Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science by Donald Preziosi
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claimed to explain the meaning of the work.

In the late 1980s, among fashionable self-professed labels in contemporary art history (e.g., feminism, Marxism, etc.), Bialostocki’s “neutral” conception of the art work’s presence in the social context might appear bland. Not obliged to accept a priori any particular perspective, Bialostocki leans toward this more general and neutral definition, which is certainly not free from intellectual risks problem. However, this “neutral” formula of iconology, which interprets a work of art as a complex of values, became a very effective tool for Bialostocki. Although iconographic analysis is its central component, the author never fails prey to iconographical reductionism. Flexible and creative, he looks for various ways of linking a work of art with external reality according to historical context.

The variety of subjects in the book can be accounted for through a dialectical approach to history, and yet the author favors certain aspects of the external relations of an art work. Bialostocki traces them particularly in artistic, scientific, and moral theories, in various historical manifestations of humanism, and, finally, in political events and ideas, stressing the significance of the turn of the 18th century.

There is a strong bond between the effectiveness of the method and the production of new areas of historical knowledge. In this regard, iconology is greatly indebted to Bialostocki, who creatively developed its studies of motifs. Furthermore, the influence of E.R. Curtius’s topics can be detected here. The majority of essays in this book arise from this area of interest in motifs, and the book includes extensive studies of the motif of the door of death (“The Door of Death. The Survival of a Classical Motif in Sepulchral Art”), the motif of the book (“Book of Wisdom and Book of Vanity”), the motif of the mirror (“Man and Mirror in Painting: Reality and Transience”), and the motif of the biblical Judith (“Judith: Story, Image and Symbol. Giorgione’s Painting in the Evolution of the Theme”). Within the same perspective, various aspects of visual representation of 18th- and 19th-century politics are investigated: first, in a more general essay, “Art and Politics, 1770-1830,” and then in two other studies, “The Firing Squad from Paul Revere to Goya. The Formation of a New Pictorial Theme in America, Russia and Spain,” and “The Image of the Defeated Leader in Romantic Art.” Further articles are also in keeping with Bialostocki’s iconological approach and thus touch on problems of the form, reception, and functions of works of art: “Myth and Allegory in Dürer’s Etchings and Engravings,” “Reflections on Eroticism in Three Rubens’ Paintings,” and “Mere Imitation of Nature or Symbolic Image of the World? Problems in Interpretation of Dutch Painting of the 17th Century.” It should be noted here that the arcana of secular iconography in the modern era (the research of which has been, no doubt, one of the most significant trends in recent art history) were already within the scope of Bialostocki’s interests in the 1960s: “Puer Sufficient Sigiris” and “Esilo Privato,” Oudry’s Painting of King Stanislaw Leszczynski.”

A particularly inspiring message in Bialostocki’s work can be found in the three essays in which the author points out the fascinating world of representation, the world of pure visualization, through the themes of presence and absence, reality and illusion, revealing and concealing. Bialostocki succeeds in touching the mysterious existence of visual art and, at the same time, its autonomous identity, its external stimuli and references within a reflexive art-theoretical, moral, and scientific sphere. These themes appear in a beautiful essay on the eye and the window in Dürer’s art (“The Eye and the Window. Realism and Symbolism of Light Reflections in the Art of Albrecht Dürer and His Predecessors”), the above-mentioned study of the mirror, and also a piece on Memling (“Modes of Reality and Representation of Space in Memling’s Donor Wing of the ‘Last Judgment’ Triptych”).

In addition to these essays linked to artistic production, three carefully chosen theoretical articles, based on historical statements by philosophers, aestheticians, and artists, suggest that the main message of art is that it is an autonomous entity and, furthermore, that it is evidence of man’s creative power. In these essays, the humanistic tradition, so close to the author, speaks as powerfully as in the texts cited above. In the opening essay, entitled “Ars auro prior,” the author traces the historical fate of this topos. The idea of the unique powers of art and the artist’s resemblance to the creative energies of nature is developed in a study of certain thoughts expressed by Alberti’s De Architектura (“The Power of Beauty. A Utopian Idea of Leon Battista Alberti”), and in a study of the concept of nature in the Renaissance theory of art (“The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity”). This same idea, applied to the nature of artists’ lives, is the core of an essay on artists’ libraries (“The ‘Doctus Artifex’ and the Library of the Artist in the 16th and 17th Centuries”).

The Message of Images presents the genuine and, thus, the best Bialostocki: a historian with impressive mastery and a vast intellectual horizon; a scholar who studies every detail with patience and real interest, and who by doing so creates synthetic “frescoes” revealing new areas of art and thought; a student of subjects and motifs through which we confront the problems of transience and of death; a lover of art, eagerly stressing traditional dimensions to approaches to the visual world; and at the same time, an erudite professor vividly aware of art’s role in and relation to the entire cosmos of culture. Finally, it must be noted that Bialostocki’s essays, full of erudition and scholarly precision, are examples of clear, communicative, and beautiful prose.

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In this shrewd book, Donald Preziosi wonders whether a “socially responsible” discipline of art history can contribute to the study of the processes by which cultural objects (like works of art) and cultural subjects (like artists, viewers, and art historians) are produced or, to use the term he develops from the writing of Jacques Derrida, “enframed” (pp. 168, 179). Preziosi hopes art history is other than the history of sequences of works in their formal and iconographical development, as traditional art histories would have it, or even the “contextualization” of these works in a rich portrayal of their social and cultural background, as some social-historical or anthropological art histories would have it. Rather, he wishes art history could study the “social production of meaning” (p. 160) in such a way that the established analytic dichotomies between form and meaning, representation and context, or subject and object could be broken down or eliminated altogether. Cultural objects and cultural subjects are, he argues, mutually interdependent; they are mutually produced or constituted in a historical process; they mutually frame or even “oppress” one another (see p. 44). Preziosi feels art history fails adequately to appreciate this complexity and continues in various ways to lapse into what he calls “historiocnarrativization” or “alternative transcendencies” in order to handle it (see p. 168). However, with substantial rethinking, art history could develop an analytic lan-
The technology of art history (chaps. 2, 3). As others have done, Preziosi sees art history as employing a “systematic technology” (p. 58), predetermining or producing the sense and significance of its object of study (pp. xvi, 19): art history is the “child of photography” (p. 72), of the isolation and reshuffling of images made possible by photo-reproduction. Of course, the proposal cannot be taken too far or too literally (Burckhardt eschewed photographs and Morelli, for good reasons, illustrated his discoveries with engravings); but Wöflin’s comparative method and Warburgian/Panofskyan iconology came to depend essentially upon libraries of texts and images. More generally, its photographic surveys can be a partial figure for art history’s “panoptic” ambition to survey its objects and totalize its inquiries from an Olympian vantage, in which a priori selections from contradictory sources and the authority of the historian are not directly in the camera’s view but rather in its “framings” (pp. 25, 27, 36, 64, 69). In other words, Preziosi offers art history as an exemplification of Foucault’s famous accounts of the emergence of the modern human sciences, gaining from recent work in the history of photography itself, some of which he cites.2

Synoptic knowledge has been embodied in an “archive” — he considers the Fogg at Harvard as an example (pp. 72-75) — organized “anamorphically” (i.e., from a vantage point not identical with purported ideal vantage points), creating a “grid of intelligibility” to be seen, à la Foucault, not merely as reportorial but as constituting the very possibility and fabric of knowledge (pp. 39-43, 59-60, 64, 193, n. 34, 209, n. 87). Presumably, of course, all modes of knowledge are anamorphic; the limiting conditions are not absolutely clear. But art history’s panoptic anamorphism certainly has specific effects: the historian-observer becomes detached, an absent “zero point” (pp. 55, 66), the object of study fully “legible” or “visualizable” (e.g., p. 56), and method an instrument used to render this object (e.g., p. 201, n. 2). Art historian, art work, and art history are simultaneously set up as “functions of the machine,” (p. 51) the frames and operation of which are not readily apparent.

The metahistoricity of Preziosi’s description of art history may disturb some readers. He points briefly to some particular historical pressures working on the discipline, such as 19th-century efforts to invent the autonomous Volk and ratify the sovereign nation state or in the art market (pp. xvi, 33, 58), but his own larger arguments against historicism seem to make him uneasy about an account of this kind; he does not elaborate. Rather, he is interested in “analogies” for the panoptic/anamorphic apparatus of art history that anedate the emergence of the academic profession itself. (In the end, then, as will be seen, the institutional sociology of art history remains somewhat out of focus.) In other words, he ties the panopticism of art history to the panopticism of modern Western thought in general. He explores two analogies at length, Camillo’s Memory Theater (pp. 59-61) and Bentham’s Panopticon itself (pp. 62-67), and sees Galileo’s telescope as an early if not the primordial instance (p. 56). Alberti’s Della Pittura (pp. 57-58), with its emphasis on an ideal if fictional viewing point, and Vasari’s narratives of “artist-and/as-his-work” (e.g., p. 75), still followed in art history, count both as disciplinary prehistory and as objects with which art history — in a somewhat mysterious

1 M. Podro, The Manifold in Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand, Oxford, 1972, for, among other things, the stature and the problems of the Kantian and post-Kantian view of aesthetic judgment and the harmonization of the faculties; N. Bryson, Vision and Painting, Cambridge, 1983, for what he calls “perceptualism” or the doctrine that images copy perceptual ideas; D. Summers, The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics, Cambridge, 1987, for the artistic, cultural, and philosophical origins of these and other traditional conceptions of the Intentionality of image-making (see below, n. 9). Here I will not attempt to reconcile these detailed studies with Preziosi’s broader outline.

2 For the evidentiary photograph as a means of surveillance, see especially J. Tagg, The Burden of Representation, Amherst, 1988.
process — have become structurally isomorphic (e.g., p. 58). In the 19th century, diagnostic taxonomy ("Zagid’s method," pp. 90-95), as Wollheim and others have shown, 4 Freud’s "teleoscope" metaphor, and the cinema become contemporary "analogies" (p. 78). All of these instruments, Preziosi suggests, panoptically render the visible object totally legible to an apparently uninvolved investigator.

Preziosi’s argument is open-ended about the status of his "analogies" for a real archaeology or genealogy of art history.5 Some realize "Western metaphysics" — if our own panoptic survey allows us to identify such a thing — in its most general lines; they are striking examples, standing for what we should be able to find in every modern discipline. Some, like Vasari’s biographies or Morelli’s cryptographies, are already well accepted as direct precursors of modern art history. A disciplinary genealogy will need to show why certain practices have been directly ancestral and others only remotely so. A "deconstruction" must show how the logic of the system has always been rhetorically unstable,7 needing institutional policing: metaphysics has been replicated not merely through analogization (for analogy always introduces cre-ative or subversive difference), but also through more insidious means of selection. For my tastes, Preziosi is not always specific enough about the epidemiology of representations infecting art history. But at this stage of our disciplinary archaeology, he rightly explores possible juxtapositions; moreover, he intends himself to figure the panoptic anamorphism of art history.

Logocentrism. In his parallel account, Preziosi considers "Western metaphysics" as such in the "discursive practice" (p. 44) of art history. His approach is largely and explicitly Derridean: for Derrida, although Logos (word, speech, meaning) can only ever be a metaphysical projection from textuality, "writing" (écriture) governed by différence, in the endemic "logocentrism" derived from the Platonic nostalgia for "origins" and "presence" (perpetuated in modern romantic mournings of all kinds), it has become the "transcendental signed" of that text, its supposed sense, cause, logic, or history.8 In a more eclectic language (some of its terms are also used by Preziosi), a nonmetaphysical study of representation should try to avoid the entrenched assumption of its Intentionality9 in order to understand its materiality, historicity,

3 Preziosi (p. 58) evokes Lévi-Strauss’s notion of mythomorphism — the approximation of discourse to the form of which it speaks — but does not go the whole way toward Lévi-Strauss’s conclusions at the end of "The Structural Study of Myth" (see Structural Anthropology, New York, 1963), which are still, it seems, unimaginably radical; rather, he evidently hopes "to distinguish between several qualities of discourse on the myth" (J. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in Writing and Difference, trans. A. Bass, Chicago, 1976, 287-288).


5 Evolutionary theorists rigorously distinguish between the cause of a relation of similarity by parallelism, convergence, analogy, mimicry, or — the only historical process of natural selection itself — common descent (see G.G. Simpson, Principles of Animal Taxonomy, New York, 1961, 78-79); Preziosi’s "archaeology" moves around among these possibilities.

6 For Kuhn, the scientific tradition since Galileo and Copernicus; for Foucault, chiefly Enlightenment rationalism; for Derrida, idealism from Plato through Kant to Husserl.

7 A small example among the many one might pursue among Preziosi’s examples, although Freud did sometimes use the metaphor of the telescope to describe his psychoanalytic method (p. 56), he also conceived the transference as a telephone, that is, less in terms of objective observation than of intersubjective communication ("The Dynamics of Transference" [1912], Standard Edition, London, 1911 xi, 97-109).


9 The term is difficult: I capitalize to indicate John Searle’s broadest definition — Intentionality as directedness — in "What Is an Intentional State?", Mind, lxxxvii, 1979, 74-92. Preziosi also capitalizes, but without explanation. Roughly speaking, Derrida understands Intentionality in the Husserlian sense (see E. Husserl, Logical Investigations, trans. J.N. Findlay, New York, 1970) as the "immediate presence" to consciousness of the way in which that mind is directed toward objects, that is, of what Husserl called the "contents" (or "meanings") of "mental acts" (mental states). Husserl labeled these abstract structures in the mind "noematema"; for pre-ent purposes, we can take them to be mental representations of objects. Despite the appeal of Husserl’s analysis — it commits us to no more than mental acts and their properties, and this is something to which we are committed anyway" (R. Aquila, "Husserl and Frege on Meaning," Journal of the History of Philosophy, xxii, 1974, 380) — it is widely held that Derrida’s critique of Husserl has been very powerful. Derrida (e.g., Speech and Phenomena, trans. D.B. Allison, Evanston, 1973) particularly challenges the notion that Husserl’s contents of mental states could, strictly speaking, be immediately present to and in that very same consciousness rather than be somehow mediated and/or temporally displaced — implying, then, that "intentionality" can only be "constituted" in a structure of delerements and epistemizations (see further Gasché as n. 8) and S. Carls- hamre, Language and Time, Gothenburg, 1986, 69-144, for well-informed discussions). However, Derrida’s own quasi-transcendental account of the temporality of language may be very one-sided in its treatment of Husserl and perhaps incoherent in itself; it certainly cannot escape "onto-theological" supposition, for example, about temporality. (For a closely reasoned Husserlian response to Derrida, see D.C. Wood, The Deconstruction of Time, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1989; for a reconstruction of "presence" as "dazzling" rather than "transparent," therefore escaping Derrida’s strictures in recognizing the spatio-temporal unavailability of the very "presence" that suffuses the mental field, see especially A. Lingis, Phenomenological Explanations, Dordrecht and Boston, 1986.) Moreover (and more important), despite the interest of Derrida’s puzzles of reflection and temporality (I will not say paradoxes), it seems to me that many post-Husserlian concepts of mental representation do not need the thesis of "presence" and may actively repudiate it; they already rigorously distinguish, and subtly interrelate, the "contents" of mental states and "consciousness" of them (see D.C. Dennett, Content and Consciousness, London, 1969) — for instance, treating consciousness as "epiphenomenal" in relation to cognitive computations (the classic statement is J.A. Fodor, The Language of Thought, Scranton, 1975) — and simply bypass or assimilate the Derridean claims in their account of the directness of intentionality. (See further H.L. Dreyfus, ed. Husserl, Intentionality, and Cognitive Science, Cambridge, MA, 1982; D.C. Dennett, The Intentional Stance, Cambridge, MA, 1987.) Unfortunately the debate between Searle and Derrida themselves has not been as clarifying as one would hope, and commentators with little familiarity with the cognitive literature have tended to assume Derrida’s views to be both correct and aimed at real and current rather than straw targets (although see, cautiously, E. Wright, "Derrida, Searle, Contexts, Games, Riddles," New Literary History, xiii, 1982, 464-477). As will be seen later in this review, to assume the self-presence and self-identity of consciousness in order to attack it may be to miss the ways in which the mediateness or mediat-
bodiliness, genderedness, and productivity (we would want, of course, to discriminate carefully among these terms and in turn to interanimate them). Here, because no final refutation of logocentrism is possible, nor a definitive validation of écriture, only “deconstruction” and a rhetorico-political conversation are possible.

With the partial exception of chap. 5, Preziosi emphasizes throughout the “transcendental signifieds” built into art history. Other elements of the Derridean program receive less attention — such as microscopically close readings of the self-subversions of canonical texts, montaging into a mapping of écriture, différence, textuality, or the trace (Spur). In fact, Preziosi’s book can be fairly read as a straightforward criticism of Platonic, Cartesian, Kantian, and Hegelian language in art history, in line with much other writing on this broad theme. Here some readers may find the Derridean jargon an obstacle in following arguments already well established by writers before Derrida, particularly Wittgenstein. As Preziosi himself admits, he advances (broadly) materialist objections to (broadly) idealist doctrines.

According to the “logic of the supplement,” as Derrida puts it, in the conceptual pairs of metaphysics — among them I would include idea/expression, form/matter, percept/concept, mind/body, rule/practice, signified/signifier, intention/action — the first term (the “transcendental signified”), a whole or unity, will be privileged, even though we have it materially only in the second term (the “supplement”), seen as a fragmentary residue. Along with most other modern disciplines, art history reifies a number of these “absent presences”; it tries to “re-presence” them (p. 71) or “reintegrate [them in their] purported fullness” (p. 31). Among these hypostatizations, Preziosi includes the Subject centered in/ by its “cogito” — in or as the “artist,” the “viewer,” or the “interpreter”; the inner truth of Art; an immanent History of art works; the Geist, Kunstwollen, Lebensform, “culture,” or “context” art works embody; the contingency of artistic production across time and space; the sign; and meanings expressed.

Such claims, and the possibility of a more realistic view of the neglected supplements, are highly philosophical projects in themselves. Preziosi does not always directly defend their epistemological grounds. For example, why does mapping écriture and the trace, or materiality and the body, not fold back into yet another attempt to retrieve yet another, newly labeled “presence”? Or does it? Do we care if différence takes the place of Eidos or Geist? Derrida always recognizes that neither metaphysics nor the “logic of the supplement” will somehow terminate upon his careful, skeptical readings of philosophical texts; “there is no sense,” he writes, “in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics.” In the work of the epigones, however, we find an enthusiasm for the post-Derridean dauning of a supposedly postmetaphysical age. More important, the argument partly hinges on the supposition that the “transcendental signifieds” are, indeed, “absent” in some way we can demarcate on principle, and are only syntheses or projections of what is not (directly? empirically?) in our experience. As such, a demarcation is unavailable by the very terms of the argument; it embeds a series of unexamined or at least metaphorical views about perception, cognition, the “material,” and so forth. In other words, if we can always find the supplement in the transcendental, then we can always find the transcendental in the supplement: Derrida never supposes we can somehow become nonmetaphysical. Furthermore, the machinery of Western logic — its stress on noncontradiction increasingly seen as a cultural metaphysics in itself — allows the anti-idealistic critique of metaphysics to identify reification or tautology in the first place.

We must still await a fully developed deconstruction of a major art-theoretical text (like Spätromische Kunstdenkmäler or Art and Illusion) comparable to Derrida’s work on the Critique of Judgment. However, at the moment it is good to have Preziosi’s meditations on the most troublesome art-historical logocentrisms.

“History,” Preziosi reminds us (pp. 14, 40-44) that art history uneasily wedded its historical positivism to idealist speculation, for example, in periodizations and disciplines of the partially autonomous evolution of style. Although the “fateful interconnection of Stilus and Chronos,” as Sauerländer puts it, certainly runs very wide and deep, Preziosi singles out glottochroology (p. 41), comparative zooanatomy (pp. 101-102), and other emerging 19th-century disciplines as art history’s models. “If history is always the unity of a becoming,” art history assumed the “centrality, continuity, and self-identity” (p. 44) of certain objects in, and of, history — artistic intentions and talents, ethnic and national characters, meanings, and now, socio-sexual difference. Because of this stress on continuity and unity (however mediated), accounts of origins and of absolute historical contradictions were, for obvious reasons, highly fictionalized.

Perhaps because these criticisms have been with us for generations, the reincarnation of positivism or idealism within a supposedly radical and materialist “social history of art” has special poignancy for Preziosi. He gives it a separate and more ad hominem treatment (pp. 159-168). On the one hand, one school of Marxist art historians, exemplified by Hadjinicolaou’s Art History and Class Struggle of 1973, is criticized for relying on a positivistic “dream of [historical science]” in which the social determinations of cultural practice could be made “transparent” to the historian-observer (pp. 160-162). On the other hand, another approach, exemplified by Clark’s Painting of Modern Life (1985), rejects deterministic language but still tends to treat the art work as “emergent” from an “external” background or “context” of socio-political affairs (pp. 163-165). In either case, Preziosi’s worry seems to be that “bourgeois idealisms” (p. 168) — the reification of History or Art — may be reappearing; social history certainly often shares its semantics with iconology and structuralism (pp. xv, 18). But, of course, despite pseudo-syntheses, Marxism is not deconstruction. It has never claimed not to make use of a philosophy of history, a metaphysics if you will, demarcating the orders of cause and relationship in history. Moreover, social history’s reification of History as Society, rather than Mind, and its reification of Art as Representation or Ideology, rather than Insight or Judgment, surely take us far from Kantian critical idealism in its usual form. Although Preziosi seems to me to elide these distinctions, this is not to say, however, that I reject his complaints.

A careful reading of recent social art history could show, I think, that the liberal bourgeois subject tends to reappear in the historical actor seen as rationally optimizing his or her choices, changes.

10 Derrida (as in n. 3), 280; see also p. 288, and his Positions, trans. A. Bass, Brighton, 1982.
12 Derrida (as in n. 3), 291.
13 For example, at the same time as the principal art-historical periodizations were outlined, philosophers of history argued that periods are never immanent, self-evident, or necessary (e.g., R. M. Meyer, “Principien der wissenschaftlichen Periodenbildung,” Euphorion, viii, 1901, 1-42).
or "politics" in a "contested" field of discursive "strategies" and more or less productive "careers." This language must derive from a Cartesian psychology — found from boardroom to cadre — in which agents are (no doubt) "positioned" socially and historically (a truism) but continue at least to know themselves as themselves. Philosophical Marxism may want to show how consciousness can be alienated from the (or "its") body. However, the difficulty of cleaving close to this project in all its ramifications — especially if one rejects psychoanalytic or parallel psychologies for their bourgeois "personalism" — seems to defeat all but a very few Marxist writers.

Of course, the knowing subject of Enlightenment philosophy may be difficult to unseat, for very good reasons. As some kind of alternative, it is certainly insufficient to imagine the "decentered" or "fragmented" subject we find narratized in many quarters today. So far, this identity subsists as a topography of partially coordinated, intercommunicating homunculi, residing in the many mansions of Freud's structural theory, Klein's projective identifications, the Lacanian "registers" of Imaginary and Symbolic, and so forth. Each homunculus possesses its separate Cartesian identity — for example, "knowing" castration as 'lack' (or, in Irigaray's alternative, its distinct pleasures), mirror-image as unity, desire as frustration, masculinity or femininity as anxiety, and so on. To bring sociality into the subject (as a society of homunculi) does not necessarily in itself offer a coherent view of society as such (as conflict and coordination), of communication (among psychic localities), or of the representation by which mutually contradictory subjective knowingnesses constitute the contents of a "fragmented" subject. The task, it seems to me, would be to imagine a subject that knows nothing, either as a whole or in any one place, space, or register; indeed, subjectivity is not a space or place that could be (un)divided or (de)centered at all.

At any rate, a full treatment of this problem will require more than the crude categories of "idealist" versus "materialist" psychology or "bourgeois" versus "radical" notions of agency.

"Art." Logocentrism characterizes art history's ambiguous claims about the work of art, art history's "obscure object of desire" (chap. 2). At least since the Renaissance, Preziosi recalls, art works have been regarded as ontologically distinct kinds (p. 51), demarcated transcendentally from all other artifacts (pp. 84-85). Even when art historians focus on a "system" of art works, such as a style, or on their "context," individual objects tend to be regarded as emergent (pp. 36, 90, 164); Preziosi observes that art history panoptically assumes a coherent domain of art works — a "table of exempla" (p. xiv) — in order to "articulate the transfinite variety" of objects within it (pp. 16, 28-29, 42, 64). For myself, I expect our ontology could admit artifacts with distinct properties, like the "density" remarked in Nelson Goodman's work and alluded to by Preziosi (p. 190, n. 17). Still, art historians pay little attention to the argument; with Preziosi, I doubt that respectable concepts of artifactuality or textuality have fully superseded art history's aesthetics even where progress has been claimed.

Many directions for the deconstruction, if not the dissolution, of that aesthetics present themselves. Because art history derives so much from its polarization of what is intrinsic and extrinsic to art works, Preziosi's frequent appeal to Derrida's deconstruction of the opposition in his work on the "frame" (parergon) is fully justified (e.g., pp. 216f, fn. 94-95) — even if, in a more charitable light, we could see modern art history from Wölflin and Riegel on as the very recognition of what Derrida calls the "invagination" of the (parergon), of the outside brought in, the inside brought out (and so on), in the "work" of "art."

In the same book but proceeding somewhat apart from the meditation on parerga, Derrida's brilliant interrogation of the "sans" in the Critique of Judgment — on the "pure" cut of the beautiful as Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck, a "finalité sans fin" in which "the trace of the sans [Ohne/sens/sang] is the origin of beauty" — cuts, it seems to me, much deeper. As Preziosi notes elsewhere, quoting Henri Zerner (p. 2), the heart of the problem has been the persistence of a pure aesthetics that does not sit easily with the causal or functional stories of the non-Kantian anthropologies to which art history has been responding since Burkehardt. "How could productions of art appear to us [as Kant has it] as finalities without end?" Perhaps because he seems, to me, greatly to underplay the role of critical idealism in the intellectual formation of art history, Preziosi does not really follow up this tension systematically. As ever, the problem, metaphorized in Kant's and Derrida's figure of the parergon, is the cognitive mediateness and worldly mediatedness of art, surely a deep necessity of our discipline as well as its eternal frustration.

"Sign." The problem of mediation, not expressly characterized by Preziosi as such, has an obvious local expression when the art work is considered as a "sign." A "coy semiotics from its very beginnings" (p. xiv), art history's concepts of the sign, Preziosi argues, have been "contradictory" and "antithetical" (p. 85, 107). In a sense, matters could hardly have been otherwise. There has never been a single sign theory to enforce consistency; as Aarsleff and Marin, Preziosi's chief sources, have shown in detail, semiotics have responded to evolving political needs. However, within this wide field, Preziosi proposes (chap. 4) the most fully realized of his intellectual genealogies to illustrate his deconstruc-

17 Pace Preziosi (p. 29), I do not think art history makes an "essential contradiction" between art works seen as types and as "unique irreducible" tokens; the polythetic character of stylistic classification, as in zoological taxonomy, means the type/token dichotomy is a red herring; attributes of an artifact may be unique, but whole artifacts are always com-

18 J. Derrida, The Truth in Painting, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod, Chicago, 1987, esp. 54-67. As Derrida stresses, Kant's remarks on parerga must be set in the context of his larger view of the harmony of the faculties: see Podro (as in n. 1), 7-35.
19 Derrida (as in n. 18), 34-36, 42-48, 68-77, 83-118.
20 Ibid., 90.
21 Ibid., 96.
tive claims. Art history, he suggests, fails adequately to reconcile “two faces” of semiological philosophy, from the scholastics through the grammarians of Port-Royal on to Locke, the 19th-century British debates over transcendentalist and empiricist systems, Taine, and Saussure (pp. 30, 213, n. 19) — what I would call the “essentialist” and the “representationalist” doctrines (for him, “classical/eucharistic” and “Lockean/modernist”). On the one hand, advancing Platonist and Christian thinking, the Port-Royal theologians conceived the sign — for instance, the cross, the liturgy — as the very incarnation of immaterial truths (pp. 102-105) like God’s mercy, the monarch’s absoluteness, or (for art history) the inner truth of an artist’s judgment and insight. By contrast, Locke conceived the sign as truly secondary — in this case, to perception; here, a representationalist visual semiology ends up somehow taking the work as the derivation of people’s ideas (that is, of perceptual constancy). Both programs have been assimilated in art history, where “the work serves to produce or to present immanent qualities . . . as much as it reproduces or represents them” (p. 115).

Deriving art history’s “coy semiology” from this history (chap. 4) is a complex affair. As Preziosi shows, Morelli’s cryptography and Panofsky’s iconology attach themselves to different moments of a potentially contradictory dialogue. A writer like Gombrich, not discussed by Preziosi, intercuts essentialism and representationalism quite successfully, given the cross-cutting intuitions of the two perspectives. Post-Gombrich visual semiotics, we could say, wishes to study the “materiality” and “non-transparency” of signification,22 at least implicit in Locke’s empirical perspective, by shearing the entire tradition of its Platonic and Kantian elements. Moreover, with recent critiques of semiotic convention- alism — at least, questioning the sufficiency of the notion that signification is “socially produced” — the whole matter seems wide open. There will not be an alternative to art history’s “coyness” here for some time to come.

“Meaning.” Up to this point, we have perhaps only seen that, intellectually, art history has been very eclectic and often uncritical, a point no one, I suppose, would gainsay. We may well wonder, then, how this crazy quilt has managed to hold together at all. The answer lies in part, I think, in the fact that diverse perspectives on history, art, and the sign have converged in assuming Intentionality and meaning, as Preziosi notes with respect to some debates (e.g., pp. 44, 108). It is clear that for him, as for many others,23 meaning is one of the central “transcendental signifieds” of the discipline (e.g., p. 87). Here too mediation is all. Several times he describes a “logocentric paradigm” of signification, representation, or communication (pp. 15, 46-47) in which — I generalize from and somewhat extend his characterization — art works, necessarily understood as a vehicle, medium, sign, trace, production, or “working,” somehow reflect, reveal, express, represent, articulate, enunciate, project, communicate, transfer, or deliver what may be called references, meanings, perceptions, concepts, intentions, or signifieds (pp. 15, 18, 22, 29, 83, 110, 118). (For Derrida, the whole package is succinctly described as the “vouloir-dire of art.”)24 Correlatively, through their “essentially distinctive” disciplinary activity of interpretation, “reading,” or cryptography, making use of the full panoptic/anamorphic apparatus of their trade, art historians attempt to uncover this “original fullness” of meaning, the “presence of real being” (e.g., pp. 11, 22, 29, 56, 86).

Preziosi is surely correct that this paradigm is very much with us. The ways it has been deployed vary a good deal: for one historian, “intentions” are seen straightforwardly as political “strategies,” for another, as unconscious “desire.” We should expect this to be the case within any real paradigm: it enables practitioners to solve many discrete puzzles and cover a very wide field.25 Any claim that we have dispensed with it should be regarded very skeptically. For example, although images, we may be told, are not “reflections” of what Preziosi nicely calls a “previous manifestation” (p. 38), to my mind the “new” art history’s alternative — works “produce” meaning or content “socially” (see pp. 18, 160) — makes the same assumptions in reverse and does not, in itself, explicate meaning as such. Or again, although a strictly conceived Saussurean semiotics abjures deriving signifiers from signifieds like perceptions, it cannot avoid smuggling “meaning” in elsewhere — for example, in the mutual references that must coordinate the conventions of a langue26 or emergent as the system of differences within the chain of signifiers.27 As Preziosi shows, the two end-points in the paradigm, meanings on the one hand and their receivers/ producers on the other, tend to be studied at the expense of the material, “intermediate” steps of production (pp. 46-47, 85, 118). But even if we were to concentrate on the “total activity” of communication (p. 148) or on the materiality and textuality of the trace itself, as Preziosi recommends, this does not in itself guarantee that the trace has not simply become the seat or site of Intentionality. It would be just as well to be as material and economical about the “presence” of meaning, intention, or communication as possible; still, this is neither an analysis nor a critique of meaning as such. Despite possibilities — such as the skepticism, well antedating Derrida’s...

22 The terms are, for example, Bryson’s (as in n. 1).
24 Derrida (as in n. 18), 22.
25 Preziosi (p. 39) considers art history’s various logocentrism to be its “paradigm”; for paradigms and puzzle-solving, see M. Masterman, “The Nature of a Paradigm,” in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, eds., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Cambridge, 1970, 59-89. However, Preziosi makes other, competing characterizations.
work, that people “follow rules” — such an analysis remains to be written in art history.28

Subjects. In the dominant versions of art history’s logocentrism, as Preziosi notes, the meaningful art work addresses itself to a viewer seen as passive (p. 52). Whether passive or actually more active, this “subject” must occupy a “fixed position,” for if the work communicates a certain kind of intention, it assumes, or predicates, a subject who could grasp it (pp. 52, 68), a “Subject who functions as the place of the intention [insertion?] of those meanings” (p. 77). A parallel operation animates the relation between art-historical “archive” and art historian/critic: “the incessant slippage of any unit [of the archival system] into all others is counterbalanced by a positionality or directionality that fabricates meaning for and by a subject” (p. 76). At the “sending” end of the paradigm, the “homogeneous Selfhood” of the Artist (or equivalent Voice) must be constituted as having and making meanings (p. 31). In general, in what is otherwise the ongoing “signifying chain” or “mass of signifiers,” presumably characterized materially only by différence, these “subject positions” — Preziosi uses Lacan’s term point de capiton — “pin down” meaning pro- and retrospectively (pp. 69, 76).29 It is easy to see these subject positions as “ideological fictivity” (p. 68), for example, with Althusser, as functions of the state apparatus. The proposal, useful as far as it goes, is Preziosi’s point for many purposes; it seems to be one of the animating intuitions of the “new art history” at large. Ideologiekritik of one kind or another results in interesting art-historical work and therapeutic, disciplinary self-criticism.

However, as Preziosi seems to recognize, the problem of subject positionality — and the matter where Althusser finally parted company with Lacan30 — is not only its place “in an ideological formation” but also its necessity (Preziosi is ambiguous: compare pp. 189, n. 13, 196, n. 59). From a Lacanian perspective, subject positions like Artist and Viewer (or Art Historian) are, as Preziosi says (p. 68), “imaginary identifications” — that is, as well as linguistic, cultural, and to that extent ideological or “Symbolic” mediations. Presumably if we use his terms, we take Lacan’s concept of the Imaginary seriously. For at least three reasons, the self can never be outside the Imaginary nor can the “ideology” of the Symbolic wholly subsume it. First, the objets petit a’ luring and securing identifications — such as Winnicott’s “transitional phenomena,”31 the gaze and voice of an Autre (real Other),32 or Lacan’s “stature, status, statuses” of cultural systems33 — are never completely grasped as independent of the self; they are always small “a” autres. Second, the “mirror phase” precipitating the regime of identifications, “the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego’s verifications,”34 occurs before and determines the self’s entry into language. Third, no Imaginary or Symbolic mediation can overcome, and must therefore repeat, the fact (in the “Real”) of sex-

28 Like Heidegger before him with his “way” (Weg) to language and his “stroke” (Riss, tear/sketch) of art, Derrida sees and indeed places the problem at the core of his project. In one of his few specific discussions of the trace, he conceives it — with Freud — as an “economy of death” (“Freud and the Scene of Writing,” in Writing and Difference, trans. A. Bass, Chicago, 1976, 196-231), that is, as the simultaneous “breaching” and conservation of resistance that already requires an expenditure of energy and — in order for the repetition to “score” at all — a goal-directedness, the twin criteria of Intentionality (see Searle [as in n. 9], and see Derrida [as in n. 18], 11). Of course, to be as nuanced and clear as he has been here is to begin to explicate rather than merely assume or reject Intentionality. As he says, the spacing of the repetitions will be definitive; but when and where a spacing deserves to be called “an intention” or “a meaning” will, it seems, be an ineluctably fictional, metaphysical, and ideological decision. One deconstructs metaphysics to find its metaphysicability.

In their ordinary, non-Derridean usages, art historians talking about meaning and intention (for example, M. Baxandall, Patterns of Intention, New Haven, 1985) unselfconsciously adopt a Grecian scenario, in which meaning-makers try to get viewers to recognize the makers’ intentions through a picture designed to elicit a certain response (H.P. Grice, “Meaning,” Philosophical Review, lxxvi, 1957, 377-388; for the clearest formulation in terms of pictures, D. Novitz, Pictures and Their Use in Communication, The Hague, 1977). Although very credible, Grice’s formula is notoriously exposed to circularity. For a more detailed discussion of a particular set of examples in the art-historical literature — the difficulties of analysis of “meaning in context” — see my review of H.J. Drewal, ed., Object and Intellect: Interpretation of Meaning in African Art, in Art Journal, xl1, 2, 1987, and in African Arts, xx1, 4, 1989, 16-32. A respectable complex account of picture-makers’ beliefs, desires, intentions, and actions is probably the primary desideratum of a truly “rethought” art history (for a promising start, see R. Wollheim, Painting as an Art, Princeton, 1987).


33 J. Lacan, “Reflections on the Ego,” International Journal of Psychoanalysis, xxxiv, 1953, 15. As the English translator of Lacan’s Seminar x1 has noted, Lacan insists that objet petit a [autre] should remain untranslated, thus acquiring, as it were, the status of an algebraic sign” (J. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, 1978, 282): I understand this “algebraic sign” to denote objects in the life history of a person not fully differentiated by that person from (being part of) his or her own self. Lacan’s clearest example in the Four Fundamental Concepts is the famous toy reel with which Freud’s grandson played his game of “fort”/”da”: “This reel is not the mother reduced to a little ball ... it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained. ... If it is true that the signifier is the first mark of the subject, how can we fail to recognize here — from the very fact that this game is accompanied by one of the first oppositions to appear — that it is in the object to which the opposition is applied in act, the reel, that we must designate the subject” (p. 62). It would be the burden of a Lacanian analysis of culture, among other things, to demonstrate the life-historical continuity between the earliest, most primitive objets petit a” — the mother’s warmth, the toys — and cultural objects more traditionally conceived.


uality/being-sexed, at the same time as they stabilize the self in an "armature" of "sanity." 36 For the Lacanian, then, unconscious sexuality establishes the very conditions of possibility for a subject's "positionality" (for this reason, no genuine accord with historical materialism, I think, could ever be reached, despite the hopeful eclecticism of some "new" art historians). In turn, from this perspective all a priori and abstract critiques of positionality — to be found in both subpsychoanalytic and sub-Marxist writing — insist on the ficticity of positionality at the expense of its factuality, its historical reality, and — dare I say it? — its meaning for desiring, alienated subjects. No doubt the Cartesian "centered subjecthood" is a "fabrication" (p. 189, n. 13). But specifically how and why have such fictions been sustained, if it is merely a tautology, from a Lacanian perspective, to say they are constructed ideologically or culturally? We still await a cogent account; as Preziosi notes, a renovated art history could examine how art works "afford positions for subjects in signifying practice" (p. 50), one part, and just the beginning, of seeing Artist and Viewer as the objets petit "a" of subjects whose Other is the objet petit "a" of an art historian.

An illustration. Preziosi (chap. 5) offers a reading of aspects of the growing literature on prehistoric marking and meaning to exemplify the tensions between logocentrism and the study of the trace. It contains Preziosi's most detailed remarks on a specific tradition of scholarship. He begins by recalling André Leroi-Gourhan's pseudostructuralist, quasi-statistical interpretation of Upper Paleolithic cave art as a stable and "ordered system of relationships" (p. 124), a "mythogram," replacing earlier stories about a complex evolution of "styles" in cave art. Preziosi feels that disagreement with Leroi-Gourhan has been "limited to the interpretation of particular subject matter" in cave art (p. 125) — in fact, the "statistical" core of Leroi-Gourhan's argument for pattern was quickly shown to be utterly fallacious 37 — but goes on to note that Leroi-Gourhan did eventually moderate his interpretation of the system he thought he had found as "sexual" in its content. Laming-Empeiraire's work, cited by Preziosi, showed that taking the same "structuralist" perspective, one could articulate the empty variables of the system with entirely different meanings or contents. In general, despite Leroi-Gourhan's vaguely structuralist insights, 38 Preziosi rightly notes his other links with logocentric, idealist perspectives (p. 126), mainly by adopting Margaret Conkey's analysis of the way Leroi-Gourhan needed to assume a homogeneity and stability in the material that both common sense and archaeological evidence would suggest to be spurious. The study of spatio-temporal differences developed by Conkey and others, which Preziosi also surveys, may yield a more adequate anthropological archaeology of Paleolithic art. Still, Leroi-Gourhan was a complex writer; his nonstructuralist works, of no interest to Preziosi, now seem prescient in their evolutionary and cognitive arguments. 39

The study of prehistoric art has been troubled by logocentrism because the "identity of Homo sapiens sapiens as fully distinct" (p. 128) turns up insistently in any scrutiny of hominin evolution. Preziosi turns, then, to the problem of "constructing the origins of art" (pp. 128-133). Plausible accounts of origins are hard to come by for the very reason that entrenched assumptions about culture and meaning work against naturalistic or material analysis. Preziosi follows some suggestions of my own on paleolithic "(re)marking" — I would now also say spacing and tracing — that try to derive the phenomena of paleolithic depiction from minimally "idealistic" assumptions. 40 Marks work representationally, he stresses, as a function of "the entire system of marks in relationship" (p. 132) — so long, I would add, as "system" does not imply organization or Intentionality. Partly in response to this account, other, alternative scenarios have also been published recently, 41 but it seems exceedingly difficult to understand the evolution of reference. Preziosi claims that "remarkably advanced artifactual behaviors . . . long preceded the emergence of Homo sapiens sapiens" (p. 128), although the criteria for "advance" seem unclear. Debate rages over the best interpretation of these pre-Upper Paleolithic materials as Intentional — goal-directed, systematic, meaningful — or not. 42 I believe their Intentional status has been vastly overconstrued. Preziosi's own example, at least, certainly falls prey to the wishful thinking he otherwise condemns. From remains found in 1966-69 at the Middle Pleistocene site of Terra Amata (ca. 220,000 B.C.), Henri de Lumley reconstructed an "ovoid hut" supposedly maintained for several seasonal occupations by its inhabitants. In the context of "constructing the origins of art," Preziosi discusses the hut at length

36 The crucial statements are in Lacan's passages on "the subject and the other (alienation)" in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, 1978, 203-215. "Two lacks overlap here. The first emerges from the central defect around which the dialectic of the advent of the subject to his own being in the relation to the Other turns — by the fact that the subject depends on the signifier and that the signifier is first of all in the field of the Other. This lack takes up the other lack [my italics], which is the real, earlier lack, to be situated at the advent of the living being, that is to say, at sexual reproduction. The real lack is what the living being loses . . . in reproducing himself through the way of sex" (pp. 204-205). The "lack in the real" is the impossibility for the sexually reproducing subject to be biologically both male and female. The (Lacanian) psychotic's disturbed language appears for him or her "in the real," that is, hallucination, rather than as the neurotic's Imaginarily troubled Symbolic language.


38 In my opinion, Leroi-Gourhan never produced an analysis satisfying the minimal criteria of a Lévi-Straussian "structural analysis" — that the "structure" take the form of variables related in the formula "A : B :: C : D" and that individual relations (A : B, etc.) be "mediated" (Lévi- Strauss as in n. 3). Rather, Leroi-Gourhan described vaguer forms of system or orderliness. Preziosi's discussion should now be supplemented by M. Conkey, "The Structural Analysis of Paleolithic Art," in C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, ed., Archaeological Thought in America, Cambridge, 1989, 135-154.


as "both an object and a mark — in short, a complex sign" (pp. 128-130). However, the highly problematic stratigraphy of the site simply cannot support this interpretation, and it has been generally discarded. In all likelihood, the "hut" is the fiction of an archaeology determined to project logocentric presences — the "carefully organized," semiotic, referential qualities Preziosi sees in the pebbles and flakes — into the material record. Whether the "origin" or evolution of reference occurred in the Middle or Late Pleistocene (that is, long ago or relatively recently), its mechanism — if you reject my own and the other scenarios — remains mysterious. It is hard to say whether this is good or bad news for metaphysicians or materialists.

Preliminary cognitive studies of prehistoric marking were founded practically single-handed by Alexander Marshack, whose work Preziosi goes on to consider (pp. 133-142). For purposes of exposition, he sticks reasonably closely to Marshack's own interpretations of his fascinating morphological and "contextual" studies of mark production. Marshack shows how complex the "unity" of a paleolithic image must really be (pp. 135-136) and he expands "the structuralist concept of systematicity or structure to the temporal dimension" (p. 136). Some of his decipherments, like the calendrical notations Preziosi discusses (pp. 137-141), make sense of some systems "of marks in relationship"; these marks were probably signs that, as we would expect from Peirce's triad of purely notional sign types, "mix" indexical, iconic, and symbolic aspects in the vehicle. 44

Preziosi, however, seems to accept Marshack's central claim that morphological difference among marks was caused by significant timelags (cf. Derrida's "spaces") in their production, that is, by "traditions" of the "periodic re-use" of signs. But, of course, there will always be a spatio-temporal "space" between repetitions within the "entire system of relationships" that gives depiction or other forms of reference (p. 132). The projection of "tradition" or "use," "context," "meaning," or "capacity for culture" — from this materiality of the trace is, surely, a logocentric leap pari passu excellence. 45 Despite his evolutionary perspective, Marshack's writing is shot through and through with such modulations from morphology to Intentionality — that, indeed, has been his big theme. Therefore I cannot accept Preziosi's idiosyncratic verdict that "Marshack's [work] could well be construed as emblematic of the poststructuralist critique of verbocentrist structuralism" (p. 142).

Preziosi's alertness to logocentric fallacy is sharper in the final section of the chapter (pp. 143-155). Here he contrasts prehistorians' usual assumption of coherence due to a unified Intentionality with recent studies of stylistic variability pioneered in paleo-anthropology by Martin Wobst and Margaret Conkey, studies that are part of a wider emphasis on style as actively "communicating" the message (and the meaning?) of socio-cultural differentiation. A subtle analysis of communication, like Jakobson's "paradigm of the speech event" (pp. 149-150), "may sensitise us," Preziosi writes. "to the potential complexities that must be taken into account in dealing with patterned markings" (p. 152); un-critical notions of the "origin" of a distinct "it," like "art," must break down in a developed account of "the roles played by visual practices in individual and collective life" (p. 152). One wonders how much might still be assumed in these concepts of style-variability, communication, cultural difference, or individual practice. For instance, elsewhere in the book (e.g., pp. 85. 118), Preziosi forthrightly declares communication to be one of the metaphors of meaning idealism. However, just to pursue the question would move us beyond archaeology and art history as we know them today.

Contradiction and totalization. Preziosi sees all of art history's logocentrisms, so provocatively sketched in the book, as "metaphors" (p. xii). As his own spatio-temporal metaphors and shifts of focus suggest, it poses a problem to say exactly who expresses them, when and where, how self-consciously, and in relation to what alternatives that could only be, as Preziosi stresses (pp. 44, 109), figurative and fictionalizing as well: logocentric metaphors are "kernels," "nuclei," or "cores" (pp. xii, 40, 145) of discourse but also its "scaffolding" (p. 19), "deep" or "forgotten" (pp. 35, 79, 109) but "persistent" (p. xiii): they are concepts, stratagems, or assumptions, but also instruments, "tropes," or even a "style" (pp. 35, 39, 194, n. 41), as far-reaching as "paradigms" but as local as "images" (p. 39).

In general, Preziosi clearly believes art historians should strive for greater conceptual consistency. His archaeological and deconstructive exegetes finally come down, I think, to the diagnosis — with the tone of mild to agonized complaint — that art history "circulates contradictory perspectives...in...the same discursive space" (p. 85; cf. pp. 95, 107, 157).

Now, to some extent, one historian's "contradiction" is another's sensitivity or flexibility. After all, history itself, as Preziosi remarks several times, is complex and contradictory (p. 166), a mosaic of "social contradictions and individual differences" (p. 170), a "multiplicity of cultural processes" (p. 179). Writing attuned to this multiplicity might itself be unstable and patchy, avoiding cut-and-dried descriptions, and appropriating counter-cutting "theories" to advance various arguments — all as the best way of adhering to the phenomena. At some point, our descriptive resources will strain; in The Painting of Modern Life, for example, Clark barely (and for that reason brilliantly) keeps some hold on viewers' and critics' "contradictory" responses to painters' "contradictory" representations of "contradictions" in social reality. Should a writer in this kind of fruitful crisis turn to a non-contradictory account of contradiction? Such a philosophy of contradiction — Hegelian, Marxian, Freudian, Derridean — could only be "metaphysical" and "logocentric," precisely, we had thought, what we had hoped to avoid. 46 It is not always obvious where Preziosi stands here: but since it may be liberating rather than debilitating, his complaint cannot be with contradictoriness as such.

In fact, Preziosi really hopes to diagnose a particular species of contradiction, as his own repeated metaphor for art history's

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44 In the original excavation report, De Lumley gives less than one page to "les huttes"; see the definitive study by P. Villa, Terra Amata and the Middle Pleistocene Archaeological Record of Southern France, Berkeley, 1983, especially 69-75, 79-82, 165-170, not cited by Preziosi.

45 That this vehicle is therefore "highly complex" (p. 141) may be no more than a truism to the extent that classifications of semiotic complexity, such as Peirce's sixty-six-fold division, assume the hypo-indexicality (etc.) of signs straight off.

46 Objections to Marshack's interpretations of morphology have been in the literature for some time, although not couched in Derridean terms. For a recent debate, see F. D'Errico, "Wishful Thinking and Lunar Calendars," Current Anthropology, xxx, 1989, 117-118 (with Marshack's reply, pp. 491-494, and D'Errico's response, pp. 494-501).

situation reveals — namely, a “double bind” (e.g., pp. 38, 49, 112, 116, 126, 188, n. 9). What about “double binds,” then? With respect to ordinary contradictions, we think in binary terms (materialist/idelist, form/content, and all the rest); ultimately, we expect they can be reduced, synthesized, or surmounted. But a “double bind” is actually ternary: It sends not only the two messages of a metaphor (X says a and b), a disagreement (X says a, Y says b), a contradiction (X says a, Y says not-a), or a self-contradiction (X says a, X says not-a), but also a “tertiary negative injunction preventing the victim from escaping from the field” or preventing a “metacommunicative statement” — self-conscious critical knowledge — that labels metaphor as metaphor, disagreement as disagreement, and so forth.47 In a double bind, you can’t have it both ways, but you can’t have it any other way.

The double bind is Preziosi’s metaphor; he does not directly explicate it as a concept. Presumably, however, his logocentrisms are the garden-variety metaphors, disagreements, contradictions, and self-contradictions taken up by art historians from philosophical traditions, the subject of Preziosi’s book, while the all-important “tertiary negative injunction” preventing the resolution of double binds stems from its institutional organization, a matter that is still outside the frame in his analysis.

How and why does Donald Preziosi write the book Rethinking Art History, published by a major press whose list includes classic texts of art-historical logocentrism, and how and why does Whitney Davis (both of us, predictably, coming out of the Fogg and now teaching in purportedly nonconformist departments) review it for the Art Bulletin? Are these topics still too explosive? Preziosi’s ability comprehensively to rethink art history is double-bound by art history’s prohibition on speaking its real names.

In real-life situations double binds have been thought to lead literally to schizophrenia — not so much the self’s ability to make and manage metaphor or dialectic but rather its inability to do so.48 To ameliorate a “double bind,” a person becomes coy; otherwise, the blind shatters and paralyses. In general terms, then, what seems to be at stake for Preziosi here — the motivation of his metaphor in a repetition both puzzling and predictable — must be that very unity, stability, and complete, self-conscious critical knowingness of a subject he is at pains in his literal text to remark as Imaginary. Indeed, the book concludes — coyly? — with a marvelous figure of this fundamental repetition. A final section titled “seeing beyond the Panopticon” (pp. 168-79) entirely re-creates it.

Meaning, Preziosi summarizes, although governed by difference, will be resolved ideologically in an “imaginary homogeneity” (p. 169) both “to reveal and to mask social contradictions and individual differences” (p. 170) — a movement, he has suggested, applying as much to art historians as to artists and viewers. Adopting the Periklean building on the Athenian Akropolis as a historical model — its several images of Athena (Parthenos, Promakhos, etc.) reframe the “totality of her identity and powers . . . through the prism of the Akropolis” (p. 172) — he concentrates on Mnesikles’ Propylaia, the entrance to the crown of the Akropolis. This building, he recalls, seems partially to violate the canons of commensurability in the irregularly placed door and two windows of the southern wall of the pinakotheke, the picture gallery forming the north flank of the structure, to the left of a visitor approaching the central entranceway. Preziosi rejects the accepted “structural or material” explanation of this phenomenon (p. 175),49 for he wants to return to a much older theory by which the asymmetry resolves “anamorphically” as symmetrical from a single vantage point outside the building on the west ascent to the entrance, a fixed point marked by an “X” on his plan (p. 176, fig. 6).50 Standing at this point, he goes on to say, a visitor could see the head of the (now lost) colossal bronze statue of Athena Promakhos — probably about forty meters east of the east (or inner) porch of the Propylaia and more or less aligned with it — “framed by the central passageway of the Propylaia, rendering that intercolumnial space a tableau or picture” (p. 175). This view from his fixed point is also drawn on his plan (fig. 6). Many layered sociopolitical meanings, Preziosi supposes, could have animated this organization, and he goes on to outline them; like art or art history, the “pinakotheke façade . . . fixes the subject at a singular site that is coincident with the viewing of a political-ideographic tableau” (p. 177).

But, of course, although it panoptically observes an axis of rather approximate alignment, this line on his plan is not a sight line at all and there was no “tableau.” The Mnesiklean ramp approaching the Propylaia rose at a very steep grade, twenty-five meters in an eighty-meter length; even between the west and east porches of the building itself, the passageway rises a full 1.4m.51 Although Mnesikles widened the west entrance to carry his wide passageway, ascending the steep ramp one could not possibly see through the gates from Preziosi’s point “X.”52 In fact, the whole point must have been the visitor’s initial exclusion and transfiguration in ascending to the west porch, passing through the dark-


50 G.W. Elderkin, Problems in Periclean Buildings, New York, 1912, 1-6 (not cited by Preziosi). Elderkin used this phenomenon to reconstruct the course of a zigzag approach ramp also included in Preziosi’s two plans, pp. 174 (fig. 5) and 176 (fig. 6). However, Mnesikles’ ramp was quite straight; all he did was nearly double (to twenty-one meters) the eleven-meter width of the straight Archaic ramp, the north retaining wall of which was partly preserved and proves the ramp was straight and steep (W.B. Dinsmoor, Jr., The Propylaia to the Athenian Akropolis, 1. The Predecessors, Princeton, 1980, pl. 16). The zigzag ramp was a Roman change.

51 Mnesikles clearly compensated for the way his building perched on a rising grade by setting four steps on the west porch where the east needs only the single stylebute; further, the west columns were .28m taller than the east columns.

52 The central intercolumniation of the west porch is 1.82m wider than the four flanking ones; this “asymmetry” is not noted by Preziosi but was surely more striking than that of the pinakotheke façade (see J.J. Coulton, Greek Architects at Work, London, 1977, 91). For the rising grade, see (for example) the sections in C. Tiberi, Mnesicle: L’Architettura dei Propilei, Rome, 1964, figs. 24 (west-east) and 33 (east-west); a person 1.5m tall standing six meters from the entrance could see the passageway ceiling, at best. The height of the Promakhos is thus entirely irrelevant to this issue; Preziosi (p. 264, n. 85) “imagines” it was the height of Phidias’s enormous Parthenos, but as the foundation of its base was only about 5.5m wide (A. Rauhut, Dedications on the Athenian Acropolis, Cambridge, MA, 1949, 198-201, no. 172). G.P. Stevens’s sensible reconstruction gives its total height as about 7.5m (The Periclean Entrance Court of the Acropolis of Athens, Cambridge, MA, 1936, 50-57, fig. 47).
en Propylaia rising to its shallow east porch, out onto the open
crown of the Akropolis: “the Propylaia is . . . an interior space
which leads from one kind of exterior to another.”53 In Preziosi’s
account, the history and the interiority — the material complexity
— of the Propylaia have been utterly de-realized so that he may
panoptically find an entirely imaginary homogeneity, a fictional
fixed point and a fabricated system of meanings, in a rather more
contradictory construction.

I think we can be very sympathetic to the ambitions of decon-
structive Postmodernism, even though it is neither as unique and
novel nor as hard-hitting in rethinking Intentionality and recog-
izing the complexity of history as some have claimed. As Preziosi
argues, the metaphysics of presence has enabled art historians to
take their basic vocabulary for agency and intention, for repre-
sentation and meaning, or for culture and history, very largely
for granted, to the extent that they take these identities as the
truly self-identical and irreducible phenomena of being in their
archaeologies and their teleologies. With Derrida and many oth-
ers — Derrida’s terms may not always be useful — we should be
able to articulate an archaeology of our archaeologies and a
teleology of our teleologies, and so on, indefinitely. At some point,
it would only be scrupulous to admit that this theoretical labor
not only tends toward but actively requires “onto-theological”
commitments. Moreover, if the so-called “new art history” is any
guide, the imagination of presences will certainly survive the in-
tial rearrangements and retotalizations of the deconstructive di-
alectic — even if and, as Preziosi’s Terra Amata and Propylaia
suggest, especially when, the critic supposes his own conscious-
ness to be at its most alert, knowing, and self-critical and calls
for such enviable consistency in the conceptual practice of others.

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53 V. Scully, The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Archi-
tecture, New Haven, 1962, 180; and see also A.W. Lawrence, Greek Ar-
chitecture, Harmondsworth, 1957, 184, and Travlos (as in n. 49), 52.
Stevens’s frontispiece (as in n. 52), reconstructing the view from the in-
terior through the east porch to his “Periclean entrance court,” illustrates
this clearly. Scully also gives a much fuller account of the axis of alignment
observed by Preziosi; it connects Salamis in the west to Mt. Hymettos in
the east and falls straight over the Altar of Athena on the Akropolis, not
marked on Preziosi’s plans but visible in his reconstruction drawing
(p. 170, fig. 4). The Promakhos was really slightly off this alignment and
offset, as if to “turn” toward the Parthenon; since it was erected by 455
B.C., well before either the Parthenon or the Propylaia, its connection to
this Periklean/Mnesiklean “axis” may be entirely coincidental.