

titles, including 'Architecture without an Architect'), *Comic Strips* (five titles, nine pages out of the forty-six in the whole index), *Kids' Art*, *Kitsch* (three titles, five pages), *Photography* (two titles, three pages), *Street Art* (fifteen titles, twenty-three pages, including 'Art in the Street?', 'Art in the Street, First Episode', 'Beauty in the Back-Streets: You Just Have to Know How to Look', 'A Suburb Sets the Pace'), *Science-Fiction-Utopia* (two titles, three pages), *Underground* (one title), *Writing-Ideograms-Graffiti* (two titles, four pages). The aim of inverting or *transgressing*, which is clearly manifested by this list, is necessarily contained within the limits assigned to it a *contrario* by the aesthetic conventions it denounces and by the need to secure recognition of the aesthetic nature of the transgression of the limits (i.e., recognition of its conformity to the norms of the transgressing group). Hence the almost Markovian logic of the choices, with, for the cinema, Antonioni, Chaplin, cinémathèque, Eisenstein, eroticism-pornography, Fellini, Godard, Klein, Monroe, underground, Warhol.

This commitment to symbolic transgression, which is often combined with political neutrality or revolutionary aestheticism, is the almost perfect antithesis of petit-bourgeois moralism or of what Sartre used to call the revolutionary's 'seriousness'.³³ The ethical indifference which the aesthetic disposition implies when it becomes the basis of the art of living is in fact the root of the ethical aversion to artists (or intellectuals) which manifests itself particularly vehemently among the declining and threatened fractions of the petite bourgeoisie (especially independent craftsmen and shopkeepers), who tend to express their regressive and repressive dispositions in all areas of practice (especially in educational matters and *vis-à-vis* students and student demonstrations), but also among the rising fractions of that class whose striving for virtue and whose deep insecurity render them very receptive to the phantasm of 'pornocracy'.

The pure disposition is so universally recognized as legitimate that no voice is heard pointing out that the definition of art, and through it the art of living, is an object of struggle among the classes. Dominated lifestyles (*arts de vivre*), which have practically never received systematic expression, are almost always perceived, even by their defenders, from the destructive or reductive viewpoint of the dominant aesthetic, so that their only options are degradation or self-destructive rehabilitation ('popular culture'). This is why it is necessary to look to Proudhon³⁴ for a naively systematic expression of the petit-bourgeois aesthetic, which subordinates art to the core values of the art of living and identifies the cynical perversion of the artist's life-style as the source of the absolute primacy given to form:

'Under the influence of property, the artist, *depraved* in his reason, *disolute in his morals, venal and without dignity*, is the impure image of egoism. The idea of *justice* and *honesty* slides over his heart without taking root, and of all the classes of society, the artist class is the poorest in strong souls and noble characters.'³⁵

'Art for art's sake, as it has been called, not having its legitimacy within itself, being based on nothing, is nothing. It is *debauchery* of the heart and *dissolution* of the mind. Separated from right and duty, cultivated and pursued as the highest thought of the soul and the supreme manifestation of humanity, art or the ideal, stripped of the greater part of itself, reduced to nothing more than an *excitement of fantasy and the senses*, is the source of *sin*, the origin of all servitude, the poisoned spring from which, according to the Bible, flow all the *fornications* and abominations of the earth . . . Art for art's sake, I say, verse for verse's sake, style for style's sake, form for form's sake, fantasy for fantasy's sake, all the diseases which like a plague of lice are gnawing away at our epoch, are *vice* in all its refinement, the quintessence of evil.'³⁶

What is condemned is the autonomy of form and the artist's right to the formal refinements by which he claims mastery of what ought to be merely a matter of 'execution': 'I have no quarrel with nobility, or elegance, or pose, or style, or gesture, or any aspect of what constitutes the execution of a work of art and is the usual object of traditional criticism.'³⁷

Dependent on demand in the choice of their objects, artists take their revenge in the execution: 'There are church painters, history painters, genre painters (in other words, painters of anecdotes or farces), portrait painters, landscape painters, animal painters, seascape painters, painters of Venus, painters of fantasy. One specializes in nudes, another in drapery. Then each one endeavours to distinguish himself by one of the means which contribute to the execution. One goes in for sketching, another for colour; this one attends to composition, that one to perspective, a third to costume or local colour; one shines through sentiment, another through his idealized or realistic figures; yet another redeems the futility of his subject by the fineness of his detail. Each strives to have his own trick, his own 'je ne sais quoi', a personal manner, and so, with the help of fashion, reputations are made and unmade.'³⁸

In contrast to this decadent art cut off from social life, respecting neither God nor man, an art worthy of the name must be subordinated to science, morality and justice. It must aim to arouse the moral sense, to inspire feelings of dignity and delicacy, to idealize reality, to substitute for the thing the ideal of the thing, by painting the true and not the real. In a word, it must educate. To do so, it must transmit not 'personal impressions' (like David in *The Tennis-Court Oath*, or Delacroix) but, like Courbet in *Les Paysans de Flagey*, reconstitute the social and historical truth which *all* may judge. ('Each of us only has to consult himself to be able, after brief consideration, to state a judgement on any work of art.')³⁹ And it would be a pity to conclude without quoting a eulogy of the small detached house which would surely be massively endorsed by the middle and working classes: 'I would give the Louvre, the Tuileries, Notre-Dame—and the Vendôme column into the bargain—to live in my own home, in a *little house of my own design*, where I would live alone, in

the middle of a little plot of ground, a quarter of an acre or so, where I'd have water, shade, a lawn, and silence. And if I thought of putting a statue in it, it wouldn't be a Jupiter or an Apollo—those gentlemen are nothing to me—nor views of London, Rome, Constantinople or Venice. God preserve me from such places! I'd put there what I lack—mountains, vineyards, meadows, goats, cows, sheep, reapers and shepherds.⁴⁰

NEUTRALIZATION AND THE UNIVERSE OF POSSIBLES Unlike non-specific perception, the specifically aesthetic perception of a work of art (in which there are of course degrees of accomplishment) is armed with a pertinence principle which is socially constituted and acquired. This principle of selection enables it to pick out and retain, from among the elements offered to the eye (e.g., leaves or clouds considered merely as indices or signals invested with a denotative function—'It's a poplar', 'There's going to be a storm'), all the stylistic traits—and only those—which, when relocated in the universe of stylistic possibilities, distinguish a particular manner of treating the elements selected, whether clouds or leaves, that is, a style as a mode of representation expressing the mode of perception and thought that is proper to a period, a class or class fraction, a group of artists or a particular artist. No stylistic characterization of a work of art is possible without presupposing at least implicit reference to the compossible alternatives, whether simultaneous—to distinguish it from its contemporaries—or successive—to contrast it with earlier or later works by the same or a different artist. Exhibitions devoted to an artist's whole oeuvre or to a genre (e.g., the still-life exhibition in Bordeaux in 1978) are the objective realization of the field of interchangeable stylistic possibilities which is brought into play when one 'recognizes' the singularities of the characteristic style of a work of art. As E. H. Gombrich demonstrates, Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* only takes on its 'full meaning' in terms of a previous idea of Mondrian's work and of the expectations it favours. The 'impression of gay abandon' given by the play of bright, strongly contrasting patches of colour can only arise in a mind familiar with 'an art of straight lines and a few primary colours in carefully balanced rectangles' and capable of perceiving the 'relaxed style of popular music' in the distance from the 'severity' which is expected. And as soon as one imagines this painting attributed to Gino Severini, who tries to express in some of his paintings 'the rhythm of dance music in works of brilliant chaos', it is clear that, measured by this stylistic yardstick, Mondrian's picture would rather suggest the first *Brandenburg Concerto*.⁴¹

The aesthetic disposition, understood as the aptitude for perceiving and deciphering specifically stylistic characteristics, is thus inseparable from specifically artistic competence. The latter may be acquired by explicit learning or simply by regular contact with works of art, especially those assembled in museums and galleries, where the diversity of their