms will depend on certain characteristics particular to asyn-

chronous, text-based learning environments. Characteristics and mechanisms discussed in this article include disembodied text-based performance of identities, speech-like writing, space-flexibility and student geographical location, space-time flexibility, and class attendance/participation, time flexibility, and asynchronous discussion threads.

In the same issue of the journal is an article dealing with the integration of “digital art” (specifically “internet art”) into the curriculum. A third article, entitled “Performing Resistance,” is peppered with artworld buzzwords—a sure sign that the writers are members of the avant-garde, and that the work under discussion is not art. Declaring, for example, that “the creative and scholarly works of many *contemporary* artists, critical theorists, and educators *challenge* the cultural assumptions that are embedded in our understandings of technology and its relationship to art and human life,” they further refer to “*questions* that performance artists and critical theorists raise as they *explore* the multiple and fluid intersections between art, technology, and the body” (italics are mine, to indicate buzzwords).<sup>55</sup> The terms *explore* and *challenge* recur repeatedly throughout the text.

*Art Education*, the official journal of NAEA, is an illustrated bimonthly magazine aimed at the classroom teacher. Its editors therefore exert far more influence than those of *Studies*. The avant-garde bias of former editor B. Stephen Carpenter II, now a professor at Penn State University, may be taken as representative. A practitioner of mixed-media, assemblage, installation, and performance art, he exhibited work in the 4th Biennale Internazionale d’Arte Contemporanea in Florence (2003), one of the numerous avant-garde expositions dotting the international artworld calendar.<sup>56</sup>

Representative of many articles published in *Art Education* is “Postmodern Principles: In Search of a 21st Century Art Education,” in which the author, Olivia Gude, identifies eight “important postmodern artmaking practices” characteristic of the projects in classes she has taught for teens. One of these, “appropriation,” is the “routine use of appropriated materials,” such as photographs, in the making of art. For the students, she reports, “recycling imagery felt comfortable and commonplace.” The practice also meant, of course, that they did not have to learn the traditional skills of drawing and painting. To explain “hybridity,” another postmodernist principle, Gude writes:

Contemporary artists routinely create sculptural installations utilizing new media [“media art”] such as large-scale projections of video, sound pieces,

[and] digital photography. Indeed, multi-media works of art are now encountered in contemporary museums and galleries more frequently than traditional sculpted or painted objects.<sup>57</sup>

Gude, Co-ordinator of Art Education in the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois at Chicago, holds that art education plays a vital role in developing “democratic life,” a role that is properly the purview of civics and history classes.<sup>58</sup>

One of the most ominous signs of postmodernist influence in today’s art classrooms is the “visual culture” movement of recent years. Advocated by many prominent academics in the field, it focuses not on works of art, but on *anything seen with the naked eye*, particularly if it can be viewed in relation to race or sexual orientation or other hot-button social and political issues of the day. As Kamhi observed in an article entitled “Where’s the *Art* in Today’s Art Education?,” a “key factor in the shift to visual culture studies has undoubtedly been postmodernism—which has all too swiftly gained wide currency.” In that same article, she cited a rare NAEA dissenter, John Stinespring, who argued that postmodernism is governed by a series of major fallacies, which teachers have uncritically accepted—among them (as summarized by Kamhi): “an ever-broadening definition of art—the acceptance as of equal value anything put forward as art; the rejection of all standards of qualitative judgment; the denigration of individual creativity and originality; an emphasis on ‘multiculturalism’ at the expense of the personally meaningful; [and] the insistence that all art makes implicit or explicit statements about socioeconomic or political issues—with the implication that there is only one “right” position on each issue, invariably to the left of center.”<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

Admittedly, I have sketched a rather pessimistic picture regarding the future of art. Having argued that the avant-garde enjoys a virtual monopoly, I have suggested that it is unlikely to end soon. What is needed to reverse the present state of affairs was anticipated by the philosopher Eliseo Vivas more than half a century ago. In an essay entitled “The Objective Basis of Criticism,” he charged that with regard to the arts, “contemporary American criticism suffers from a serious defect: it ignores, sometimes truculently, the need for a systematic philosophy of art.” His interest in such matters, he noted, “originally sprang from certain convictions which thirty-five years of study have confirmed and clarified”:

The first of these is that art is no mere adornment of human living . . . for which a substitute could easily be found, but an indispensable factor in making the animal man, into a human person. Another is that its proper use can be discovered by an analysis of the work of art as an embodiment of objective meanings and values. A third is that we cannot grasp the work of art objectively unless we bear in mind the act that creates it and the distinctive mode of experience that apprehends it.

Missing from criticism, Vivas argued, was a clear idea of such fundamental issues as “the nature of art” and its role in human life.<sup>60</sup>

Two decades later, Ayn Rand (though no doubt unaware of Vivas’s work) formulated the core of just such an “[Objective] systematic philosophy of art”—part of the broader philosophic system she called “Objectivism.” It remains to be seen if her esthetic theory will take hold in the culture, ending what I have termed the “interminable monopoly of the avant-garde” and ushering in a genuine renaissance of traditional painting and sculpture.

The likelihood of such a cultural upheaval anytime soon has greatly diminished since I first drafted this essay over a decade ago, even as the sheer number of contemporary traditional painters and sculptors has grown. It is an illusion to maintain otherwise. As I have documented, the ever-increasing dominance of the avant-garde is due to stubborn adherence to the notion that virtually anything can be art if the artworld *says* it is. *What Art Is* was published fifteen years ago as an antidote to such madness. Despite praise by respected academic reviewers and occasional citations in books, it has thus far been largely ignored—even, with rare exceptions, by Rand’s followers.<sup>61</sup>

Still, I remain guardedly optimistic. In 2001, in an In-Depth interview on C-Span, the ninety-four-year-old cultural historian Jacques Barzun, who knew a thing or two about intellectual history, expressed admiration for *What Art Is* and for Rand’s ideas about art. Later that year, he wrote Kamhi and me to say that “yours is the kind of work that makes its way slowly but lasts long, both because its subject is perennial and because of the breadth and depth of your treatment.”<sup>62</sup> Time will tell.

## 9. The Interminable Monopoly of the Avant-Garde

*Originally written more than a decade ago, this essay required considerable updating and revision for the present volume. Owing to circumstances beyond my control, only minimal changes were possible within the text itself. For that*

*reason, some notes are much longer than in accepted scholarly practice and include substantive material that might otherwise have been incorporated in the text itself. In lieu of paragraph breaks, I have broken some of the longest into sections marked [a], [b], and so on, for ease of reading and citation. —L.T.*

1. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991*, New York: Vintage, 1996, 517–18 <<http://tinyurl.com/Hobsbawm-TheAgeOfExtremes>>. Hobsbawm also wrote *Behind the Times: The Decline and Fall of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Gardes*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1998 <<http://www.eric-reyes.com/assets/hobsbawm001.pdf>>. For an informative but ultimately dismissive review of *Behind the Times* that also cites *The Age of Extremes*, see Donald Kuspit, “The Avant-Garde Dies,” *Artnet Magazine*, June 25, 1999 <<http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/index/kuspit/kuspit6-25-99.asp>>. Kuspit’s own high regard for avant-garde art is reflected in his evident disdain for Hobsbawm’s thoughts on the subject, which he characterizes as “contempt for the avant-garde.”

2. To avoid cluttering the text, I will henceforth generally omit scare quotes around spurious terms such as “avant-garde art” and “contemporary art.”

3. Appendix A, “New Forms of Art,” in Torres and Kamhi, *What Art Is* (see below, n. 5) lists some hundred purported art forms and categories invented in the twentieth century. It is reprinted in *What Art Is Online* <[www.aristos.org/whatart/append-A.htm](http://www.aristos.org/whatart/append-A.htm)>, followed by Part II, which includes about seventy new examples added since 2000. The list continues to grow. Regarding charlatanism, cultural historian Jacques Barzun (1907–2012) wrote us that he agreed with our contention that (in his words) “much put forward as art these days is a product of either charlatanism or invincible ignorance.” Personal correspondence, September 10, 2006; quoted in “A Jacques Barzun Compendium” <<http://www.aristos.org/barzun.htm#Letters From>>. On charlatanism, see also Roger Scruton (who speaks of a “culture of fakes,” from “fake expertise” to “fake art”), “The Great Swindle,” *Aeon*, December 17th, 2012 <<http://aeon.co/magazine/philosophy/roger-scruton-fake-culture/>>. On the view of ordinary people that abstract art is made by charlatans and frauds, see David Halle, *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 <<http://tinyurl.com/Halle-AbstractArt>>; cited in *What Art Is*, 176.

4. As defined by the late philosopher Arthur Danto, the term “artworld” refers to all the individuals who are knowledgeable about, and accept, the theories behind contemporary art. “The Artworld,” *Journal of Philosophy* 61 (1964), 571–584. Danto’s fellow philosopher George Dickie coined the term “artworld public” in “The New Institutional Theory of Art,” *Proceedings of the 8th Wittgenstein Symposium* 10 (1983), 57–64.

5. [a] Ayn Rand, “Art and Cognition,” in *The Romantic Manifesto*, rev. ed., New York: New American Library, 1975, 45–79. Rand’s full definition is “Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments” (19). In her essay “Art and Sense of Life,” she repeats the definition, adding: “It is the artist’s sense of life that controls and integrates his work, directing the innumerable choices he has to make, from the choice of subject to the subtlest details of style” (34–35). On Rand’s definition, see also *What Art Is*, ch. 6, “The Definition of Art,” 103–08.

[b] Although Rand did not coin the term *sense of life*, she appears to have been the first writer to analyze the concept in depth and to define it precisely—as “a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence.” Her analysis is a major contribution to the literature on esthet-

ics. I cannot imagine thinking or writing about art without having it in mind on some level.

[c] Regarding Rand’s ideas on sense of life and art, the Jesuit philosopher W. Norris Clarke (1915–2008) commented two decades ago that he found her thought on the subject “especially interesting. . . . She is indeed a powerful and clear thinker.” See “A Jesuit’s Praise of Rand’s Theory of Art,” *Aristos*, Notes and Comments, March 2013 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-13/brief-3.htm>>.

[d] For a critical introduction to Rand’s theory of art, see Louis Torres and Michelle Marder Kamhi, *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*, Chicago: Open Court, 2000; our discussion of her definition of art, with reformulations by each of us, is on pages 103–08 <<http://tinyurl.com/DefinitionArt-Ch6-WhatArts>>).

[e] Reviews of *What Art Is* were favorable. For example, Richard E. Palmer (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, MacMurray College) judged *What Art Is* to be a “[w]ell documented . . . debunking of twentieth-century art . . . and art theory” and “a major addition to Rand scholarship,” *Choice* magazine, April 2001 <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/choice.htm>>. Jonathan Vickery (now Associate Professor, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, U.K.) observed that *What Art Is* is “as trenchantly anti-modernist as anti-postmodernist,” and concluded that though Rand’s esthetics is “not likely to find many converts in the contemporary art world,” Kamhi and I offered “a balanced critical assessment of [Rand’s] arguments, finding justification for those arguments from archaeology, cognitive science and clinical psychology, and applying [her] ideas to every area of contemporary culture,” *The Art Book*, September 2001; see our response <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/resp-ab.htm>>.

6. Tate Collection, Glossary of art terms <<http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/a/avant-garde>>.

7. [a] Definition of “Avant-Garde,” National Gallery of Art (NGA), Washington, D.C. <[https://www.nga.gov/feature/manet/tdef\\_avant.htm](https://www.nga.gov/feature/manet/tdef_avant.htm)>. “Pushing the boundaries” (and variants thereof) is an artworld cliché. See “Artworld Buzzwords,” *What Art Is* Online <<http://www.aristos.org/whatart/append-B.htm>> and <<http://www.aristos.org/whatart/app-B-II.htm>>.

[b] In the present essay, I take the term *avant-garde* to include all forms of bogus art invented since the turn of the twentieth century—from abstraction to all the forms falling under the rubrics *postmodern* and *contemporary*. See also *What Art Is*, 392n8.

8. The MFA’s Department of Contemporary Art subsequently dropped the reference to “color-field painters,” and now notes that the MFA was “one of the first encyclopedic museums in the United States to fully integrate performance art [an *avant-garde* invention] into its collections, exhibitions and programs” <<http://www.mfa.org/collections/contemporary-art>>.

9. Most telling in this connection is the definition offered by Britain’s Tate Museum: “The term *contemporary art* is loosely used to refer to art of the present day and of the relatively recent past, *of an innovative or avant-garde nature*” <<http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/c/contemporary-art>>, emphasis added. That is the sense in which the term is generally used in today’s artworld, including the field of art history. According to Joshua Shannon, an historian of so-called post-war art (i.e., “*avant-garde art*”): “In the last twenty-five years, the academic study of contemporary art has grown from a fringe of art history to the fastest-developing field in the discipline.” Quoted in Hal Foster, “Contemporary Extracts,” *E-Flux Journal*, January 2010 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/contemporary-extracts/>>.

10. Kenyon Cox, “The Illusion of Progress,” *Artist and Public and Other Essays on Art Subjects*, New York: Scribner’s, 1914, 77–98 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16655/16655-h/16655-h.htm#III>>. By the end of the twentieth century, Cox’s prescient observation that “the only title to consideration” was “to do something quite obviously new or to proclaim one’s intention of doing something newer” was corroborated in a monumental study entitled *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), by clinical psychologist Louis Sass. As Sass notes: “[A]vant-gardism [is] the ‘chronic condition’ or ‘second nature’ of modern art.” (29) “The paradoxicality of entrenched avant-gardism is captured in the notion of an ‘adversary culture’ or ‘tradition of the new,’ whose only constant is change itself, whose only rule is the injunction to ‘make it new.’ By their very nature, such ambitions will incite the most varied forms of expression in an ever-accelerating whirl of real or pseudo-innovation (or in the constant and ironic recycling of familiar forms).” (30) Sass also aptly observes: “The first characteristic of modernism . . . is its negativism and antitraditionalism: its defiance of authority and convention, [and] its antagonism or indifference to the expectations of its audience” (29). His book is essential reading for anyone seeking to truly understand the interminable monopoly of the avant-garde.

11. [a] For critiques of avant-garde public art, see Michelle Marder Kamhi’s aptly titled “Today’s ‘Public Art’—Rarely Public, Rarely Art,” *Aristos*, May 1988 <<http://www.aristos.org/backissu/public-art.pdf>>; her recent book, *Who Says That’s Art? A Commonsense View of the Visual Arts*, New York: Pro Arte Books, 2014, 224–28; and “‘Public Art’ for Whom?” *For Piero’s Sake*, May 5, 2015 <<http://www.mmkamhi.com/2015/05/05/public-art-for-whom>>.

[b] Virtually all current public (civic) art is avant-garde. It is also controversial, as acknowledged even by its proponents. The guiding principles of the Association for Public Art (APA) in Philadelphia likely reflect the official view of most, if not all, large American cities. The organization attempts to justify such work by claiming that public art is “the artist’s response to our time and place combined with our own sense of who we are.” And further: “In a diverse society, all art cannot appeal to all people, nor should it be expected to do so. . . . Is it any wonder . . . that public art causes controversy?” APA’s avant-garde bias is implicit in its answers to rhetorical questions it poses in tacit recognition of widespread hostility and skepticism toward the work it sponsors. For example: Q. “What is the ‘art’ of public art?” A. “As our society and its modes of expression evolve, so will our definitions of . . . art. . . . Q. “Why public art?” A. “It reflects and reveals our society and adds meaning to our cities” <<http://tinyurl.com/WhatIsPublicArt-AssnPA-Phila>>.

[c] The contrast between two public works in Philadelphia created three decades apart—one traditional, the other avant-garde—belies the APA’s claims: *The Signer* (1982), by EvAngelos Frudakis (b. 1921) <<http://tinyurl.com/Frudakis-TheSigner>>, <<http://tinyurl.com/About-TheSigner>>; and *Maelstrom* (2009), by Roxy Paine (b. 1966) <<http://tinyurl.com/RoxyPaine-Maelstrom>>, <<http://tinyurl.com/AboutMaelstrom-Museo>>. On Frudakis, see <<http://tinyurl.com/Frudakis-Daughter>>. On Paine, see various biographies online.

[d] For further examples of current avant-garde bias, see the Chicago Public Art Program <<http://tinyurl.com/ChicagoPublicArt>> and the Dallas Public Art Collection <<http://tinyurl.com/DallasPublicArt>>.

12. PBS, *Art in the Twenty-First Century* <<http://www.art21.org/films>>; ART21 <<http://www.art21.org>>.

13. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* <<http://jaac.aesthetics-online.org>>.
14. Rand, “Art and Cognition,” 73. On film, see also *What Art Is*, 253–261.
15. [a] Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991, 218–19. The passage quoted, from the book’s concluding section, is preceded by the following statement: “I have no formulaic definition to offer. The arguments of the previous pages tempt me to characterize art in the following terms.” On Davies, see *What Art Is*, ch. 6 <<http://tinyurl.com/DefinitionArt-Ch6-WhatArtIs>>.
- [b] On the rules of proper definition, see *What Art Is*, 101–03; Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 2nd ed., ed. by Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff, New York: Meridian, 1990, 41–42, 50–52; Patrick J Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 12th ed., Independence, Ky.: Cengage, 2015; David Kelley, *The Art of Reasoning: An Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking*, 4th ed., New York: Norton, 2013; and Lionel Ruby, *Logic: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Chicago: Lippincott, 1960, 102–08.
16. The 1993 ASA position paper was presented by Margaret P. Battin, now Distinguished Professor, Philosophy, University of Utah. For more recent perspectives on esthetics, see my reviews of books by prominent academic philosophers: Cynthia Freeland’s *But Is It Art? An Introduction to Art Theory* (New York: Oxford, 2001), “Judging a Book by Its Cover,” *Aristos*, May 2003 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-03/judging.htm>>; and Denis Dutton’s *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), “What Makes Art Art? Does Denis Dutton Know?” *Aristos*, April 2010 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-10/dutton.htm>>. Also of interest is Dutton’s response <<https://web.archive.org/web/20140830072349/http://theartinstinct.com>> [search for Ayn Rand]; and my response to him, “The Ad Hom Instinct: A Reply to Denis Dutton,” *Aristos*, November 2010 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-10/dutton-2.htm>>.
17. As documented in *What Art Is*, 9–11, the authors I have in mind include H.W. Janson, then Anthony Janson (*History of Art*); Frederick Hartt (*Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*); John Canaday (*What Is Art?*); and E.H. Gombrich (*The Story of Art*).
18. Thomas McEvilley, quoted in Amei Wallach, “Is It Art? Is It Good? And Who Says So?” *New York Times*, October 12, 1997. Wallach’s piece began: “The debate continues about where art is today and *what so many people still want it to be*. . . . The *Times* asked art-world participants and observers for answers” (emphasis added). A recent article by art critic Holland Cotter echoes one of the criteria cited by McEvilley. Referring to “an installation consisting entirely of radio waves in an otherwise empty gallery,” he observes: “What made such work art was the fact that it was in a gallery.” “Tuning Out Digital Buzz, for an Intimate Communion with Art,” *New York Times*, March 16th, 2015.
19. See Michelle Marder Kamhi, “Anti-Art Is Not Art,” *What Art Is Online*, *Aristos*, June 2002 <<http://www.aristos.org/whatart/anti-art.htm>>; and *Who Says That’s Art?*, ch. 4; as well as *What Art Is*, 172.
20. [a] Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Cothren, *Art History*, 5th ed., New York: Pearson, 2013. Stokstad conceived and was the sole author of the first three editions (1995, 2001, and 2007).
- [b] With a few exceptions—such as Thomas Cole (*The Oxbow*, 1836) and Thomas Eakins (*The Gross Clinic*, 1875)—the most eminent traditional artists of the past hundred years, including those of the Hudson River School (of which Cole is considered the founder) and the Boston School, are simply airbrushed from art history, as are the greatest of today’s painters inspired by them.

[c] On contemporary painters working in the tradition of the Hudson River School, see the Hudson River Fellowship <<http://tinyurl.com/HudsonRiverFellowship>>. See also, “River Crossings: Contemporary Art Comes Home,” about a recent exhibition of work by a group of mostly avant-garde artists who allegedly “have a connection to the region that Thomas Cole and Frederic Church helped ignite as a hot-bed of innovative contemporary art” <<http://www.rivercrossings.org/artists>>.

[d] On the Boston School, see R.H. Ives Gammell, *The Boston Painters: 1900–1930*, ed. by Elizabeth Ives Hunter, Orleans, Mass: Parnassus, 1986; Christopher Volpe, “A Legacy of Beauty: Paintings in the Boston School Tradition” <<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/7aa/7aa740.htm>>; and Edward J. Sozanski, “The Boston School: A City’s Art of Arts,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 27, 1986 <<http://tinyurl.com/Sozanski-BostonSchoolCitysArt>>. See also Richard Lack, ed., *Realism in Revolution: The Art of the Boston School*, Dallas: Taylor, 1985; and “The New Dawn of Painting” (my review of *Realism in Revolution*), *Aristos*, March 1986 <<http://www.aristos.org/backissu/newdawn.pdf>>.

[e] On Classical Realism, inspired by the Boston School, see Gary B. Christensen, *Richard F. Lack: Catalogue Raisonné*, with Preface by Gabriel P. Weisberg, Department of Art History, University of Minnesota, and Biography by Stephen Gjertson (Saint Paul: Afton, Fall 2015); Stephen Gjertson, “Classical Realism: A Living Artistic Tradition” <<http://tinyurl.com/Gjertson-ClassicalRealism>>; and Louis Torres, “The Legacy of Richard Lack,” *Aristos*, December 2006 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-06/lack.htm>>.

[f] Is bias such as that shown by Stokstad and Cothren ethical? Probably not. Section II of the College Art Association’s “Standards for the Practice of Art History” states that “[s]cholarly integrity demands *an awareness of personal and cultural bias and openness to issues of difference* as these may inflect methodology and analysis” <<http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/histethics>>, emphasis added.

21. Randy Kennedy, “Revising Art History’s Big Book: Who’s In and Who Comes Out?” *New York Times*, March 7, 2006. Observing that “in many colleges, the book, while as familiar as furniture, had become something to teach against,” Kennedy reported that it was Joseph Jacobs, an independent scholar, critic, and art historian, who wrote the chapters on modern art in the new edition and, among other things, “bee[ed] up both Marcel Duchamp and Robert Rauschenberg, moves he said were long overdue.” Since then, the 8th edition of *Janson’s History of Art: The Western Tradition*, by Penelope J.E. Davies, et. al., has been issued (New York: Pearson, 2011).

22. Norman Fruman, “A Short History of the ALSC,” *ALSC Newsletter* (Spring 1995) <[http://www.alscw.org/LiteraryMatters\\_1-1.pdf](http://www.alscw.org/LiteraryMatters_1-1.pdf)>. The organization is now called the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (ALSCW) <<http://www.alscw.org/about/index.html>>.

23. Association for Art History (AAH), Statement of Purpose, as originally published on the Indiana University website. See the slightly different version circulated to members of the Art Libraries Society of North America by AAH co-founder and co-president Bruce Cole: <<http://tinyurl.com/AAH-StatementOfPurpose>>.

24. The other co-founder and co-president of the Association for Art History was Andrew Ladis (1949–2007), Franklin Professor of Art History at the University of Georgia.

25. [a] About the twelve units of the “Art Humanities: Masterpieces of Western Art” section of Columbia’s core curriculum—in particular, that on Pollock and Warhol—click on “Art Humanities Syllabus” at <<http://www.college.columbia>

.edu/core/classes/arthur.php>, then access the “Art Humanities Website” at <<http://www.learn.columbia.edu/arthurhumanities>> [Login: ahar, PW: 826sch], and select Pollock/Warhol at top right. On Columbia’s “Twentieth-Century Art” course see the description under Spring 2015 Undergraduate Courses at <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/arhistory/courses/spring-2015/spring-2015-undergraduate-courses.html>>.

[b] The publisher of *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* asserts that the authors “provide the most comprehensive critical history of art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries ever published” <[http://www.thamesandhudson.com/media/images/ArtSince1900-contents\\_24672.pdf](http://www.thamesandhudson.com/media/images/ArtSince1900-contents_24672.pdf)>. As indicated by the book’s subtitle and Contents page, however, they deal only with work that was either modern, anti-modern (e.g., Nazi “Degenerate ‘Art’” [1937a]), or postmodern—completely omitting the traditional painting and sculpture of that period. Such an omission violates the College Art Association’s ethical standards (see above, note 20f).

26. College Art Association, “M.F.A. Standards,” 1991 <<http://tinyurl.com/CAA-MFA-Standards-1991>>, emphasis in original. The standards were again revised in 2008 <<http://tinyurl.com/CAA-MFA-Standards-2008>>.

27. Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, School of Art, Arizona State University <<http://art.asu.edu/about>>. Students in the Sculpture Program at the Institute are said to be “incredibly flexible, working with great skill in diverse media, each creating their own unique definition of the field of sculpture” <<http://art.asu.edu/sculpture/program>>.

28. Michigan State University, Master of Fine Arts Exhibition 2005 <<http://artmuseum.msu.edu/exhibitions/future/mfa/index.htm>>. Regarding another such exhibition, see Louis Torres, “The Future of the Art World,” *Aristos* (May 2003) <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-03/acad-5c.htm>>. For more recent examples, see *Who Says That’s Art?*, 173. See also the latest MFA Thesis exhibitions at Yale University’s School of Art (ranked #1 among Fine Arts schools by *U.S. News & World Report*) <<http://art.yale.edu/1156ChapelArchive>>. The Yale School of Art’s Dean is Robert Storr, who was curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from 1990 to 2002.

29. *Crossings*, Artist Statement by Mara Jevera Fulmer <<http://artmuseum.msu.edu/exhibitions/future/mfa/1.htm>>. Fulmer is now Associate Professor/Program Developer-Coordinator in Graphic Design, Charles Stewart Mott Community College, Flint, Michigan. On *Anger*, see Artist Statement by Katherine Krmarik <<http://www.artmuseum.msu.edu/exhibitions/future/mfa/2.htm>>. Krmarik is currently an adjunct faculty member, Fine Arts and Social Sciences Division, Mott Community College, Flint, Michigan.

30. Roberta Smith, “It May Be Good but Is It Art?” *New York Times*, September 4th, 1988 <<http://tinyurl.com/Smith-ButIsItArt-NYTimes>>, 1; Grace Glueck, “Art on the Firing Line,” *New York Times*, July 9th, 1989 <<http://tinyurl.com/Glueck/ArtOnFiringLine-NYTimes>>, 3. On these and similar remarks by other critics, see *What Art Is*, 11–12. Smith is now co-chief art critic at the *Times*.

31. András Szántó (Author/Project Director), *The Visual Arts Critic: A Survey of Visual Arts Critics at General-Interest Publications in America*, National Arts Journalism Program, Columbia University, Columbia University, 2002 <<http://www.najp.org/publications/researchreports/tvac.pdf>>.

32. The anonymous respondent’s forthright remarks continue: “Being able to interpret the mysteries bestows a certain importance on the critic, making him

essential to the whole enterprise, an insider. It can be a seductive role. It can be very, very difficult, then, for a critic to step back and make a clear-headed, unbiased appraisal, especially if doing so means pronouncing something artistically worthless or nonsensical. He's too heavily invested" <<http://criticavtjkj.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-visual-art-critic-survey-of-art.html>>. For a critic to make such a judgment would in effect be to declare that a thing dubbed *art* by his artworld peers is *not* art. Few have the courage to do so.

33. In *What Art Is*, Michelle Kamhi and I argue that despite continual efforts by alleged experts to “educate” the public on the merits of avant-garde work, ordinary people tend to remain unpersuaded. We offer numerous examples (3–7). For opinion pieces critical of such antitraditional work, by columnists and writers who are not art critics, as well as statements by ordinary people expressing similar views, see the Aristos Awards at <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-award-3.htm>>.

34. Measured against the standards implied in this essay and elaborated in *What Art Is*, not one of the eighty-four individuals cited in the survey qualifies as an “artist.”

35. Mark Stevens, “Paint by Numbers,” *Vanity Fair*, December 2013 <<http://tinyurl.com/Stevens-PaintNumber-VanityFair>>.

36. Purportedly alluding to novelist Hart Crane’s suicide by drowning in 1932, *Diver* <[http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=89254](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=89254)> was a study for a painting of the same name. Carol Vogel, a *New York Times* art writer, has described it as follows: “Drawn on brown paper with charcoal, chalk, pastel, and probably watercolor, the work abstractly suggests a diver in motion, showing two sets of hands, one touching and pointing down as though preparing to dive and the other coming back up as if the figure were rising” (“The Modern Adds Art as Its Building Grows,” December 16, 2003) <<http://tinyurl.com/Vogel-ModernAddsArt-NYTimes>>. *Diver* (1962–1963), in fact, does no such thing, abstractly or otherwise. See also note 37.

37. “A Happy Source of Riches in a Pair of Scowling Busts,” *New York Times*, January 28th, 2005. As if one such catalogue were not enough, another is underway. See “The Catalogue Raisonné of the Drawings of Jasper Johns” (includes a photograph of Johns working on *Diver* in 1963), the Menil Collection, 2014 <<http://jasperjohnsdrawings.menil.org>>. See note 36, above.

38. Regarding McEvelley’s views, see above, pp. 170–71; and <<http://tinyurl.com/ok7qzgg>>. On SVA’s MFA program in Art Writing, see <[http://artwriting.sva.edu/?page\\_id=49](http://artwriting.sva.edu/?page_id=49)>.

39. That slogan is the title of the Epilogue to an official history of the NEA through 2008, which is said by the NEA to cover its “sometimes controversial history with candor, clarity, and balance.” See “National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965–2008,” ed. by Mark Bauerlein, with Ellen Grantham, 2009 <<http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea-history-1965-2008.pdf>>. See also “Arts and Public Support,” my critique of the NEA, in Ronald Hamowy, *Encyclopedia of Libertarianism*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2008 <<http://tinyurl.com/Torres-ArtsAndPublicSupport>>.

40. On the 2015 NEA Shakespeare initiative, see <<http://arts.gov/national/shakespeare>>. On the 2015 Jazz Masters initiative, see <<http://arts.gov/honors/jazz>>.

41. About the “Operation Homecoming” initiative, see <<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=26832>>.

42. [a] The NEA grantmaking process is fraught with avant-garde bias. The “Objectives” section of the NEA’s “Art Works” Guidelines, for example, emphasizes “innovative forms of art-making” <<http://tinyurl.com/NEA-GuidelinesObjectives>>.

Similarly, the Visual Arts Guidelines cite support for “contemporary artists” and their projects, “[i]nnovative uses of technology or new models in the creation of new work,” and exhibitions of “contemporary art with a focus on science/technology collaborations” <<http://tinyurl.com/NEA-VisualArtsGuidelines>>.

[b] A Visual Arts grant was awarded to enable artists “to create, interpret, and present new work” at the American Academy in Rome. Originally traditionalist in its outlook and aims, the Academy (which was founded in 1894 by the neoclassical sculptors Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Daniel Chester French and other like-minded individuals) now notes that “times . . . have changed since its inception.” They sure have. By its own account, it is now “a forward-moving, forward-thinking community of artists and scholars enlightened by . . . history . . . dedicated to preserving its past while linking that past to the demands and sensibilities of contemporary society” <http://www.aarome.org/about/place/academy>>. In today’s cultural climate, one can easily guess what sort of “new work” will be featured there.

[c] The only direct evidence I know of regarding the NEA’s avant-garde bias is a rejection letter it sent in 1988 to the recently established New York Academy of Art, turning down its application for a grant. According to Gregory Hedberg, the Academy’s founder and first director, the letter stated that its “traditional education would stifle creativity in young artists.” See Hedberg’s essay “A New Direction in Art Education,” in *Realism Revisited: The Florence Academy of Art* (Bad Frankenhausen, Germany: Panorama Museum, 2003), reprinted in the exhibition catalogue *Slow Painting: A Deliberate Renaissance* (Atlanta: Oglethorpe University Museum of Art, 2006), 11–15. Commenting on the Academy’s grant rejection, Wendy Steiner (no doubt an NEA partisan) claims that, in spite of it, the NEA was “not exactly a hotbed of avant-gardism” (*The Real Real Thing: The Model in the Mirror of Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, 154).

[d] Visual Arts Grants Panels purportedly consist of “experts with knowledge and experience in the area under review.” Each of the panels is said to be “diverse with regard to geography, race and ethnicity, and artistic points of view” <<http://tinyurl.com/NEA-GrantReviewProcess>>. Notwithstanding alleged diversity regarding “artistic points of view,” however, the five visual arts experts on each panel tend to be predominantly avant-gardist. Consider, for example, the qualifications and artistic points of view of the members of Art Works I, Panel A, for Fiscal Year 2015 <<http://tinyurl.com/NEA-ArtWorksPanelA>>: Bryant K. Adams, <<http://bkadamiamart.tumblr.com/bio>>; Sara Daleiden, <<http://www.mke-lax.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/soul-daleiden-about-0213122.pdf>>; Erin Riley-Lopez <<http://www.albright.edu/freedman/history-mission.html>>; Xochi Solis <<http://xochisolis.com/about>> and <<http://utvac.org/about/about-vac>>; and Bryan Suereth <<http://www.disjecta.org>>. At the NEA, it seems, anyone can be an art “expert.”

[e] Panel recommendations are forwarded to the National Council on the Arts. The NEA’s chairman has final approval, but the Council plays the most crucial role in the decisionmaking process <<http://arts.gov/about/national-council-arts>>. Consisting mainly of eighteen voting members appointed by the President, the Council advises the chairman (who chairs the Council). It also makes recommendations regarding such matters as funding guidelines and leadership initiatives. Two of the three current members who are visual arts professionals are staunch avant-gardists.

[f] A representative Council member is Olga Viso, executive director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, which “ranks among the five most-visited modern/contemporary

art museums in the United States” <<http://www.walkerart.org/about/mission-history>>. On Viso, see <<http://arts.gov/about/national-council-arts/olga-viso>> and Susannah Schouweiler, “POV: A Chat with Walker Art Center’s Director, Olga Viso,” *Mn Artists*, April 23, 2008 <<http://tinyurl.com/POV-ChatWithViso>>. Another member, Rick Lowe, is an “Artist, Community Organizer” best known for having created *Project Row Houses* (1993), an “ongoing, collaboratively produced artwork” that “emphasizes that art can be functional rather than detached from people’s needs and struggles [and] implicitly acknowledges that a contemporary avant-garde can exist” <<http://economyexhibition.stills.org/artists/rick-low/>>. That project is not cited in his NEA bio <<http://arts.gov/about/national-council-arts/rick-low/>>. But further indication of its artworld status comes from Michael Kimmelman (the former long-time chief art critic of the *New York Times*, and now its architecture critic), who declared that *Project Row Houses* “may be the most impressive and visionary public art project in the country” and characterized Lowe as someone who “tried to think afresh what it meant to be a truly political artist” (“In Houston, Art Is Where the Home Is,” *New York Times*, December 17th, 2006).

43. [a] Regarding the reduced “American Masterpieces” initiative, see Jacqueline Trescott, “NEA’s ‘Masterpieces’: A Tour With Less Force,” *Washington Post*, April 21st, 2005 <<http://tinyurl.com/Trescott-NEA-Masterpieces>>.

[b] A representative Visual Arts grant was the one awarded in 2010 to the Mint Museum in Charlotte, N.C. for the exhibition *Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections* <<http://www.mintmuseum.org/art/exhibitions/detail/romare-bearden-southern-recollections>>. Bearden (1911–1988) is generally characterized as an avant-garde or modernist artist. See, for example, Nnamdi Elleh, “Bearden’s Dialogue with Africa and the Avant-Garde,” in *Embracing the Muse, Africa and African American Art* (exhibition catalogue), New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2004. See also Robert O’Meally, Kobena Mercer, et al., *Romare Bearden in the Modernist Tradition* (New York: Romare Bearden Foundation, 2009), which discusses Bearden’s relationship to modernism, post-modernism, and the avant-garde. Bearden is best known for his collages (and photomontages)—which, like the collages of Picasso and Braque in the early twentieth century, are not art because they are not a “selective re-creation of reality.” See above, note 5. Yet Michael Kimmelman opined that Bearden’s collages “are among the glories of American art.” “Life’s Abundance, Captured in a Collage,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2004 <<http://tinyurl.com/Kimmelman-Bearden>>.

[c] Regarding NEA “Visual Arts Touring” exhibitions, see <<http://www.arts.gov/node/526/view>>.

44. For all the National Medal of Arts recipients since its inception in 1985, see <<http://arts.gov/honors/medals/year-all>>. To be fair, two of the twenty-two whose names I recognize were not avant-gardists—the sculptor Frederick Hart (posthumous, 2004) and Andrew Wyeth (2007). Hart is best known for his Washington National Cathedral *Creation Sculptures* <<http://tinyurl.com/Hart-CreationSculptures>> and his Vietnam Veterans Memorial sculpture, *Three Soldiers* <<http://mallhistory.org/items/show/64>>. On the avant-garde-inspired myth that represents Maya Lin’s Wall as *the* Memorial, ignoring the two other official parts, consisting of traditional sculptures (Hart’s work and Glenna Goodacre’s *Vietnam Women’s Memorial* (commemorating the nurses who served), see my article “When Journalistic Misfeasance Becomes Felony,” *Aristos*, November 2004 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-04/nytpubed.htm>>. On the controversy over Lin’s Wall and the ensuing compromise that gave rise to Hart’s *Three Soldiers*, see Tom Wolfe, “The Artist the Art World Couldn’t See,” *New York Times Magazine*, January

2, 2000, reprinted at <<http://www.jeanstephengalleries.com/hart-wolfe.html>>; and Wolfe's "Frederick Hart: Life and Passion," *Sculpture Review*, Spring 2000. See also Robert Tracy, "The Wall vs. 'Three Soldiers'" <<http://tracyfineart.com/threesoldiers/>>. Tracy, a painter, served two tours in Vietnam with the Marines.

45. Rosalind Ragans, *ArtTalk*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 4th ed., 2005 <[http://www.weebly.com/uploads/3/2/3/0/3230217/art\\_talk\\_\\_text\\_4th\\_ed.pdf](http://www.weebly.com/uploads/3/2/3/0/3230217/art_talk__text_4th_ed.pdf)>, 374.

46. On consciousness, Rand wrote: "Art is inextricably tied to man's survival . . . to that on which his physical survival depends: to the preservation and survival of his consciousness. . . . The source of art lies in the fact that man's cognitive faculty is *conceptual*—i.e., that man acquires knowledge . . . not by means of single isolated percepts, but by means of *abstractions*;" and "Art brings man's concepts to the perceptual level of his consciousness and allows him to grasp them directly, as if they were percepts." This is the psycho-epistemological function of art and the reason for its importance in man's life" (*Romantic Manifesto*, 17 and 20, all emphases in original).

47. *ArtTalk*, 378 and 381. Ragans misdefines *realism* as a "Mid-nineteenth-century artistic style in which familiar scenes are presented as they actually appeared" (471).

48. *ArtTalk*, 381, 384–85.

49. On Duane Hanson, see *What Art Is*, 326n22, 464n91; *Who Says That's Art?*, 46, 75, 76; and Kamhi, "Modernism, Postmodernism, or Neither? A Fresh Look at 'Fine Art,'" *Aristos*, August 2005 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-05/fineart.htm>>. On Richard Estes, see Ken Johnson, "'Richard Estes: Painting New York City' Features Works in Abstract Realism," *New York Times*, March 19th, 2015; and Artsy <<https://www.artsy.net/artist/richard-estes>>. On Chuck Close, see *What Art Is*, 281, 462n88, and 463n91; and "Portraiture or Not? The Work of Chuck Close," *Aristos*, February 2012 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-12/close.htm>>. Close was one of the top ten living artists included in a contemporary artworld "pantheon" in the 2002 nationwide survey, *The Visual Arts Critic* (see above, note 31).

50. Laurie Schneider Adams, *A History of Western Art*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011, 1; full text at <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/74004418/A-History-of-Western-Art#scribd>>. Two avant-gardists who utilize animal carcasses are Damien Hirst and Marc Quinn. On Hirst, see numerous references in *Who Says That's Art?*. On Quinn, see "Cybernetic Engineered: Cloned & Grown Rabbits," *Factum Arte* <<http://www.factum-arte.com/pag/67/Cybernetic-Engineered>> and <<http://www.factum-arte.com/ind/6/Marc-Quinn>>.

51. *History of Western Art*, 581 <<http://tinyurl.com/Adams-HistoryWesternArt>>.

52. Despite the pretentious term *art educator*, the great majority of NAEA members are K–12 art *teachers*. The term "educators" appears a dozen times on the "About Us" page of the NAEA website, however, while "teachers" appears just once <<http://www.arteducators.org/about-us>>. As Jacques Barzun long ago pointed out, teaching refers to the process of "leading a child to knowledge, whereas education properly refers to a completed development" ("Occupational Disease: Verbal Inflation," lecture delivered before the National Art Education Association, Houston, March 18th, 1978; reprinted in *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, 105, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. This essay should be required reading for every art teacher.

53. Alice Lai and Eric L. Ball, "Students Online as Cultured Subjects," *Studies in Art Education*, Fall 2004, 20–33 <<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ740502>>. The authors teach at Empire State College, State University of New York.

54. Kenneth M. Lansing, “Addendum to ‘Why We Need a Definition of Art,’” *Aristos* (December 2004) <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-04/lansing2.htm>>. On abstruseness and other lapses in scholarly writing, see my “Scholarly Engagement: When It Is Pleasurable and When It Is Not,” *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 5:1 (Fall 2003), 105–110 <[www.aristos.org/editors/jars-lt.pdf](http://www.aristos.org/editors/jars-lt.pdf)>.

55. Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius, “Performing Resistance,” *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Fall 2004) <<https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-724580471/performing-resistance>>. On buzzwords, see above, note 7.

56. [a] Carpenter is now Associate Editor of *Studies in Art Education*. He is also the “chief executive artist” for Reservoir Studio, a “social action collective.” His “visual artwork” is said to “confront social issues and critique historical, cultural, and political constructs.” <<https://sova.psu.edu/profile/b-stephencarpenter-ii>>.

[b] The current editor of *Art Education* is James Haywood Rolling Jr., chairman of Syracuse University’s graduate and undergraduate art education programs. As a visual artist, Rolling focuses on “mixed media explorations and portraiture of the human condition, viewing studio arts practices as an essential form of social research.” He is actively involved in “instigating the reconceptualization of the art education discipline as a natural nexus of interdisciplinary scholarship where visual art, design, and other creative practices intersect as an avenue of social responsibility. . . . His scholarly interests include . . . visual culture & identity politics . . . social justice & community-engaged scholarship, and narrative inquiry in qualitative research” <<http://vpa.syr.edu/directory/james-haywood-rolling-jr>>. See also his March 2013 article in *Art Education*, in which he suggests that in “The Hijacking of Art Education” (*Aristos*, April 2010 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-10/hijacking.htm>>) Michelle Kamhi may have misconstrued “socially responsible art education practices” as “the intrusion of teachers’ personal political agendas” (“Art as Social Response and Responsibility: Reframing Critical Thinking in Art Education as a Basis for Altruistic Intent,” 7 <<http://tinyurl.com/Carpenter-ArtSocialResponse>>).

[c] In a recent *Art Education* editorial, Rolling notes: “[O]ur very different encounters with the art world and our varying experiences of art practice and arts pedagogy help shape our definitions of what art is” and often work “to obscure the rich interwoven nature of the larger story of the Arts” (“Interwoven Arts Education Pedagogies: From the Formalist, to the Informative, to the Transformative, to the Performative,” May 2015 <<http://tinyurl.com/RollingJr-InterwovenArts>>). In that light, he should realize that his own experience obscures the rich nature of the traditional contemporary art that Kamhi and I write about in “What About the *Other* Face of Contemporary Art?,” *Aristos*, June 2008 <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-08/otherface.htm>>, originally published in the March 2008 issue of *Art Education*.

57. Olivia Gude, “Postmodern Principles: In Search of a 21st Century Art Education,” *Art Education*, January 2004 <<http://tinyurl.com/Gude-PostmodernPrinciples>>, 10. Gude is now on the Editorial Advisory Board of *Studies in Art Education*.

58. Gude, “Art Education for Democratic Life,” <[https://naea.digication.com/omg/Art\\_Education\\_for\\_Democratic\\_Life](https://naea.digication.com/omg/Art_Education_for_Democratic_Life)>. Gude’s radical view of art’s function in shaping the “democratic life” of students is apparent in such assertions as “[q]uality art education provides access to the art and practices of making through which today’s youth can actively investigate local and global themes”; and “[i]n challenging outmoded worldviews, contemporary art prepares people to engage, to shape, (and sometimes to preserve) aspects of our ever-changing world.”

59. Kamhi, “Where’s the *Art* in Today’s Art Education?,” *What Art Is* Online, November 2002 <[www.aristos.org/whatart/arted-1.htm](http://www.aristos.org/whatart/arted-1.htm)>; and John Stinespring, “Moving from the Postmodern Trap,” annual meeting of the National Art Education Association, Miami Beach, Florida, March 22nd, 2002. See also Kamhi, “Rescuing Art from ‘Visual Culture Studies,’” *Aristos*, January 2004 <[www.aristos.org/aris-04/rescuing.htm](http://www.aristos.org/aris-04/rescuing.htm)>, reprinted in *Arts Education Policy Review*, September/October 2004; and *Who Says That’s Art?*, 174–75, 178–79, and 288nn22, 23. The liberal bias of art critics is openly acknowledged by Ken Johnson: “It is one of the big lies of the serious art world that anything goes. That may be the case in regard to form, material and techniques, but when it comes to cultural politics, my art world leans decidedly leftward.” “Achieving Fame Without a Legacy,” *New York Times*, June 22nd, 2012.

60. Eliseo Vivas, “The Objective Basis of Criticism,” *Creation and Discovery: Essays in Criticism and Aesthetics*, New York: Noonday Press, 1955 <<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001435972>>. For the first Vivas quote on page 184 of this essay, click on “Full view.” At the title page, jump to page 191 of the book and then scroll down to page 192 for my last Vivas quote. The block quote on page 185 and the quote immediately preceding it are from Vivas’s Preface (ix).

61. [a] Following are key reviews and citations of *What Art Is* not already noted: (1) Roger Kimball, “Can Art Be Defined?” *The Public Interest*, Spring 2001, <<http://tinyurl.com/Kimball-CanArtBeDefined>>, reprinted, with minor revisions, in Kimball, *Art’s Prospect: The Challenge of Tradition in an Age of Celebrity*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003 (see authors’ response at <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/resp-pi.htm>>); (2) Ronald F. Lipp, “Atlas and Art,” in *Ayn Rand’s Atlas Shrugged: A Philosophical and Literary Companion*, ed. by Edward W. Younkins, Hampshire, U.K.: Ashgate, 2007, 143–155 (on *What Art Is*, see esp. 145), <<http://tinyurl.com/Lipp-AtlasAndArt-p143>>; and (3) Carlin Romano, *America the Philosophical*, New York: Knopf, 2012, 363 <<http://tinyurl.com/CarlinRomano-America>>. (*What Art Is* is the only scholarly Rand study of many published since 1995 [the publication date of Chris Matthew Sciabarra’s groundbreaking *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*] that is cited by Romano, who is Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Ursinus College and Critic-at-Large of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. He was the Literary Critic of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* from 1984 to 2009.)

[b] Penn State Press: (1) Michelle Marder Kamhi and Louis Torres, “Critical Neglect of Ayn Rand’s Theory of Art,” Vol. 2, No.1, Fall 2000, 1–46 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560130>>; (2) The Aesthetics Symposium (a discussion of Rand’s philosophy of art “inspired by” *What Art Is*), Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 2001, <[http://www.aynrandstudies.com/jars/v2\\_n2/2\\_2toc.asp](http://www.aynrandstudies.com/jars/v2_n2/2_2toc.asp)>; see also <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/i40075330>>; (3) Kamhi, “What ‘Rand’s Aesthetics’ Is, and Why It Matters” (Reply to The Aesthetics Symposium), Vol. 4, No. 2, Spring 2003, 413–489 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41560230>>; (4) Torres, “Scholarly Engagement: When It Is Pleasurable, and When It Is Not” (Reply to The Aesthetics Symposium), Vol. 5, No. 1, Fall 2003, 105–151 <<http://www.aristos.org/editors/jars-lt.pdf>>.

62. Jacques Barzun, “In Depth” interview, Book TV (C-Span 2), May 6th, 2001 (last half hour), and personal correspondence, October 5th, 2001; both quoted in “A Jacques Barzun Compendium” <<http://www.aristos.org/barzun.htm>>. Barzun’s biographer, Michael Murray (*Jacques Barzun: Portrait of a Mind*, Savannah: Beil, 2011), notes that he was “a *cultural* historian, a practitioner of a discipline he had helped to create, in which the arts bulk large” (xv). Barzun told Murray he was a “cheerful pessimist” (xvi).

By the time they met (1979), he had concluded that the West was in decline. In 1973 he had delivered a series of lectures at the National Gallery of Art (dealing in part with the *avant-garde*), published as *The Use and Abuse of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974 <<http://tinyurl.com/Barzun-UseAndAbuse>> [search for *avant-garde* and see esp. 14, 51, and 137]. See the retroactive Aristos Award for the book at <<http://www.aristos.org/aris-award-3.htm#Barzun-1974>>. See also *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life*, Barzun's magnum opus, published in 2000, esp. 643–651 and 713–732. I dedicate this essay to his memory.