

Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness

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Alois Riegl is known as a pioneer of formal analysis, but his theory of beholding contradicts formalistic preoccupations. The essay interprets this theory in the intellectual context of fin-de-siècle Vienna, arguing that Riegl regarded the relationship to the beholder not as the formal means, but as the ethical purpose of art, and defended the beholder's participation against the charge of "theatricality." Riegl's "formal" theory, too, was not hermetic, but responsive to the same intellectual challenge as the theory of beholding. A brief discussion of intellectual currents in the later twentieth century reveals the strengths and limitations of Riegl's endeavor.

The "artistic" is "a specific form of the relation between creator and contemplators, fixed in the artistic work."¹ The probable author of these lines, published in 1926, was the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Two years later, Bakhtin wrote approvingly of a group of Western "formalists" who, from his description, do not seem very "formalistic."

The struggle against positivism and naturalism, trends which took meaning away from art, was of great importance to the European formal movement. While formalism advanced the idea of the closed unity of the work mainly in opposition to abstract, and particularly to idealist, notions of art, it was in opposition to positivism that it steadfastly insisted upon the profound meaningfulness of every element of the artistic construction.²

One of the Western theorists whose work Bakhtin admired was the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905). He cited Riegl and his compatriots to contrast them to true formalists of his own nationality. The Russians, he

felt, went astray because their materialistic notion of art denied it all semantic, hence ideological, significance. For Bakhtin, the antidote to formalism was a literature that recognized the radical otherness of separate "voices." This "dialogism" has recently been embraced by theorists who see in it the hope of restoring referentiality and social significance to literature. It has also been attacked by those who see in it a false hope made possible by blindness to its own tropological basis.³

Riegl's work, however, has found few champions among non-formalists.⁴ Interestingly, the reason for this neglect is that he has been viewed as the direct forebear of formal critics of the mid-twentieth century, many of whom suffer the same limitations as the Russians criticized by Bakhtin. These later critics treated the work of art as an autonomous entity, concerned with the irreducible principles of its medium. The text that primarily earned Riegl the reputation as their precursor was one of two that interested Bakhtin and his circle: *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (1901).⁵ This work on late Roman art, which introduced the controversial term *Kunstwollen*, identified the quintessentially artis-

Previous versions of the present essay were presented on several occasions over the past few years, and the essay owes much to the comments and suggestions of those present. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following individually: Becky Chandler, Linda Krauss, Michael Podro, Lynn Poland, W.J.T. Mitchell, Robert S. Nelson, Sanford Schwartz, Richard Schiff, Joel Snyder, and an anonymous reader. Finally, I am indebted to Michael Fried, whose lectures and essays on Courbet were a source of inspiration for this essay.

¹ V.N. Voloshinov (M. Bakhtin?), quoted in Todorov, 21, emphasis in the original.

² P.N. Medvedev (M. Bakhtin?), *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. A.J. Wehrle, Baltimore, 1978, 48.

³ Bakhtin's dialogism has been championed most notably by Todorov. P. de Man challenged dialogism in *Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis, 1986, 106-114.

⁴ Some recent exceptions are those primarily concerned with Riegl's theory of value expressed in his writings on monuments. See, e.g., H. Zerner, "Alois Riegl: Art, Value, Historicism," *Daedalus*, cccv, 1976, 177-189, and K. Forster, "Monument/Memory and the Mortality of Architecture,"

Oppositions, xxv, 1982, 2-19. In 1983, however, W. Kemp recognized the dissonance between formal theory and Riegl's theory of the beholder, as espoused in *Das holländische Gruppenporträt*. A brief but perceptive passage on that work is included in an exposition of the historical tradition of the aesthetics of reception: *Der Anteil des Betrachters: Rezeptionsästhetische Studien zur Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich, 1983, 20-24. Also relevant to Riegl's concept of the beholder is J. Oberhaidacher, "Riegls Idee einer theoretischen Einheit von Gegenstand und Betrachter und ihre Folgen für die Kunstgeschichte," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, xxxviii, 1985, 199-218.

⁵ The other work that interested Bakhtin's circle was *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, Berlin, 1893, which is the only one cited in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. It seems clear, however, that the author knew Riegl's work primarily through W. Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, Munich, 1909, and the introduction to A. Schmarsow, *Grundbegriffe der Kunstwissenschaft*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1905, 1-14, both of which offer extensive quotations from Riegl along with misleading interpretations. The Riegl text most relevant to Worringer, and hence to Medvedev or Bakhtin, was *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*.

tic element subject to this volition as "the appearance of things as form and color in the plane or in space."⁶ The system of formal analysis constructed on this basis, composed of categories of perception, became a model for twentieth-century formal critics.

A year later, however, in *Das holländische Gruppenporträt*, Riegl turned to an enterprise that, although probably unknown to Bakhtin, would seem to introduce into the discourse of formal criticism a note as dissonant as that of Bakhtin's dialogism: he began to discuss the artistic role of the beholder. The beholder is most commonly introduced into art-historical literature as a patron or customer. In this form, the presence of the beholder opens art to political and social, rather than formal, explanations. The psychological theories of E.H. Gombrich and others have introduced the beholder as an abstract psychological entity. This psychological beholder, while remaining seemingly apolitical, threatens the self-enclosed unity of the work.⁷ Riegl's introduction of the beholder was more straightforwardly formal. He used the literal confrontation of the beholder and the work of art across space as the basis for a new strategy of pictorial analysis. Hence scholars were able to assimilate Riegl's preoccupation with the beholder to his formal concerns by interpreting his strategy as part of an ingenious method of explaining the coherence of certain works of art.⁸ This interpretation, however, has not taken into account the threat to artistic coherence constituted by dependence on the beholder.

The present essay proposes a different interpretation of Riegl's preoccupation with the beholder. I argue here that Riegl discussed the relationship to the beholder not as the formal means, but as the ethical purpose of art, seeking to defend the participation of the beholder in certain artistic practices against those who would dismiss it as "theatricality." Then I address the nonformalistic character of Riegl's "formal" theory, showing it not to be formal in the hermetic sense, but responsive to the same intellectual challenge as the theory of beholding. Finally, I relate Riegl's theory to formal criticism of the mid-twentieth century, with a view to determining whether beholding, any more

than dialogism, can subvert formalism, or is fated always to be coopted by it.

The Attentive Act

Riegl was conscious of the consequences of the historian's acknowledgement of the beholder. In private notes of the mid-1890's, he identified the relationship between the beholder and the work of art as the central issue of art history, relegating the analysis of the work of art in itself to "aesthetics." "Aesthetics," he wrote, "[is the] relation of parts to the whole. [The] relation of the parts among themselves. [It] has not taken the relation to the beholder into consideration. The relation to the beholder constitutes art history. Its general principles make up historical aesthetics."⁹ If concern for the beholder distinguished history from philosophy, then Riegl himself was an aesthetician, not an art historian. *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, after all, seemed to treat "aesthetics," the relationship among parts, not "art history," the relationship to the beholder, even if it did so historically and relativistically, not in the traditional philosophical sense.¹⁰

If he were an "aesthetician," he may have had good reason. "Art history" is composed of the particular facts regarding the beholder and the work in historical progression. "Historical aesthetics" distills these facts into general principles. The latter term, evocative of Hegel, expresses Riegl's tenaciously held view of history as a progressive development. Yet he was unable to detect a difference, let alone progress, between "classic" and "modern" art in respect to the relation to the beholder. "Both," he wrote, "are objectivistic. Neither lets the figure look at the beholder. Rather, things happen independently from the beholder, not for the beholder's sake."¹¹ Riegl must surely have found it problematic that the development of art was circular in the respect that he regarded as central to its history.

Riegl's studies of Dutch art appear to confront this problem directly. His first attempt to practice "art history," that is, to trace a development in the relationship between art and its beholder, was *Das holländische Gruppenporträt* (1902). Whether Riegl projected his own concerns into them

⁶ Riegl, 1901/1927, 19. *Stilfragen* also contains the term *Kunstwollen*, but makes no claim for it as a rigorously defined concept.

⁷ See esp. E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York, 1960, Pt. 3: "The Beholder's Share."

⁸ M. Iversen discussed the relation to the beholder in formal terms in "Style as Structure: Alois Riegl's Historiography," *Art History*, 11, 1979, 62-72; and in her dissertation, "Alois Riegl's Art Historiography," University of Essex, 1979, 101-140; also M. Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven and London, 1982, 81-95.

⁹ "Ästhetik: Relation der Theile zum Ganzen. Relation der Theile untereinander. Hat nicht berücksichtigt Relation zum Beschauer. Relation zum Beschauer macht Kunstgeschichte. Gesetzmäßigkeit darin macht historische Ästhetik"; Riegl, ms, carton 9, folder 2, unpag. The notes appear to relate to the manuscript of *Die historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste*, which would date them between 1897 and 1900. For the dating of the manuscript, see Riegl, 1966, 9-11.

¹⁰ As will be seen, *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* treated the relation to the

beholder after all, but not in the same sense as did *Das holländische Gruppenporträt*.

¹¹ "Klassische und moderne Kunst: ihre Verwandtschaft. Beide sind objektivistisch. Keine läßt die Figur den Beschauer fixieren, sondern die Dinge vollziehen sich unabhängig vom Beschauer, nicht für die Absicht des Beschauers"; Riegl, ms, carton 9, folder 2, unpag. Riegl's emphasis. By "classic" art, Riegl could have meant either the art of Periclean Greece or the High Renaissance art that his contemporary Heinrich Wölfflin had discussed in his work, *Die klassische Kunst: Eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance*, 1899. If Riegl had the art of the High Renaissance in mind, he was, of course, mistaken, since Renaissance altarpieces often directly addressed the spectator, or contained intermediary figures inviting the spectator into the work. In the Austria of Riegl's era, the term "modern art" was used to signify anything from the Renaissance to the present time. Riegl probably had in mind a very contemporary image to be opposed to "classic" art: paintings by Whistler, academic French Impressionists and their German imitators, realist art by Leibl or Menzel, and the symbolist work of Klinger or Stuck.

or correctly interpreted them in their own context, surely these portraits, whose figures look out of the frame, must have seemed an obvious point of departure for an inquiry into beholding (Fig. 1).¹² In Riegl's argument, the gaze was a vehicle for a condition he termed "external coherence" (äußere Einheit) or unification of the work of art with the beholder. On the levels both of composition and of the "pictorial conception" (Auffassung), this unity demanded "internal coherence" (innere Einheit) among the figures, without loss of individual identity.

On the level of composition, Riegl's procedure is formal. "Internal coherence" is achieved in the plane by means of line, while tensions between planar and spatial unity define precisely the relationship between the beholder in space and the work. The concept of the pictorial conception, however, departs from formal theory. In circulation since the early nineteenth century, this term meant the artist's conception of his subject matter, realized in the representation.¹³ To subsume the concept into formal analysis, Riegl would have had to argue that the pictorial conception consisted of forms and colors. Instead, he modified his previous slogan to read that the essence of art rested in the "pictorial conception, form and color," thus distinguishing the pictorial conception as a separate artistic element.¹⁴ He refined the concept to refer to a specifically psychological relationship between the personalities involved in a given work of art.¹⁵ In the group portrait, these personalities include the beholder, who provides external coherence, and the figures in a portrait, all of them united by a specific psychological element, namely "attention." This attentive bond linked a unified, gazing picture, full of individual portrait figures, to an equally individualized beholder.¹⁶

Riegl's analyses of attention are better described as narrative than formal. Rembrandt's *Syndics of the Draper's*

Guild, for example, is a performance in which the beholder takes part. In Riegl's opinion the most fully resolved "coordination" of internal and external coherence, the painting motivates the beholder's presence dramatically (Fig. 2).¹⁷ One officer of the guild speaks to the others. They heed his words and try to gauge their effect on an unseen party, located in the same place as the beholder.¹⁸ Their attention to the speaker establishes internal coherence, and their attention to the beholder creates external coherence; i.e., it draws the viewer into a relationship. As the focus of so much concentrated attention, he is transfixed before the canvas, while their self-awareness keeps the relationship in balance. The beholder and the "party" exchange places so often in the analysis that it is difficult to distinguish between them. Riegl almost upsets the balance in a passage imputing to the painting an almost mystical quality:

. . . Stillness reigns in the picture, so that one thinks one hears the individual words falling like drops of water. The longer one looks, the more forcibly the inner tension in which these four souls vibrate is communicated to the beholding subject. That soft admixture of self-awareness comes through in every head, along with the selfless attentiveness, like a part of the all-embracing world soul.¹⁹

The act of attention nearly overwhelms the beholder.²⁰

Riegl did not find attentiveness merely in figural compositions, however. Convinced of its significance for seventeenth-century Dutch art, Riegl found the quality even in portraits of nature. "The portrait conception, with its postulate of external coherence with the beholder, did not merely govern the art of the Dutch group portrait, but all of Dutch painting."²¹ In Rembrandt, not only people "should be bound to one another and to the beholder

¹² The present essay makes no attempt to judge the applicability of Riegl's method to Dutch art. For a discussion of Riegl's method as it applies to Dutch art, see M. Imdahl, "Regie und Struktur in den letzten Gruppenbildnissen von Rembrandt und Franz Hals," in *Festschrift Max Wegner zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. D. Ahrens, Münster, 1962, 119-128; and S. Alpers, "Style is What You Make It: The Visual Arts Once Again," in *The Concept of Style*, ed. B. Lang, Philadelphia, 1979, 98-101. Alpers's provocative discussion of Rembrandt's "theatricality" (in the broad sense of performance) could be profitably extended to the deployment of the gaze. S. Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, Chicago, 1988, 34-57.

¹³ The term "Auffassung" is defined by C.F. von Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen*, 1829, ed. J. Schlosser, Frankfurt a.M., 1920, 15.

¹⁴ Riegl, 1929, 146. See also "Neue Strömungen in der Denkmalpflege," *Mitteilungen der k.k. Zentralkommission für Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und historischen Denkmale*, 3rd ser., iv, 1905, 96, where Riegl writes of "das ästhetische [Gefühl], das durch Auffassung, Form und Farbe des Denkmals bedingt ist. . . ."

¹⁵ In *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom*, he made this explicit, adding the modifying adjective "psychologische" in the margin of the manuscript. Riegl, ms, carton 4, folder 2, p. 42a. The passage dates from a course on Italian Baroque art that Riegl gave in 1901-02.

¹⁶ As suggested by Kemp, "communication" would be a better word than unity to describe the functions Riegl attributes to the relations designated by the terms "innere" and "äußere Einheit," since "unity" suggests an ideal rather than a function. Kemp (as in n. 4), 22. Riegl, however, would not have used such a term himself, since he always assumed that art strove

for an ideal.

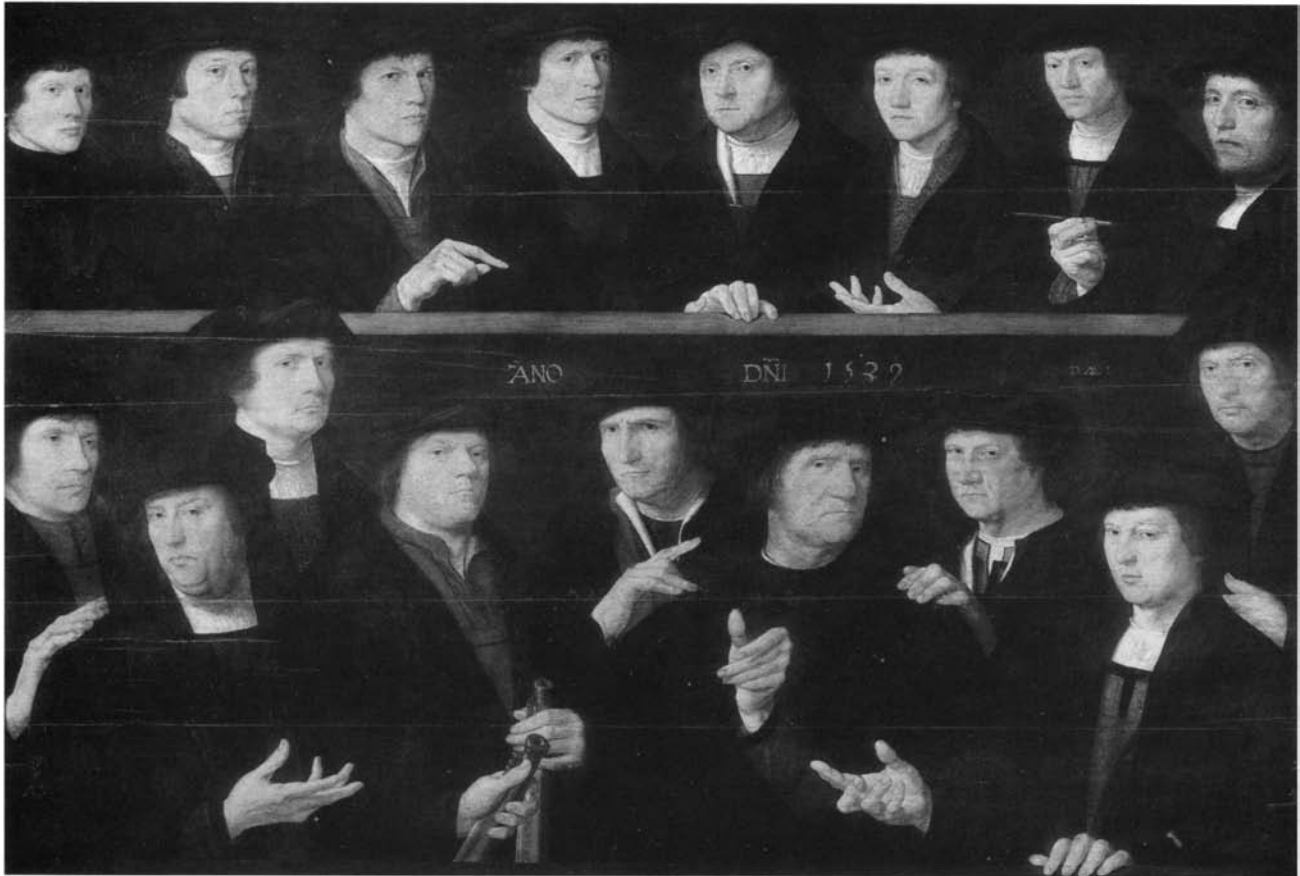
¹⁷ Riegl, 1902/1931, 212.

¹⁸ In his otherwise very useful analysis of *Das holländische Gruppenporträt*, Michael Podro (as in n. 8, 94) errs in referring to the unseen party as, according to Riegl, someone other than the beholder, who stands slightly to the beholder's left, and from whom the beholder, like the draper, awaits a response. Riegl actually identifies the direction of the attention of the drapers with the beholder, for he refers to the "direkten Verkehr mit den Beschauer"; Riegl, 1902/1931, 262. He also argues that the perspectival viewpoint of the work is to the lower left, and that it is best seen from that position, where a chair was conveniently located in the museum; *ibid.*, n. on p. 213. Riegl was not the first to discuss the direct address of the beholder in Rembrandt's painting. Theophile Thoré also saw the drapers as looking directly "à la place d'ou précisément on contemple le tableau," and adds that "ses braves syndics ont l'air de vous parler et vous provoquer à répondre"; *Les Musées de la Hollande*, Amsterdam, The Hague, Paris, 1858, 26. Riegl was impressed by Thoré, whom he cites repeatedly in his lecture notes. For a discussion of 19th-century French theory regarding group portraits, see U. Schumacher, "Gruppenporträt und Genrebild: Zur Bedeutung der Photographie für die französische Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Giessener Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte*, iv, 1979, 19-62.

¹⁹ Riegl, 1902/1931, 213.

²⁰ Riegl refers to the action as a "closed dramatic scene," and later calls such pictorial conceptions "dramatic"; *ibid.*, 230.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 178-179.



1 Dirck Jacobsz., *Civic Guards*, 1529. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum-Stichting



2 Rembrandt van Rijn, *Syndics of the Drapers Guild*, 1662. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum-Stichting



3 Jacob van Ruisdael, *Village in the Forest Valley*. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz

through lighted space and through a common soul, but all of nature, with or without living beings, should form this kind of spatial and spiritual unity."²² Elsewhere, he described seventeenth-century Dutch art as "the painting of attention," defined as a state of motionless, but not passive, activity. "The beholder still confronts the external things, which he perceives by means of his optical sense, actively, because he approaches them attentively."²³ The pictorial conception of Jacob van Ruisdael's *Village in the Forest Valley* (Fig. 3) is based on the "arousal of the optical-mental impulse to behold," symbolized by fishermen, whose vocation "presumes attentive viewing with absolute physical quiet."²⁴ Any potential distraction from what Riegl calls the "pure enjoyment of beholding" is omitted.²⁵

But attentiveness, as Riegl describes it, is not one-sided. The fishermen do not look at the viewer, but "the houses of the village, almost without exception, turn to the beholder their gabled fronts, shot through with windows, with which they seem to gaze at him quietly."²⁶ In another painting, the city street, not the pedestrians who populate it, "gazes at the beholder, and the . . . gabled fronts . . . line

up attentively behind."²⁷ In another, the few resting or wandering figures that inhabit the forest do not behave as a group portrait, but rather, according to Riegl, the landscape itself does. There "one perceives almost nothing but trees, but each of them comes forward as an individual, and all together beckon us irresistibly into their shadows."²⁸

These passages may not lead one to regard Ruisdael's trees as portrait figures. In his course on Dutch art, however, Riegl evoked the literal animation of seventeenth-century landscapes. Broad brushwork did not suffice to enable a tree to act as an "animate individual."²⁹ In contrast, Ruisdael "speaks to us . . . through his trees, that greet us like individuals."³⁰ Not only the trees, however, impart the sense that, in looking at *The Great Forest*, one is at the same time being watched. "Between the trees . . . the bright sky looks at the beholder with hundreds of eyes."³¹ In Riegl's portrayal, the entire canvas, like all of Dutch art, engages the beholder in one coordinated act of attention.

The Ethics of Attention

Riegl's historical strategy was not to view the period he

²² ". . . Sollen untereinander und mit dem Beschauer durch das Lichtraum und durch die gemeinsame Seele verbunden sein, sondern die ganze Natur, die belebte und unbelebte, soll eine solche lichträumliche und seelische Einheit bilden"; Riegl, ms, carton 6, folder 2, 87 (emphasis in the original). The passage is from a course on Dutch art, offered in 1900-01.

²³ Riegl, 1929, 141.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁹ "Wie soll ein Baum uns gleichfalls als ein beseeltes Individuum erscheinen wenn wir davon nur die unregelmässigen Umrisse eines Farbenfleckens wahrnehmen?" Riegl, ms, carton 6, folder 2, 247. The passage is from a course of 1896-97 on Dutch art, reused in 1900-01.

³⁰ "Ruisdael spricht zu uns namentlich durch seinen Bäumen, die uns wie Individuen begrüssen"; *ibid.*, 150.

³¹ Riegl, 1929, 140-141.

studied in isolation, but to compare it in its distinctive aspect with his own. He hypothesized, in *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* and *Das holländische Gruppenporträt*, that the element that distinguishes an artistic mode will be the one to hamper its reception in other periods.³² Hence he made historical interpretation into a dialogue between the present and the past, beginning with the recognition that difference is the reason for, and the greatest obstacle to, dialogue.³³ He therefore thought it important to note that unlike a great many seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, the group portrait was not in vogue in the late nineteenth century.³⁴ Riegl attributed both the popularity of the group portrait in its own time and its later rejection to the direct address of the beholder. Figures in modern paintings, he wrote, ignored their beholders, whose aversion to being watched led them to regard even Rembrandt's *Syndics of the Drapers' Guild* as "baroque and therefore antiquated."³⁵

Nevertheless, Riegl's perception of the portraits accords well with his time. The popularity in German-speaking countries of the notion of pure seeing, apart from expressions of "will," and the association of selfless beholding with participation in the world soul, were rooted in an age when practically every educated person could read about this association in his own copy of Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*. Similarly, attention played a prominent role not only in Riegl's view of the seventeenth century, but in the growing science of psychology. It served Wilhelm Wundt, for example, to combat "mechanistic" psychologies of the mid-nineteenth century that conceived of the mind as a passive slate upon which "ideas" impressed themselves.³⁶ Wundt singled out the concept of attention to rescue the principle of free will. Because of attention's apparent source in the soul of the attending person, and its exclusively internal nature, productive of no direct external effect, he thought it the primary volitional act. For Wundt as for Riegl, attention is an intransitive activity that fails to act on anything. Wundt regarded attention as the primary source of self-consciousness, since it yoked to-

gether separate, immediate impressions under the rubric of an ego. As Robert Musil later remarked, psychology was important because attention was the source of the "*cogito ergo sum* theory of epistemology."³⁷ It formed the substratum of the discrimination between "subjects" and "objects," since the sense of self depends on the perception of an "other" that is not the self. Thus self-awareness arises simultaneously with sympathy, and attention acquires an ethical dimension.³⁸

Although Riegl thought Wundt's attempt to unseat mechanism inadequate, his own theory of attention is clearly indebted to Wundt.³⁹ Yet Wundt's theory lacked the element crucial to Riegl. The attitudes that should have recommended the group portraits to Riegl's contemporaries pertain to the way one looks at nature and art and not to the way nature and art look back. Wundt focused on the consciousness of the attending individual, not on the confrontation between one consciousness and another. He could not have done otherwise, for the only authority he accepted was that of immediate experience, prior to which the distinction between subjects and objects does not exist.⁴⁰ The "objects" are all in one's own imagination; there is only one "subject": oneself.

An art theory that closely parallels Riegl's theory of attention suggests this subjective attitude. Empathy theory, which also made its mark on Wundt, similarly personifies the work, asking the beholder to extrapolate from his knowledge of himself to architectural forms.⁴¹ But while empathy leads the beholder to read the work into his own experience, but not to interact with it, Riegl asks the beholder, through the gaze, to interact with the image as though it were a person.⁴² A Pygmalion-like maker decides how he wishes to relate to another person, and crafts a work with which he can perform that interaction through visual contact.

Riegl held the contemporary reliance on immediate experience responsible for the tendency to undervalue the group portrait. "All portrait painting," he wrote, "assumes

³² Riegl, 1902/1931, 3-4; Riegl, 1901/27, 22. The argument in *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* is in part personal, explicitly making Riegl into a spokesman for his own era, while in *Das holländische Gruppenporträt* he does not acknowledge this role.

³³ H. Belting, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?*, Munich, 1983, argues persuasively, in contrast, that present artistic currents provide insights into the past because of similarities.

³⁴ Riegl, 1902/1931, 3-4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

³⁶ "Attention" was regarded as a component of the concept of apperception, which Kant positioned centrally in his philosophical system. Herbart continued the significance of apperception, but Wundt differed from Herbart by placing a special emphasis on its attentive component. This emphasis makes his psychology both dependent upon, and an attempt to supersede, that of Herbart, a relationship not unlike Riegl's own to Herbart. What follows is drawn from Wundt's *Outlines of Psychology*, trans. C.H. Judd, Saint Clair Shores, MI, 1969, 202-223, esp. 219-223. See also A.L. Blumenthal, "A Reappraisal of Wilhelm Wundt," *American Psychologist*, xxx, 1975, 1081-88, and the essays by Blumenthal and K. Danziger in W.G. Bringmann and R.D. Tweney, eds., *Wundt Studies: A Centennial Collection*, Toronto, 1980.

³⁷ From the diaries, 1905 or later, in *Tagebücher, Aphorismen, Essays und Reden*, ed. A. Frisé, Hamburg, 1955, 79.

³⁸ W. Wundt, *Ethik: Eine Untersuchung der Thatsachen und Gesetze des sittlichen Lebens*, Stuttgart, 1886, 438.

³⁹ Riegl, 1929, 54-55.

⁴⁰ French psychologists held similar positions. Littré, for instance, was attracted to the argument that the subject-object distinction arises only on reflection on immediate — and unitary — experience, and the concept of "Impressionism" depends on it. See R. Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, Chicago, 1984, 18-19. The view of "attention" as the source of the subject-object distinction was still prevalent in the 20th century. M. Merleau-Ponty rejected the authority of attention for the same reason that Riegl embraced it: because it assumed the existence of a unified ego and an objective world; see *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, London and Henley, 1962, 26-31.

⁴¹ The theory of empathy, most explicit in Theodor Lipps, was already present in 19th-century sources such as Robert Vischer and the early writings of Wölfflin.

⁴² Bakhtin recognized the element of fusion in the epistemology of empathy. Todorov, 1984, 22.

that there are objective individuals, whose physical and psychological state remains completely independent of the subjective perception of some viewer."⁴³ Consequently, not objectivity, as Riegl had previously speculated, but extreme subjectivity made it necessary for the figure in modern paintings to ignore the beholder. Riegl was now able to explain to his own satisfaction the similarity between classical and modern art.

Classical antiquity avoided this angle [toward the viewer] for it knew nothing but objects. Modern art can also do without it, but for exactly the opposite reason: it knows nothing but the subject; for according to its view, the so-called objects are completely reducible to the perception of the subject.⁴⁴

"Objectivity" presupposed "that things exist completely independently from us and therefore confront us, the beholding subject, as objects."⁴⁵ But moderns saw external objects as dependent on perception for their very existence. For such figments of our imagination to pay attention to us would be to claim a separate existence for themselves, and institute the opposition between subject and object. Indeed, the historical interest of Baroque art depended on this very opposition. It showed "how a newly awakened and growing subjectivity gradually came to grips with the given object and its tangible and visible qualities."⁴⁶ Subjective in comparison to classic art, its dualistic acknowledgement of existing "objects" differentiated it from modern art.⁴⁷ In the Dutch group portrait, Riegl thought he found a genre of painting that claims its own separate existence.

Riegl's historical comparison reveals that he did not regard attentiveness as a merely formal characteristic. A similar value judgment informs his tendency to project the compositional principles of group portraits onto the groups they portray, playing on the double meaning of the terms "subordination" and "coordination." Applied to compositional analysis, "coordination" implied not so much concerted action as the quiescent regularity of grids or scatter

patterns, contrasted unfavorably to more dynamic, "subordinated" patterns.⁴⁸ Riegl used the terms, but evaluated them differently. Evoking their political overtones, he sought to demonstrate that subordination needed to be tempered if not replaced by coordination, so as to preserve the identity of the individual within a group. Hence he attributed the lined-up (coordinated) pattern of sixteenth-century portraits of pilgrims, and the lack of attentiveness to one another of the pilgrims, to the essentially personal, noncommunal nature of pilgrimage.⁴⁹ A more complex compositional interaction obtains in Dirck Jacobsz's group portrait of 1529 (Fig. 1). The civic guards, rather than "subordinate" a comrade by looking at him, ignore one another and their own intransitive actions, and relate independently to separate, unseen beholders strewn in all directions before the canvas. These beholders weld the guards together by recognition of the principles that bind them, principles conveyed through symbols of the differentiated functions necessary for group coherence (i.e., the secretary's pen and paper, the treasurer's gesture of calculation, etc.). Since the captain does not aspire to "exalt himself over his fellow guards," only a symbolic election evokes his presence: the men point to him, introducing a discrete element of subordination that Riegl attributes both to the composition and to the democratic spirit of the group.⁵⁰ Where, conversely, the captain points at his men, Riegl calls the composition a "presentation," its only subject being attention.⁵¹

Other verbal associations also evoke an ethical purpose. The term "attention" had, for Riegl, overtones of paying respect to its object.⁵² Significantly, the word "respect" derives from the past participle of the Latin word *respicere*, "to look back," while *Aufmerksamkeit* (attention) denotes a polite or deferential act directed toward another. "Achtung," a union of "respect" and "attention," was central to Kant's ethical theory.⁵³ Riegl characterized attentiveness as "selfless," and contrasted it with will and feeling, which suggest power relations. In his view, "will" seeks to overcome the external world, and "feeling" either capitulates before the external world in pleasure, or battles against it

⁴³ Riegl, 1902/1931, 262.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁵ "Objektive Ästhetik," *Die Neue Freie Presse*, 13 July 1902.

⁴⁶ Riegl, 1902/1931, 189, n. 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 200, 261.

⁴⁸ The terms were already well established when Riegl took them up. Most recently, Gottfried Semper had used them in *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künste*, 2 vols., Frankfurt a.M., 1860-63; repr. Mittenwald, 1977. He deemed subordination necessary for coherent design, and placed less value on merely coordinated designs. Wölfflin seemed to share this evaluation in his use of these terms in "Die antike Triumphbogen in Italien: Eine Studie zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der römische Architektur und ihr Verhältnis zur Renaissance" (1893), in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. J. Gantner, Basel, 1946, 51-71.

⁴⁹ Riegl, 1902/1931, 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 237. See also *ibid.*, 44. In the portraits in Dirck Jacobsz's painting, one encounters "einem schlichten, wohlwollenden Ausdruck, der zwar nichts von seiner Würde preisgibt, aber offenbar die Außendinge nimmt, wie sie sind, und dieselben anspruchslos respektiert, den gleichen Respekt jedoch wohl auch für sich fordert."

⁵³ The term is explicated in Kant's *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, where it is the subjective element in obedience to moral law (Pt. 1, Bk. 1, chap. 3). With reference to its use in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, it has been interpreted to denote the recognition of equality due to all. B. Williams, e.g., interprets it as the recognition of the humanity of the individual, apart from general or hierarchical labels. This interpretation would relate it closely to Riegl's theory of attentiveness; see *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers, 1956-1972*, Cambridge, 1973, 234-239. However, Kant explicitly states that "Alle Achtung für eine Person ist eigentlich nur Achtung fürs Gesetz (der Rechtschaffenheit), wovon jene uns das Beispiel giebt" (*Grundlegung*, in *Kants Werke*, Berlin, 1968, 4:401). It would seem, therefore, to correspond at most to Riegl's "objective Aufmerksamkeit," explained below.



4 Gerard Ter Borch, "Paternal Admonition," ca. 1654. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum-Stichting

in pathos.⁵⁴ Attention is active but "allows external objects to affect it, and does not seek to overcome them."⁵⁵ The ethical thrust he gave to different varieties of union is often explicit. Faust's presumption, for example, was a desire for the "connection of his own mind with the whole world."⁵⁶ This aggressive form of union contrasts to a more humble form: "Prayer is union with God."⁵⁷ Rembrandt, Riegl wrote, "strives for deep psychological union between the people he paints and the beholder, for serious emotions such as goodness, devotion, . . . (all, that is, means of expression of connection), thus, for the highest ethical feelings of which man is at all capable."⁵⁸ Clearly, Riegl thought attentiveness, and all it entailed, not only an effective way to unify a picture, but an admirable way to lead one's life, in concord with one's fellow man. It meant respect (or regard), democracy, equality. A present-day psychiatrist would approve it as a mark of good "object-relations."

There is even a religious element in Riegl's interpretation of attention. Its origin was the respect for the external world legislated by Early Christian ethics. Riegl called this "ob-

jective" phase "attention in the Christian sense."⁵⁹ Later, increasing specificity in time and space allowed the depiction of attention as the free choice of the individual. The perfect balance of subject and object reached in the *Syndics* depends on a mixture of self-interest with the fully internalized imperative to deal honestly with the public.⁶⁰ Since a feeling that is too egoistic can submerge attention, he argued that feeling is infused into the portrait "not in the form of self-awareness . . . but as sympathy, which rejects all subordination and simply motivates attention in an outward direction."⁶¹ The term "sympathy" evokes the ethical implications that Wundt, too, ascribed to attention.

Even in the demise of attentiveness, an ethical element was present. Its last, "novelistic," phase had almost sinister overtones. External coherence was created by so engrossing the beholder in an analysis of the psychological ties between the characters that the scene becomes his own inner experience.⁶² The distrust with which Riegl viewed this phase is suggested in his description of the style of genre painting from which he thought it emerged. In such paintings as the Terborch that Riegl knew as *Paternal Admonition*, selfless attention becomes "an assumed mask" under which lie "secret passions which the master knew how to disguise in the most clever fashion" (Fig. 4).

It follows that Terborch's art has distanced itself further from the original ideal of Dutch art — selfless attention — than did any earlier phase. Terborch is the painter of that clever egoism which does not seek to explain its knowledge of the weakness of others by attributing it to common humanity, but uses it to triumph over others tyrannically.⁶³

Riegl's ethical interpretation of attention culminates in a defense of the theatricality of Baroque art. According to its critics, the figures in the paintings pretend to address one another, but, like players, they in fact turn to address the audience. Riegl accepted the characterization, but defended the art. Theatricality, he argued, did not represent a "conscious lie."

They are accused of acting, in their pictures, as though they knew nothing of a beholder, and yet arranging everything for the beholder. In fact, they demonstrated

⁵⁴ For "selbstlose Aufmerksamkeit" see Riegl, 1902/1931, 262, 274. The "will" to which Riegl refers is the urge to power, rather than volition in general, and Riegl differentiates the two by using the noun form, *Wille*, for the urge to power, and the verb form, *Wollen*, for volition, which saves him the possible contradiction of arguing that a *Kunstwille* can be directed against *Wille*. For an example of Riegl's use of the terms "Wille" and "Gefühl," see Riegl, 1902/1931, 13-14. An early sketch for *Das holländische Gruppenporträt* includes a chart that maps the opposition between will and feeling. At this stage, Riegl still sought to include attention in this polarity, crossing it out from under the heading "Wille zur Verbindung," and finally placing it under "verbindende Empfindung"; Riegl, ms, carton 7, folder b, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Riegl, 1902/1931, 14.

⁵⁶ "Es ist Verbindung der eigenen Geiste mit der ganzen Welt"; Riegl, ms,

carton 6, folder 3, p. 64. The passage is from a practicum on Rembrandt, offered in 1900-01.

⁵⁷ "Gebet ist Verbindung mit Gott"; *ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁸ "Er strebt nach tieferer seelische Verbindung zwischen den von ihm gemalten Menschen und dem Beschauer, nach ernsteren Affekten wie Gute, Hingebung, . . . (also alles Ausdrucksweisen der Verbindung), also nach den höchsten ethischen Gefühlen, deren der Mensch überhaupt fähig ist"; Riegl, ms, carton 6, folder 2, p. 86 (1900-01).

⁵⁹ Riegl, 1902/1931, 23, 44.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 260.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 273-274.

clearly enough that they were aware of the beholder. But they also believed that, in addition, they had to take into account the objective character of things. And this openly acknowledged conjunction of objective and subjective phenomena in the picture cannot be interpreted as hypocrisy, but as an honest avowal of their dualism.⁶⁴

"Dishonest" art did not confront the beholder; it turned its back.⁶⁵

The Ethics of Formal Analysis

Riegl's formal system also followed an ethical agenda. It grew out of an attempt to defend artistic representation against the threat of subjectivity. A phenomenon sometimes termed the "revolt against positivism" entailed an increasing awareness of the subjectivity of perception.⁶⁶ Scientists questioned the project of acquiring valid knowledge and forming sound judgments. Thinkers faced the epistemological dilemma of explaining how one can validate impressions, yet affirm their essential subjectivity. In art, this dilemma took the form of doubts about the adequacy of what were previously assumed to be natural, that is, immediately accessible, modes of representation. Both Impressionism and Symbolism sought immediacy, attempting to overcome subject-object duality through an elemental experience of union. The risk they ran was to seem arbitrary – either solipsistic or, worse, conventional. While realist artists never doubted the possibility of contacting material reality through the senses, the psychology that engaged Impressionists and Symbolists found the distinction between external perceptions and hallucination at best problematic.⁶⁷ The fear of deterioration into arbitrary so-

lipsism haunted critics and artists, who sought means to make art comprehensible and verifiable through an objective basis, such as could be found in the artist's craft, comparative anthropology, or psychophysics.

In late nineteenth-century Vienna, the subjectivity of perception came to be seen as a threat to the cohesiveness of the individual. While Ernst Mach drew crowds when he lectured at the university on the view that physical objects are only complexes of sensation, and Freud investigated the "other" in the unconscious, dramatists and poets pondered the threat to man's ability to communicate with his fellow man.⁶⁸ Writers of *Jung Wien* took for their theme the mercurial nature of the ego, and its lack of external corroboration for its disjointed impressions. The resulting transience of the personality prevented their heroes from forming permanent relationships.⁶⁹ Others sought self-validation through the projection of their personality onto their environment. The critic Hermann Bahr described his perfect house as one in which "I would see my soul everywhere as in a mirror. This would be my house. Here I could live, looking at my own countenance, hearing my own music."⁷⁰ Another response was to seek a mystical union of the subjective, inner self with the world soul, a state for which the popular catch word was *Stimmung*, a nearly untranslatable term lying between the English "mood" and "atmosphere" and carrying the harmonious musical connotation of being "in tune."⁷¹

Although sensitive to the lure of "Stimmung," Riegl championed none of these solutions to the problem of subjectivity.⁷² He sought instead to incorporate subjectivity within a framework he thought objective, hence validating traditional notions of representation. Like many a nine-

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁶⁵ Riegl's description of Terborch resembles the characterization of the Goethean character Luciane, who acts the part of the "admonished daughter" in a tableau vivant in Goethe's novel *Wahlverwandschaften*. Luciane charms others but also enjoys ridiculing them in their absence. M. Fried quotes the passage concerning the tableau vivant, analyzing it as the theatricalization of an ostensibly anti-theatrical composition. The discrepancy between Diderot's advocacy of absorption, and Riegl's championship of theatricality may relate either to a change in the attitude toward 17th-century art, or, as Goethe's passage suggests, attitudes toward absorption or theatricality may relate to one's attitude toward more basic issues. See *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Berkeley, 1980, 171-173. Riegl was also concerned with the problem of the insincerity of pretensions to ignore the beholder. The figures in Van Dyck's portraits, Riegl wrote in his lecture notes on Flemish art, appear unaware and uninterested in external viewers. Riegl adds, however, "Thatsächlich aber merken wir an der ausgesuchten edlen Haltung des Kopfes, der Hände, am Costum, an der Frisur, daß der Porträtierte sich gleichsam bewußt ist, daß er beobachtet wird. Also eine falsche subjectivität"; Riegl, ms, carton 5, folder 2, p. 134, Riegl's emphasis. The passage is from a course on Flemish art of the 17th century offered in 1901. Similar comments on Van Dyck's coquettish relationship with the beholder appear throughout the manuscript.

⁶⁶ The phrase "revolt against positivism" was coined by H.S. Hughes, in *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930*, New York, 1958, but others have identified and described a similar phenomenon.

⁶⁷ Schiff (as in n. 40), 44-46.

⁶⁸ Hermann Bahr later recalled the impact made by Mach: "To Impres-

sionism only sense-impressions exist . . . 'Nothing can save the 'I,'" says Ernst Mach . . . Its 'I' has vanished, and with it the world has vanished also"; *Expressionism*, Munich, 1920, 47-48.

⁶⁹ The following are a few of the better known examples: Artur Schnitzler, *Anatol* (1891); Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gestern* (1891), and *Der Tor und der Tod* (1893); and Leopold Andrian, *Das Fest der Jugend des Gartens der Erkenntnis* (1894).

⁷⁰ H. Bahr, *Secession*, Vienna, 1900, 37.

⁷¹ Leo Spitzer suggests some of these interpretations in the introduction to his *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word "Stimmung"*, Baltimore, 1963, 1-5. Ludwig Hevesi, in his essay "Stimmung," offers a befuddled Italian journalist such curious definitions of *Stimmung* as "die Uerlichung des Sachlichen," and complains about the "industriellen Stimmungsbetrieb" (in a collection of previously published essays, *Die fünfte Dimension*, Vienna, 1906, 143, 147). In some parodies, however, an acerbic bite implies that something demagogic and dangerous lurked in the term. In his essay "Der Sattlermeister" (1902), Adolf Loos used *Stimmung* to represent the elitist demagoguery that tyrannized over the small craftsman in the name of art; *Trotzdem*, Salzburg, 1931, 15. He used it to similar purpose in "Von einem armen, reichen Manne" (1900); *Ins Leere Gesprochen*, Paris, 1921, 162. A feuilletonist identified only as "W." parodies the term in an article in which chairs and interior decor mask political intentions; "Alles Englisch," *Die Neue Freie Presse*, 24 November 1897.

⁷² Riegl's response to *Stimmung* ranged from ridicule to apotheosis. In one essay he sought to ally the mystical term with scientific progress. See "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst," Riegl, 1929, 28-39; also M. Olin, "Alois Riegl and the Crisis of Representation in Art Theory, 1880-1905," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1982, 408-420.

teenth-century thinker, he turned to perceptual psychology to combat relativism. Although perception could not place one in definitive contact with a knowable world, perception itself was thought to be universal, and hence capable of determining relationships within human society and between the individual and the world.⁷³ The perceptual theory he subscribed to associated "objective reality" (and the belief therein) with palpability, and "subjectivity" with opticality. The sense of touch isolated objects in order to validate their separate material existence.⁷⁴ This in turn validated the subjective "optical" relationships into which the visual sense can unite them. Riegl's system of formal analysis grew out of this pursuit. He sought to validate artistic images by tracing their formal attributes to the optical and tactile senses. If the viewer could be convinced that he could touch an object, he would believe in its reality, and hence its ability to enter into a(n optical) relationship.

In the formal language of *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, the work of art mirrors the relationships that a culture wishes to see in the world.⁷⁵ The ancients, according to Riegl, utilized references to "tactile" qualities in order to assure themselves of the material reality of the objects they depicted. Later cultures united these objects optically. Thus formal signs of perception, not naturalistic representation, became markers of artistic validity, or the reference of art to something outside of itself. Not surprisingly, Riegl worried about the contemporary preponderance of artistic opticality, and repeatedly looked for indications that the palpable element would reemerge.⁷⁶

The project had consequences for the conception of the work of art as a unified whole. For a work that was to illustrate relationships, perfect unity was undesirable; hence Riegl's attention, in *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, to the isolation of parts from one another and in the plane. Riegl did not regard this separation, secured by the sense of touch, as limited to late Roman art, however. All art, he wrote, is a "matter of coming to terms between the subject on the one hand and the thing (i.e., extension, space) on the other hand, and by no means a full dissolution of the object in the subject, which would absolutely mean the end of the fine arts." Even though moderns might emphasize color over the "character of palpability," the object exists and cannot be disregarded completely in favor of the attribute.⁷⁷

The theory of attention is due to the same desire to give humanity a common basis on which to communicate, in the recognition of the reality — difference, separation — of the external world. As the passage just cited illustrates, the language of touch and sight continues in *Das holländische Gruppenporträt*. But perceptual metaphors play only a supporting role here. Art does not *depict* a relationship in this drama, but rather *performs* it with the beholder. This approach to art seems to want to liberate art from signs, giving art the look of a natural mode of communication. Even if not palpably "real," an object convincingly acts out its relationship to a beholder if it pays attention to that beholder, and acknowledges its own existence as a subject. The theory of attention, then, can be seen as an attempt to preserve communication while circumventing the issue of representation.

The presence of a hermeneutical element in this theory is corroborated by Riegl's historical practice, which, as mentioned above, made use of a dialogue with the present to identify the distinguishing element in the past. Indeed, he used a perceptual metaphor to describe the attitude of his contemporaries toward the material remains of the past. Their "value for history," which grasped individual events, was "as though objectively palpable." Like respect for the object, Riegl thought he saw the value for history being submerged in a more subjective relation to the past. The "value for age" (Alterswert) subsumed the object in the subject to produce "moods" (Stimmungen).⁷⁸ In his view, the scholar's establishment of the otherness of the past prepared the way for the more subjective value, but was also in conflict with it. Riegl compared the modern historian to the philosophers of late antiquity, who, as intellectuals, introduced the teachings later popularized — and emotionized — by Christianity.⁷⁹

Thus Riegl's formal aesthetics, like his "theatrical" aesthetics, grew out of a critique of society. He feared that modern man had lost contact with the external facts of the world and with his fellow man. Riegl sought not only to arouse interest in painters of the past who respected the role of art in facilitating human communication, but, at a deeper level, to address the problem at the heart of modern man's excessive subjectivity. As Riegl saw it, man had lost confidence in the shared, communicable "reality" of the visible world, including the ability of art to represent.

⁷³ Some of those who followed this line of thinking were neo-Kantians, notably Friedrich Lange. But other thinkers concerned with the problem of relativism passed through a perceptual-psychological stage, including Riegl's teachers Franz Brentano and Alexius Meinong.

⁷⁴ The association of the sense of touch with the notion of verification has an extensive history. For a brief discussion of this history, see my article "Verification by Touch in Kandinsky's Early Abstract Art," *Critical Inquiry*, forthcoming, 1989.

⁷⁵ Passages such as the following, however, do suggest the use of art to regulate relationships perceptually: "Alles Wollen des Menschen ist auf die befriedigende Gestaltung seines Verhältnisses zu der Welt (im umfassendsten Sinne des Wortes, inner- und außerhalb des Menschen) gerichtet. Das bildende Kunstwollen regelt das Verhältnis des Menschen zur sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Erscheinung der Dinge"; Riegl, 1901/1927, 401.

⁷⁶ For example, the following passage of 1904: "Ich bin auch überzeugt, daß die Kunst selbst vor dem Äußersten haltmachen wird, und Symptome dafür sind jetzt schon zu bemerken. Denn soll das zu fällig sein, daß gerade ein Künstler wie Toorop, dem sich mehr als allen anderen das darzustellende Ding rein zu einem Stimmungsmittel verflüchtigt, diesen Dingen äußere Formen verleiht, deren Vorbilder aus der altägyptischen Kunst geschöpft sind, d. h. aus der Kunst, die . . . den nackten taktischen Objektivismus vertreten hat"; Riegl, 1929, 205-206.

⁷⁷ Riegl, 1902/1931, 189, n. 1.

⁷⁸ Riegl, 1929, 169-170.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 165. For a more detailed discussion of the essay in which Riegl discusses the historical value, see Olin, "The Cult of Monuments as a State Religion in Late 19th Century Austria," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, xxxviii, 1985, 177-198; also Forster (as in n. 4).

Riegl's system of formal analysis attempted to show how formal artistic elements could "represent" through reference to the perceptual modes in which man confronts his world. But his theory of attention attempted more; it suggested how art could transcend the problem of representation. Instead of serving to represent the world, art could aspire to share it with the beholder.

The Formalism of Attentiveness

Riegl's concern for attentive viewing was not isolated in the early twentieth century. It had important implications for fields outside of art. His ideas emerge from the same concerns, and draw on a similar educational background at the University of Vienna, as Edmund Husserl's contemporaneously evolving phenomenology. Like Riegl, this fellow student of the philosopher Franz Brentano sought to determine the extent to which self-perception depended on the perception of others, and identified a perceptual basis for acceptance of the other. Fueled by empathy theory, he argued that the beholder comprehends the existence of others by comparing their bodies with his own, and extending the external comparison to interior states. Husserl's motivation was primarily epistemological, an attempt, parallel to that of Riegl, to account for objectivity.⁸⁰

Even closer to Riegl's ethical theory of attention is a theological theory. An author who once registered in Riegl's course in Dutch art declared that "living is meeting." Martin Buber, like Riegl in his essay on Ruisdael, illustrated "meeting" with reference to a tree: "The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no *Stimmung*-value, but it is bodied over against me and has to do with me, as I with it. . . ." ⁸¹ The impression, the *Stimmung*, and indeed, any generalization about an object are all internal, and do not constitute relationships. The object exists only in the subject's mind. The I-Thou relationship parallels attention. It presupposes otherness, and it balances passivity (being acted upon) and acting (acting upon) so as to ensure our presence to one another.⁸² In contrast, according to Riegl and Buber, he who depends on *Stimmung* rather than mutuality to contact the external world courts solipsism. He

threatens to subsume the world into himself and remain alone rather than overcome isolation in communication.

Riegl's concern for suspending isolation without destroying independence is still evident today in scholars' preoccupation with difference and dialogue. As I have noted earlier, Bakhtin's Buber-influenced espousal of dialogism has recently aroused interest among literary theorists. The dialogical aspects of Husserl and Buber, too, command the attention of philosophers.⁸³ Hans-Georg Gadamer explored the possibilities of openness to the "thou" in a hermeneutics based on the attempt to engage in "conversation" with tradition.⁸⁴ Stanley Cavell, in discussions of the notions of "neighboring" and "acknowledgement," brought out the ethical significance of the concern for the beholder (reader) and its repercussion on communication.⁸⁵ Like Riegl's attempt to include the beholder, all of these theories of the "Other" reflect a strongly felt need to hypothesize language so that it makes reference to the external world. Contemporary theorists often express fears that such recent theoretical developments as deconstruction pose as great a danger to the belief in reference as did mid-century formalism.⁸⁶

Furthermore, the notion of beholding has been important in the visual arts. Even in the nineteenth century, Riegl's statement that modern paintings do not look at the viewer was not true of all paintings.⁸⁷ In the twentieth century, however, it is fair to say that the situation of beholding became an artistic issue. Ruisdael's houses may or may not permit themselves to be read as faces. Those of Gustav Klimt, however, are easy to interpret as imitations of the coyly beholding faces in some of his portraits (Figs. 5, 6). Egon Schiele's *Windows* are more brazen than those of Klimt, but the effect of beholding is similar (Fig. 7). Although this is not the context in which to make an extended argument about beholding in landscape painting, certainly in figural compositions artists have used technical devices comparable to those seen in the Dutch group portraits described by Riegl. Leo Steinberg has postulated a relationship between these portraits and Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* in regard to the technical devices used to achieve external coherence, although he rightly does not conclude

⁸⁰ See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. D. Cairnes, The Hague, 1960, 89-151. On Husserl's use of empathy theory, see M. Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber*, trans. C. Macann, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1986, 69-72, 90-95.

⁸¹ M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, Leipzig, 1923, 14. The translation is a slightly altered version of the second English edition of *I and Thou*, trans. R.G. Smith, New York, 1958, 8. Buber registered in Riegl's course on 17th-century Dutch art in 1896-97. In 1903, he took his *Rigorosum* with Riegl and Franz Wickhoff, but failed the exam, passing it only after a second attempt under Wickhoff and Emile Reisch. Archives of the University of Vienna, *Nationalen* and *Rigorozen*.

⁸² Buber (as in n. 81), 18.

⁸³ Two recent books that attest to the significance of this issue for French and German philosophy are Theunissen (as in n. 80); and V. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding, Cambridge, 1979. The original title of Descombes's book is *Le Même et l'autre*.

⁸⁴ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York, 1975, esp. 310-325.

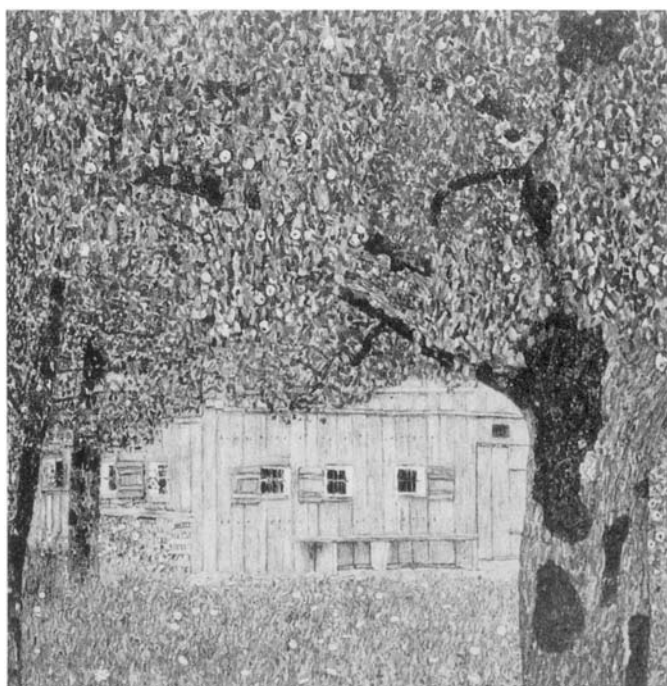
⁸⁵ S. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, San Francisco, 1981, 65, 105-108; and "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge, 1969, 238-266. See also the essay "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," in *ibid.*, 267-353. S.W. Melville brings out the ethical element in Cavell, in *Philosophy Beside Itself: On Deconstruction and Modernism*, Minneapolis, 1986, 17-33. Reader-response criticism is irrelevant to the present argument, since its purpose as understood by Stanley Fish and other practitioners seems to have little to do with intersubjectivity.

⁸⁶ C. Norris has set out to combat such fears in such works as *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, London, 1982, and *Derrida*, Cambridge, MA, 1987.

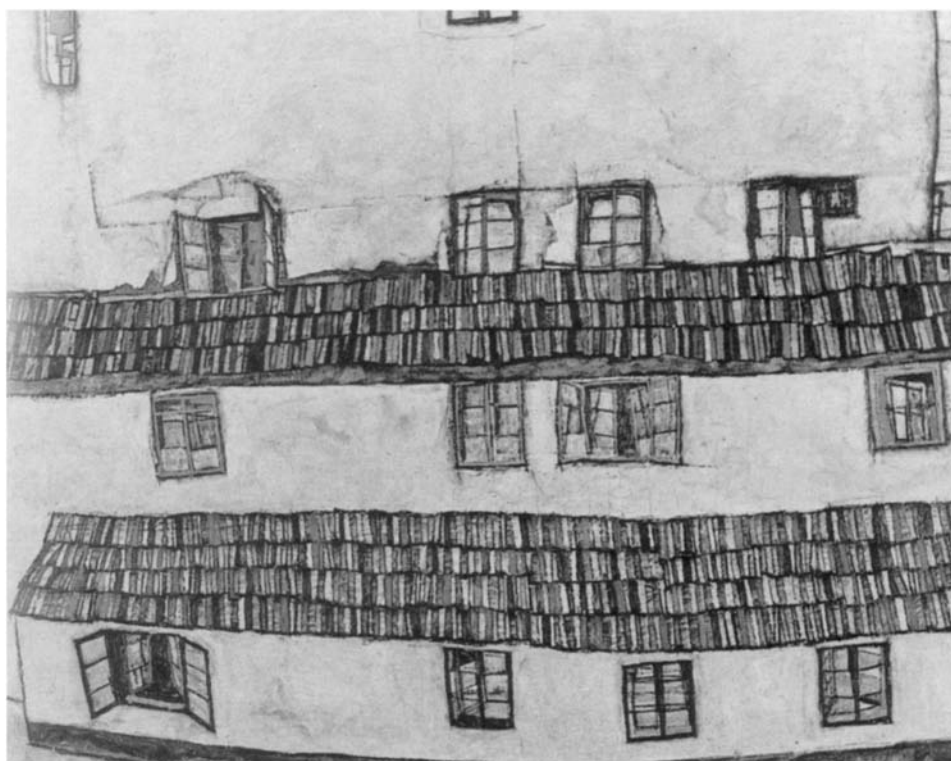
⁸⁷ Portraits, for example, continued to gaze out of the canvas, sometimes provocatively, and even some history paintings were conceived as portraits.



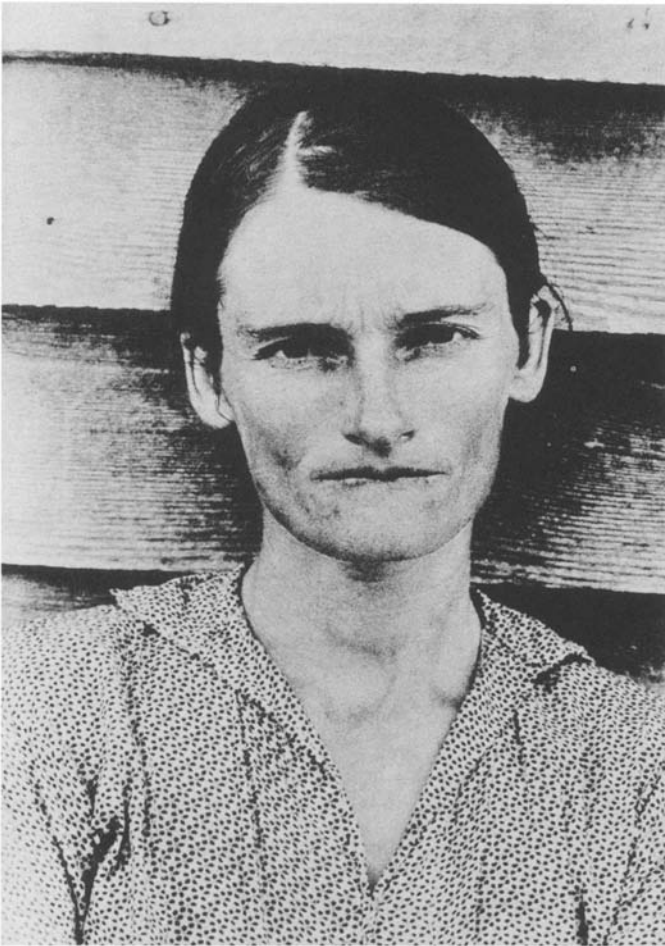
5 Gustav Klimt, *Woman with Hat and Feather Boa*, 1909. Vienna, Österreichische Galerie



6 Gustav Klimt, *Upper Austrian Farmhouse*, 1911-12. Vienna, Österreichische Galerie



7 Egon Schiele, *Windows*, 1914. Vienna, Österreichische Galerie



8 Walker Evans, *Annie Mae Gudger*, 1936 (from W. Evans and J. Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*)

that Picasso meant to propose this style of confrontation as a model for human relations.⁸⁸ Photography, too, has used direct address to establish relationships between subject and object. The gaze of Walker Evans's *Sharecropper's Wife*, from Evans and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, marks the relationship of openness and mutual respect in which Agee's prose encourages the reader to participate (Fig. 8). Even the abstract artistic current of the 1960's known as Minimalism used formal means to break

down the barrier between art and its audience. Supported by a theoretical stance comprising elements of phenomenology and Gestalt psychology, Minimalists reduced the number of parts so that the beholder must confront, rather than analyze, the object. The relationship of their sculpture to the beholder is sometimes expressed in terms reminiscent of Riegl. According to a recent review, the sculpture of Richard Serra "matters to us, and we matter to it . . ."⁸⁹

In spite of the practical interest in it, however, discussions of the beholder in the visual arts do not tend to aim at the establishment of intersubjectivity.⁹⁰ Riegl's formal ideas, which could have fueled such a project, are usually turned to a different purpose. Arnold Hauser's "social art history," for example, often recalls Riegl's fondness for paralleling compositional systems with social tendencies, without, however, subscribing to Riegl's stated ethical purpose. In the most provocative contemporary exploration of the issue of beholding, however, Riegl's formal system has indeed been appropriated, but in service of a set of values diametrically opposed to Riegl's own. Michael Fried began with concerns similar to those of Riegl. He used Riegl's vocabulary without an acknowledged awareness of its origin, but with a perceptive understanding of its consequences. In the 1960's, Fried used the terms "optical" and "tactile" to denote essentially the same formal characteristics as Riegl. "Tactile" suggests the palpably, or verifiably, real, as it did for Riegl, while "optical" suggests the mental, or, as Riegl would have termed it, the subjective.⁹¹ From nearly identical premises, however, Fried and Riegl draw opposed conclusions. Fried thought modern art needed to exclude the appearance of reality provided by tactile values. Similarly, his exploration of theatricality is not a defense, but a passionate attack against an art that seeks contact with the beholder.⁹²

Fried's view of theatricality, like Riegl's, can be associated with his formal theory, since theatricality threatens formal criticism as Fried understood it in the 1960's. The existence of the beholder, like the reference to palpable reality, makes formal criticism impossible if understood as the analysis of a work of art without reference to its nonartistic environment, sources, or relations. Only in a world without beholders could truly formal criticism flourish. Even metaphors of perception depend on a beholder. Since such

⁸⁸ For an example, see L. Steinberg's argument about Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*: "The Philosophical Brothel," *October*, XLIV, 1988, 17-74.

⁸⁹ J. Russell, "Art: Serra Sculptures at the Modern Museum," *The New York Times*, 28 February 1986.

⁹⁰ For an interesting analysis of recent theories of beholding, see D. Carrier, "Art and Its Spectators," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, LXV, 1986, 5-17.

⁹¹ In *Three American Painters*, Fried phrased the problem of contemporary art in terms of an opposition between tactile and optical pictorial means, interpreting the artists he discussed as those who reject the possibility of "verification by the sense of touch," and seek their effects through opticality alone; Fried, 1965, 17, *passim*. Like Riegl, he must later have

found this opposition (used previously by Clement Greenberg) unhelpful, or even misleading, for he dropped it and couched his later arguments, as did Riegl, primarily in terms of the relationship between the beholder and the beheld. Fried's interpretation of the "tactile" as including all references to space is more faithful to some 19th-century perceptual theories than is Riegl's interpretation, in which the "tactile" suggests only solid bodies. On 19th-century perceptual theories, see N. Pastore, *Selective Histories of Theories of Visual Perception, 1650-1950*, London, 1971.

⁹² Although they offer formally similar accounts of theatricality, and frequently allude to one another, Fried and Cavell should not be equated. Decisive differences of purpose underlie Cavell's statements on "theatricality," even those which treat the same subject matter as Fried, ostensibly quite similarly, as in *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Cambridge, MA, 1979, 108-118.

a world could not exist, the beholder cannot be ignored. A world in which formal criticism would be appropriate is inconceivable. Fried's attempt to conceive an art created for such a world contains an element of the heroic.

Like Riegl's, Fried's position on theatricality rests on a religious basis. The formal critic of modernist painting "is also a moral critic," while the feeling evoked in the beholder by the conviction that a work of art before him exists in a solitary closed world of its own is "grace."⁹³ As an epigram to "Art and Objecthood," Fried chose a passage by Jonathan Edwards: "We every moment see the same proof of a God as we should have seen if we had seen Him create the world at first."⁹⁴ Edwards meant to identify the moment of creation as the essential meaning of history, but also as an event in an eternal present, outside of historical time.⁹⁵ Similarly, Fried contrasts "presentness" in art to the mere "presence" evoked by an object that acknowledges the beholder. Art is the manifestation of creation, an act observed by no beholder, acted by the only One capable of a self-sufficient action. The artist Géricault, he writes, "found the theatricalization of action personally intolerable . . . expressed it as virtually the loss of the world, understood as that set of conditions, that *ground*, upon which self-sufficient action is alone realizable other than as a theatrical performance."⁹⁶ Géricault spent his "short, heroic life" in a doomed quest for divine self-sufficient meaning. In "Art and Objecthood," Fried makes more precise the effect of such an effort on the beholder. Presentness, he writes, compels "conviction," and Fried astutely acknowledges that, in contrast, the appropriate reaction to "presence" is "attention."⁹⁷

It is not surprising that Riegl and Fried provide complementary answers to the problem of the beholder. Both trace the threat to meaning to Kantian philosophy.⁹⁸ Riegl understood meaning not as autonomous, but as established between people who inhabit a shared space. Hence the Kantian loss was of the physical world as the ground for human communication. Fried's self-sufficient meaning — the meaning a work has before it is communicated — visualizes artistic meaning as a lost origin, or transcendental signified: a Romantic symbol that means without reference.⁹⁹ Such autonomy is impossible in a Kantian world that can no longer conceive of experience in an external present apart from time or without a beholder in the absence of space. Autonomy and communication both succumbed to the same blow; the beholder can neither be included nor excluded.

In Riegl's positivistic defense of representation, he stumbled to the verge of a dialogistic model of artistic communication. But only to the verge. Again, the comparison with Fried is illuminating. Their entailment with formal analysis places them on the common ground denied their opposing aspirations for art. If their ends differ, their means are the same. Both ascribe to forms the power to create or withstand a relationship with a beholder. Historicist though he was, Riegl did not historicize form. Forms are written in a language all can understand. Only the acceptance or rejection of the relationship they offer varies over time. Riegl does not postulate a new language of line or color, and does not argue that new ways of reading past art make forms express different values. Thus at the basis of his formal view of art is not a conventional, but a natural, language, whose phrases formal critics could sound to voice the concern for artistic autonomy. In his desire to salvage representation by transcending form, Riegl provided ammunition to formalists.

The natural language of form disseminated by Riegl and others at the turn of the century, and assumed by writers in the mid-twentieth century, also made possible the art they discussed. Surely the worst that can be said of Minimalism is not that it aimed at a relationship to the beholder, but that it failed to achieve this relationship through formal means. Without a natural language of form, the beholder needs a sophisticated understanding of conventional notions of form to know whether a work calls for direct confrontation or the visual analysis of parts. The ability to comply with the work's demand becomes the educational acquisition that distinguishes a social class.¹⁰⁰ The work fails to engage basic processes of perception.

It might seem that the literal gaze, as opposed to that of the anthropomorphic cube of the Minimalists, does not depend on the dubious existence of a natural language. Beholding, however, is indeed entailed with forms that can be conventional. The viewer of Diane Arbus's morally ambiguous representations of the image-beholder, subject-photographer relationship is driven to reassess Evans's *Sharecropper's Wife* with the knowledge that even a gaze is a form (Fig. 9). Arbus's image can be interpreted as belonging to a genre of contemporary images that critique the conventional assumption of a natural language. On its own, the structure of beholding can neither initiate nor evade a relationship with its beholder. It can, however, allude to the possibility or denial of relationships, even if

⁹³ Fried, 1965, 10; Fried, 1967/1968, 147.

⁹⁴ Fried, 1967/1968, 116.

⁹⁵ P. Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, Cleveland and New York, 1959, 307-330.

⁹⁶ Fried, "Thomas Couture and the Theatricalization of Action," *Artforum*, VIII, 1970, 43.

⁹⁷ Fried, 1967/1968, 146.

⁹⁸ Fried refers to Manet as the first "post-Kantian painter"; Fried, 1965, 49. For the notion that the defeat of theatricality is an unobtainable goal, see "How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark," *Critical Inquiry*, IX, 1982, 230. Melville understands this aspect of Fried's project perhaps better than Fried himself. See "Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Conditions

of Publicity in Art and Criticism," *October*, XIX, 1981, 55-92, and Melville (as in n. 85), 8-17. On Riegl's association of Kant with loss of confidence in the physical reality of the world, see Riegl, 1966, 124, and M. Olin, "Spätromische Kunstindustrie: The Crisis of Knowledge in *fin de siècle* Vienna," *Akten des 25. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte*, I, Vienna, 1984, 31.

⁹⁹ On the Romantic symbol, see T. Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. C. Porter, Ithaca, NY, 1982, 147-221.

¹⁰⁰ P. Bourdieu, "The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XI, VI, 1987, 201-210; and *idem*, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge, MA, 1984, 18-63.

only within time-bound formal conventions. The present need to rethink the role of intersubjectivity in art brings into focus this central concern of Riegl's thought, a concern to which we, in our own dialogue with him, now need to attend.

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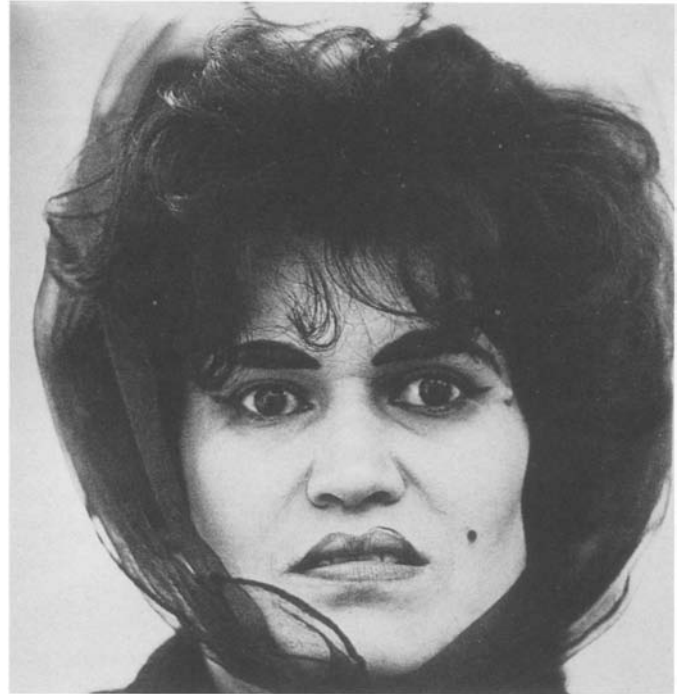
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9 Diane Arbus, *Puerto Rican Woman with a Beauty Mark*, New York City, 1965 (© Estate of Diane Arbus)