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In the days before *Glasnost* cast its first pale and tentative light over what conservatives refer to as The Empire of Evil, authors from the West who went there as cultural emissaries found it bracing—"inspiring" was the term used by Hortense Calisher—to be in a world where writing was considered dangerous. The sense of having one's words suddenly mean something might—almost—have been a fair exchange for the freedom one might have to surrender, if the latter were purchased at the cost of no one especially caring how it was exercised in art: as it might suddenly enter a feminist's mind that it was deeply moving to be in a culture where it meant something 'to be a woman,' even if at the cost of a freedom and independence she had fought to achieve. I dare say very few would strike the bargain, freedom perhaps trumping significance in one's schedule of values, an ordering to be reckoned with when we sentimentalize organic communities by contrast with individualistic liberal societies where the intervention into single lives by the aggregate social order is marginal and limited. And in any case the intoxication of being thought of as dangerous is somewhat diminished by the reflection that it is not art alone, but personal correspondence and even mere conversation, that will be considered dangerous enough to justify monitoring by the state, functioning as a literal, suspicious, humorless, and largely arbitrary referee.

When the censor functions as a third party at every interchange of discourse, at whatever level of communication, the remaining two parties will inevitably resort to intricate and oblique strategies of concealment and disguise, where lines are written primarily that the text should be located and looked for between them, and the unscripted text be finally that for the sake of which the written one exists—as if heard melodies exhausted their role in making unheard melodies audible to a third, secret ear. I have been with Poles whose every utterance is filtered through so many strata of irony that no one who has not internalized the complex sequence of bureaucracies under which they mastered aesopean concealment can hope to understand them fully or participate in anything save a coarse level of communication. I am, in such colloquys, reminded of Proust's description of the Narrator's great aunts, in the Combray section of *Remembrance of Things Past*, as "women who had brought to such a fine art the concealment of a personal allusion in a wealth of ingenious circumlocution, that it would often pass unnoticed

even by the person to whom it was addressed." Once a labyrinth of tertiary significations mediates between author and reader, writing as such, even when frivolous, is not to be taken at face value, and everything is dangerous even, or especially, when it seems most ingenuous. Paranoia becomes a rational posture when "Jack and Jill went up the hill" is under cryptographic surveillance and the censor is desperate not to let anything get through. Its being hidden is what makes it dangerous, even if it would not be recognized as especially dangerous if openly said.

In January, 1986, the PEN organization hosted in New York an international conference of writers to ponder over some days the topic "The Imagination of the Writer and the Imagination of the State." It was an uninspired title, or at least did little to enlist the imagination of the writers invited to address one another beyond the obvious sort of remark, predictably made the first morning: "The State has no Imagination" (ha ha), a piety that wore rapidly thinner as it was repeated from session to session. But it seems to me an argument can be made that the imagination of a writer is very much a product of what the imagination of bureaucrats concerned with writers imagines writing to be, since the writer's consciousness has internalized the schedule of permissibilities and prohibitions that defines the political morality of expression. The imagination of the state may then just be the imagination of the writer writ large. That the system of political legitimacy and the structures of artistic expression should be reciprocals of one another is after all a deep thesis of Historical Materialism—the view that art and politics are surface manifestations of the same deep structure that defines a social order. But I am proposing a less ponderous thesis in the social psychology of art, that our art and our political reality are made for one another, that each, one might say, is the same set of symbolic forms differently embodied—in the media of artistic administration and artistic expression respectively. If one were to construct an architectural model of artistic consciousness under a system of censorship, it would look like one of Piranesi's prisons: stairways leading nowhere, doors opening onto blank walls, dead-ends masked as infinite vistas, causeways ending in abrupt emptiness, unsuspected shafts, circuitous corridors leading insidiously back to the point at which one enters them, where the inhabitants bump into themselves rounding corners and the victim recognizes in the blackness of the torture-chamber that the executioner is himself. If, as has been insisted since Plato, the soul is an isomorph of the state, then the objectification of the soul in literature is the best picture of the state we can have, providing we can learn to read

it. But naturally, if this is true, writing can be translated from one political culture to another only at the most superficial level. How are we to replace the texts that haunt the interlinear emptinesses, the eloquent blankness of margins, if even the use of a semi-colon may carry the semiological density of poetry?

And when *Glasnost* comes, it is, accordingly, a mixed blessing to the artist who had counted on the hermeneutic mentality that guaranteed subtleties and depths that simply wash away when there is no presumption of hiddenness. "For Soviet Rock Musicians. *Glasnost* is Angst" was the headline of a *New York Times* article not long ago. Rock music was itself defined as hidden, its form reflecting the standing attitude toward artistic content in general, and hence necessarily an underground activity: it was, the reporter says, "a subterranean world of illicit clubs and black market tapes, subject to police raids and regular condemnations in the official press." To legitimize rock is therefore to rob it of its form and hence of its meaning: an officially condoned rock is precisely rock that the state has conquered, so that poor Boris Grebenshchikov is damned by his acceptance to fear that he will lose his edge by virtue of official acceptance, as did his friend Andrei Makharevich, the leader of a group called Time Machine. "Nobody can believe that the system has changed," Boris complained. "They think we must have changed." So the only way to remain artistically honest is to continue to conceal, or at least for one's audience to continue to believe bland lyrics cover dark messages intended specifically for them, much as the youth of twenty years ago believed Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Band transmitted a code underneath the resented approbation of parents, and that the Beatles remained subversive after all. So the indelible structures of what I have elsewhere called deep interpretation—interpretation which asks what is really being said in what in fact is said—is carried forward, and remains as a precondition of artistic significance, into the era of *Glasnost*.

Deep readers will have noticed, a paragraph back, a distorted echo of a famous phrase of Wittgenstein's: The human body is the best picture we have of the human soul. His point, infinitely contestible as everything he wrote is, is that we can have no picture of the human mind save as embodied, and so in speaking of it we are ultimately speaking of the bodily gestures and expressions which give mental states their form and mental language its criteria. And I want to say something parallel, that the artwork of a state embodies the state, or that the state is embodied in the set of artworks it enfranchises, so that writing is never not the inscription of the political order in which it is done, and that all art is political in consequence, even if politics should not be its immediate

content. Political art, that is, is a species of art that is political in the way I am suggesting, so that even the least political of writing celebrates, in the structure through which its readers address it, the order of politics in which those readers themselves have their form, and their literary imagination embodies the same politics as the works to which they respond. And of course that raises the problems alluded to in the remark about translation: for works that embody distinct political orders are in some deep way as incommensurable as those political orders themselves are.

This is so even when art is most free, as in our own political order, though one of the points I want to make is that the only freedom we are likely to accord is the maximal degree of freedom. Consider the defenses advanced on behalf of *Ulysses* a generation ago, or of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The argument was not that the words and phrases that occurred in these works and which raised the question of censorship did not, in themselves and as such, merit censorship: they really were scatological or offensive—the authors would not have used them if they were not. But since they occurred integrally in what experts agreed were works of art—works in fact of high literary art—they could be allowed—as if, understood as forming parts of artistic wholes, the words or phrases could not affect the reader who was, by this fact alone, immunized against what would have been their toxin if written or uttered in a non-artistic context. It was as if its being art neutralized content much as being officially acceptable in another part of the world neutralizes art. And it is this that enables art to be free. It is true that there remains the danger that those insensitive to the concept of art might search out the books for the thrill of seeing dirty words in print—as we all did, when young and nasty, with our parent's dictionaries. But the concept of art interposes between life and literature a very tough membrane, which insures the incapacity of the artist to inflict moral harm so long as it is recognized that what he is doing is art. And this leads to the nightmare of impotency that accounts in some measure for the relief our writers felt in the political world where art was acknowledged as dangerous. What more tormenting dream could a playwright have than imagining putting the deepest and most unsettling challenges to the values of an audience, only to receive a standing ovation from those he intended to portray as hypocrites, villains, tartuffes, iagos, corrupters, transgressors, rogues and swine? It would be as though Hamlet, meaning to trap the conscience of the king in the mirror of art, were to please the king instead, who likes the way he is shown and tips a wink of complicity to his wayward stepson for whom there is now an inkling after all of hope.

But it is even worse here, for the question of like or not like does not arise, it being art. Nietzsche once wrote as an aphorism of desperation "I listened for an echo and heard only applause." So those writers excited by the vision of art as dangerous when abroad have failed to recognize how dangerous art must be perceived at home if our way of dealing with it is to insure, by conceptual repression, that it cannot but be innocuous if art. That is why the freedom in question is total. If there were degrees and distinctions, we would be treating it as other than art. You can say whatever you like since it has no real meaning, providing it is art. So it is not really freedom either.

I have never fully understood the thesis that art is dangerous, and particularly that it is politically dangerous, but certainly it is a very ancient thesis, and is part of what I have elsewhere designated the philosophical disenfranchisement of art—for the first philosophical responses to art were in effect theories, the political purpose of which was to extrude art, somehow, from the possibility of efficacy, and lodge it, metaphysically or institutionally, where it could do us no harm. Nietzsche held a theory of the birth of tragedy that could go some distance in accounting for this fear and hence this need. His thought was that ancient tragedy evolved out of dionysian rites, which were perceived as especially dangerous to the moral order because participation in them consisted of orgiastic frenzy, the dissolution of restraints of every sort, the creation of hallucination so extreme that, as represented in the *Bacchae*, a mother could participate in the dismemberment and cannibalization of her own son. In an odd way, art was a way of taming these barbaric practices, putting them at a kind of distance so that instead of participants there was an audience, segregated by the conventions of theatricality from a spectacle that reenacted, in some symbolic way, practices the smoking memory of which remained in the Greek unconscious as a threat to order, value, stability. Perhaps, the tacit recognition of suppressed danger energized the spectacle, and the work of art was like the box of Pandora, concealing in itself the dark destructive energies, the threat of whose release meant chaos. But then, once the conventions were in place, they could be used as a kind of transparent shield by artists or poets who then could say or do whatever they wished under the protection of the institution, something like the fool of the medieval court, but having an effect on his viewers because he was a poet without, for exactly that reason, being exposed to any adverse effect on himself. I have in mind especially the Old Comedy (470-300 BC), the wounding exaggerations of which, at the hands of Aristophanes, knew

no limit and respected no person. Behind the shield of poetry, Aristophanes moralized, agitated, wounded, maligned, slandered, lied, lobbied, and pleaded on behalf of values that had not a chance any longer, in the name of an order that had long vanished, but in language that was magnificent and moving, and dangerous for that reason. He was not an intellectual, however, and as Plato undertook to show no artist really was, none of them knowing anything and hence none of them to be trusted in circumstances, like politics, where knowledge was essential. And bit by bit Plato, himself wounded through the treatment by Aristophanes of Socrates in *The Clouds*, dismantled the conventions of the theater and reconstituted them as a metaphysics of art which guaranteed that art could have no effect whatever, making it impossible for it any longer to be dangerous. And in the process of giving a systematic definition of art, Plato defined philosophy—which may in fact before then have been the somewhat untrammelled and dis-systematic enterprise Aristophanes depicted it as in *The Clouds*.

Consider, for example, just the theory that art is imitation. It has been insufficiently appreciated how political the theory is, for it has the effect, if credited, of paralyzing the artist: if audiences would appreciate that art is illusion, sufficiently like reality to be mistaken for it but logically situated outside reality so that it could have neither the causes nor the effects of reality itself—an idle epiphenomenon—then art is metaphysically ephemeralized. It can tell us nothing we do not already know, and the artist is reduced to a mere facsimilist with knowledge of nothing save how to do that. So he cannot have the authority of someone who works in reality—like a carpenter, or a navigator or a doctor—or who understands how to know reality, like the philosopher, rather than, as a mirror, someone who knows only how to register the appearances. Mimesis was, then, less a theory of art than a philosophical aggression against art (one which, by the way, makes Aristophanes impossible), vaporising art by situating it in a plane where it can do no harm because of how dangerous it was when in that plane and interacting effectively with political reality. How deeply this theory of ephemerality has been internalized by artists themselves is testified to by Auden's thought that "Poetry makes nothing happen." And yet, Auden felt in the same poem, there is compensation for ineffectuality, namely a kind of immortality because of Time's worship of language. Time worships language "and forgives everyone by whom it lives." And so it allows us to remember Aristophanes for what one authority calls "the true glories" of his art: his praise of country life in *The Peace*, the serenade in the *Ecclesiasuzae*, the maiden song from *Lysistrata*, the chant

of the Initiated in the *Frogs*. In brief, ephemeralization is compensated for by aestheticization, and Aristophanes is redeemed for art by being reduced to an anthology of literary gems.

We no longer accept the mimetic theory, which has to be in any case distorted if it is to capture works of art much more complex than those that satisfy themselves by mere resemblance—and we begin to see the first serious effort to transform it from an aggression to an analysis in *The Poetics*—but it does not greatly matter, politically, since in aestheticization we have the supreme disenfranchisement, for the work of art is reduced by its means to something that exists for gratification. There exists a contrast, almost canonical, between the “aesthetic point of view” and “the practical point of view,” the latter being the perspective under which the question of what to do arises, where the consideration of what difference or effect something has comes into play, and where we are engaged with reality. And this contrast is enshrined in one of the masterpieces of disenfranchising philosophy, Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, where in the first instance art is something we judge and where the judgement is aesthetic, that is, with reference finally to taste. It is there that Kant defines beauty in terms of having no purpose though appearing to be purposive—“Beauty is the form of the purposiveness of an object, so far as this is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose.” Kant’s theory of art is somewhat more complex, but beauty is an essential part of it. In the first instance an artwork is beautiful only on condition that it seems like nature, and hence beautiful in the way in which nature is (in a sense this is a disguised form of the theory of mimesis, for the artist seeks to imitate nature by seeming free from all artifice). And in the second instance art deserves to be called beautiful on the basis of taste, hence aesthetic judgement. So in the end, Kant’s theory of art is this: artworks please without subserving any interest (hence he opposes a theory of art as having any use). It pleases “without concepts”—or it awakens the sense that there is a concept without any specific concept being implied, so it as it were awakens thought without allowing thought any substance, which restates in effect his “purposiveness without any specific purpose” theme; and that aesthetic judgement is essentially universal—so outside of politics just because politics is the sphere of conflict and especially of conflicting interests. An imitation appears to show something with a purpose, but can have no purpose of its own since it fails if we don’t know the original and is useless if we do. So let the artist be free since it does not matter what he does. We have built a logical pedestal which in fact is an ingenious form of prison, and I have often remarked on the resemblance between the

use of the pedestal here and in the extrusion of women from the practical affairs of life: Plato too was prepared to honor the artists by exile until he hit upon the theories that were a better form of exile, kicking art upstairs.

Aesthetics is very much an eighteenth century invention, a period when nature was sufficiently under human domination that one could address it from without, see it as an object less of threats than for pleasure, as in landscape gardening which, according to Kant “gives only the appearance of utility and availability for other purposes than the mere play of the imagination in the contemplation of its forms.” In brief, nature and art seemed together the object of a single kind of disinterested judgement, abstracted from all questions of use and practice. And I think it not coincidental that the age of aesthetics, as we may call it, was coeval with the rise of the political values of the liberal state, with its great emphasis on the apparatus of natural rights and inalienable freedoms. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the history of English literature was pretty much the history of censorship. In large measure, I believe, literature seemed to open up ways of saying things that could not be said directly, which meant already that literature was a mechanism of repression, standing to the writer’s true beliefs and attitudes in something like the relationship in which Freud supposes the manifest content of a dream stands to the latent pathogens of the repressed unconscious. What Freud explicitly calls “the censor” allows the latent thought to be expressed (or “discharged”), but in highly disguised forms, so much so that it is said to demand immense hermeneutical skill on the part of the therapist to find out what is really meant. The extraordinary political contribution of the aesthetic attitude in the eighteenth century was to render obsolete the mechanisms of indirection between writer and reader. Remember, we are discussing literature, not prose as such. There was no press censorship in England after 1695, Milton’s *Areopagitica* had its effect only after the Revolution, and so it was possible to tell the news (except in wartime) and express editorial opinion freely, and so there was no need to have recourse to literary concealment. In literature, too, there was freedom to say anything, as directly as one wished (of course there was drama censorship in England until very nearly the present, and film censorship in America), without suffering any of the consequences to which one would be liable were one to have said the same thing without the bilateral immunities the concept of art introduces, which in effect protects everybody in a way that would be impossible if the same message were transmitted outside the category of the artwork.

Treating a text as an aesthetic object, viewing it through the protective lenses of the new concept of art, audiences were able to contemplate across an irreducible distance—"aesthetic distance" as it got to be called in a celebrated essay—the most incendiary gestures and declarations without any effect at all. It allowed the artist perfect freedom, but at the cost of total and logically guaranteed harmlessness. And surely the transformations of poetic style from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century and beyond in English writing have to be explained as due to the acceptance of the new aesthetic point of view. The richly involuted structures of metaphysical poetry have to be understood as correlative with the heavy penalties attached to making a religious or political misstep: Donne's parents were Catholics, in a time when being a Catholic in England was fraught with danger. His mother was descended from Thomas More, who met a martyr's death; his father wrote epigrams. It is as though the densely mazed architectures of such writing, in which reading was an exercise in decoding, were a perfect adaptation under the most severe constraints of artistic, let alone personal, survival.

I would like at this point to insert a kind of digression. Modern criticism, I think it will be conceded, begins with Eliot, whose paradigms were such writers as Donne and Crashaw, for whom interpretation was required even in their own day as a condition for determining what was being said by means of what in fact was said, and hence *deep* interpretation was the standard way of reading. But criticism, then, began to assume the form of other systems of deep interpretation—psychoanalysis and marxism—and under this pressure, *all* texts became concealments, and deconstruction an inevitability. This gives the critic a great power, virtually the power of the priest, since only he or she knows what truly is being transmitted, and so constitutes the true reader. The rest of us either have to be taught to read, or take the critic as the authority. This has had two immediate corollaries. In the first instance, it developed in response a style of writing made to order for the critic, who came to serve the role of the censor in political systems which drive the writer to acts of increasingly complex concealment, where every letter is in effect the purloined letter. And of course the other corollary was the inevitable impact on critical writing itself, which becomes increasingly obscure, to the point that only other critics can read it and their interpretations are uncertain and obscure, and set forth in any case in texts that in turn require criticism—to the point where criticism exemplifies the literary ideal and a critic like Geoffrey Hartman can claim that the critic is the true artist of our time—or that literature itself is justified to the degree that it makes literary criticism possible.

When the new schedules of rights and freedoms emerged as politically urgent, forming the political foundation of the great enabling documents in the history of human rights, making persecution for beliefs and feelings a violation of human dignity, aesthetics was ready to hand to insure that what artists said would have no adverse political effect. Increasingly direct utterance, with a collateral mistrust of ornamentation and allusion, followed as a matter of course. By the time of Wordsworth, poets could even use the vernacular speech of plain men and women. To be sure, it took some time before the artistic use of coarse speech was essayed, but such was the genius of philosophical aesthetics that the salty locutions of barracks and locker rooms could find their way innocuously onto the printed page.

In the eighteenth century, this would not have been tried. The counterpart of taste as an aesthetic sense—a sense very like what in that period they designated as a moral sense—was taste as an *artistic* constraint. “Taste,” Kant wrote, “like the judgement in general, is the discipline (or training) of genius; it clips its wings, it makes it cultured and polished; but at the same time it gives guidance as to where and how far it may extend itself if it is to remain purposive. And while it brings clearness and order into the multitude of thoughts, it makes the ideas susceptible of being permanently and, at the same time, universally assented to, and capable of being followed by others, and of an ever progressive culture.” So coarse speech would have been excluded on grounds of taste—but once the artifice imposed by the imperatives of aesopism abated, and writers could use increasingly direct language and syntax, the concept of aesthetic distance, at first not especially required in the name of artistic freedom, came to serve a function much like the bell the leper was required to ring, opening up a sanitary path through society. As long as it was accepted as *art*, no one was in danger of contagion.

The limits are naturally always being tested. Recently, a group of Jewish vigilantes prevented the Kammerspiel Theater in Frankfurt from putting on what was an evidently explicit antisemitic play by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. It is characteristic that people would be more shocked by the Jews than by Fassbinder: a high school teacher in the audience was reported by the *New York Times* as having said that she would be unable to explain all this to her students, since “I have always told them that art was one thing that could never be touched or prevented.” And what I am seeking to explain is how the high school teacher ever could have acquired that view. The case justifies a moment of serious reflection.

Kant made a remarkable observation in connection with the concept of beautiful art, namely that it was able to treat as beautiful things that in reality are ugly or displeasing. It was as though its being art meant that *it* could not be ugly, unless it failed on grounds that have nothing to do with subject-matter: "The furies, diseases, the devastations of war even when regarded as calamitous may be described as very beautiful, as they are represented in a picture." Kant meant, I think, that something can be a beautiful representation of an ugly thing, the aesthetics of the subject not penetrating the representation itself. Think of how beautiful Rembrandt's depictions of quite ugly and unpleasing things can be. But Kant, with his marvelous genius for distinctions, made an exception:

There is only one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction, and consequently artificial beauty, viz., that which excites *disgust*. For in this singular sensation, which rests on mere imagination, the object is represented as if it were obtruding itself for our enjoyment, while we strive against it with all our might. And the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished from the nature of the object itself in our sensation, and thus it is impossible that it can be regarded as beautiful.

It would be interesting to have an example of what Kant meant, though he interestingly went on to show how sculpture tended to represent things ugly in themselves via symbols and allegories, and hence through art where the senses alone would not suffice for appreciation, since they were symbolic and required interpretation—as if, for these, the mere fact of aesthetic distance would not suffice and the mechanisms of disguise and concealment the aesthetic attitude otherwise made obsolete were required. But Fassbinder appears to have been flat out antisemitic in this play, and it is useful to consider this against Kant's position on disgust.

There was a time when under law, the quotation of obscenity was itself obscene, so that for a certain class of utterances, the distinction between use and mention was dissolved. That you cannot mention certain words without being perceived as using them is in some measure testified to by the fact that the Meese Report on pornography is one of the hottest publications on the market (there was a celebrated lingerie catalog from Bloomingdale's that fell into the same category). In an age, such as ours, of what is termed image appropriation, where painters as it were quote images without being thought any the less original as artists for doing so, the appropriation of pornographic images is perceived as pornographic in its own right. Feminists, in my view rightly, object to the paintings of David Salle for their constant depiction of women in

sexually humiliating positions, and perhaps there is an even greater moral stigma that attaches to the appropriation rather than the immediate use of pornography in the manner of David Salle, just because in the latter instance it is being used to arouse males while in the former case it is being used to outrage and provoke females, so that feminists rightly again sense a degree of overt hostility in the paintings that is a matter of abstract speculation in the originals: the pornographer may be engaged in an entirely different kind of act.

Now in my view the Jewish protesters in Frankfurt were insisting that the theatrical mimesis of antisemitism is already antisemitic—that with this discourse, imitation and reality are one. So after two centuries of aestheticism, there are still expressions—racist, sexist, and doubtless others—that act as solvents against the prophylactic shield of art. The teacher was insisting that the concept of art is strong enough to withstand even the idiom of bigotry. The Jews were insisting, with Plato, that something can be art and dangerous, even when mimetic (and here the mimetic theory fails of its purpose), that certain words are hateful even in the mouths of those who do not necessarily mean them, or only pretend that they are being said. It was almost certainly with this in mind that Plato as the architect of an ideal state prohibited young people from imitating certain characters. Whatever the effect on their character, it was true that they would be disgusting in saying or imitating disgusting things. The whole of Western Philosophy, to judge by its systematic effort to disenfranchise art from any practical role in life, massively confirms this intuition. The art historian, Edgard Wind, writes as follows in *The Eloquence of Symbols*:

It is quite customary today, in cases at law, to justify a work of questionable moral value by extolling its artistic merits. As if the struggle between the two forces could be settled by a neat differentiation in terms! As if danger to morality ceased where the power of artistic creation begins! As if art merely idealized its object, without intensifying it! Only an age in which the power of art is unrecognized, an age when the connection between moral and artistic forces has been lost, could one think and judge in that way. For such an age, Plato's demand is bound to read like a riddle.

Fassbinder said, of "Trash, The City and Death," "It's only a theater piece," going on to insist that its "possibly reproachable" methods are used, for otherwise "You get something as dead as everything else in the German theater landscape ... The play doesn't care about taking certain precautions and I think that's right. I have to be allowed to react to my own reality without regard to anything. If I'm not allowed to do that, then I'm not allowed to do anything at all." But

of course this is false. The Jews who formed a screen so that the audience could not see the actors in Frankfurt were not forbidding Fassbinder's films, just this play—"reacting to *their* own reality." Of course that reality was complicated by the fact of its being Germany, by the fact that the director, Gunther Rühle had said that the *Shonzeit*, literally the "no hunting season," for Jews might perhaps be lifted. The play opened in a Lower East Side storefront theater on Rivington Street, where, according to an extremely negative review by my colleague Tom Disch, the director did everything he could to make the performance as revolting as possible—including having the actor who plays "A, The Rich Jew" urinate into a plastic bucket that remained on the stage until the curtain fell. There were no vigilantes, perhaps because the reality of New York's Jews really can tolerate a lot. Anyway, no one much cared here.

I think Kant's analysis goes some distance toward explaining why art is dangerous. It is dangerous because its methods are open to the representation of dangerous things but in such a way that it becomes as dangerous as they are. The representation of antisemitism is as dangerous as antisemitism itself, and possibly more so because the artist uses his freedom to address the objects of his hatred at their most civilized, namely as members of a theatrical audience—just as the appropriator of pornographic images attacks women at their most civilized, as members of an artworld, where the conventions of its being art are supposed to prevent them from striking back while they are being assaulted. This is the obverse of the contradiction Kant identifies in the depiction of the disgusting. We can see this contradiction in both the chief ways of responding to the danger of art. In one part of the world, art is dangerous because, even of the most innocent sentence, a seditious interpretation is possible. Ideally under such a system art should be eliminated in the interests of public safety, but the residual prestige of high culture has so far prevented such a final solution, leaving censorship as an uneasy compromise. In the other part of the world, writing, so long as it is perceived as art, is categorically excluded from the class of dangerous acts, but this because the very concept of art prevents the interpretation that would be natural if we were dealing with real discourse. The task of the writer under the first system is to circumvent the censor, but at the risk of losing his audience, which cannot find the thread. I expect it is that that makes abstract art seem so dangerous under the system of censorship—the censor keeps looking for the code. Or writing becomes, as it is under contemporary strategies of criticism, simply the occasion for canny interpretations, since readers

can attribute to it any meaning they choose, on the assumption either that the author is being especially subtle, or that things are revealed which he himself is not conscious of. Under the alternative system, the task of the writer is evidently constantly to test the concept, again at the risk of losing his audience, this time by transforming them into vigilantes whom he has the moral luxury of putting down as barbarians or philistines when they take a stand against what is after all ART. The two systems involve two distinct attitudes toward artists, and of artists toward themselves. In the one system, the artist, however conformist, is incipiently a rebel. In the other system, every rebel, however outrageous, is incipiently a conformist. In the one system, the political prison is a standing risk. In the other a Presidential Ceremony with a Citation for Excellence is the standing promise.

It is unclear that writers or artists from either sphere are easily interchanged, all the less so if the imagination of the writer and the "imagination" of the state are in the equilibrium of pre-established harmony that I proposed they are. From the one side, the freedom on the other must be intoxicating until it is appreciated how much it costs. On the other side the danger must be intoxicating until it is appreciated how innocuous the texts would be if there were freedom. Given the abysses which separate the two continents of artistic psychology, it is understandable that representatives from either side should communicate, as at the rather awful meeting of PEN, at the level of slogans. I shall always bear the memory of world-famous writers behaving like windbags at the most portentous level of meeting hall oratory. I suppose we should hope for a relaxation of the aesthetic attitude so that our artists really are exposed to real risks, even if it is important now and then to stop them. And on the other side a relaxation of the forces that make for deviousness so that not everything one writes is a real risk taken. But even a minor relaxation on either side means a convergence, or the beginning of one, politically, psychologically, morally. Art is internally enough connected with the rest of life that a change in it must mean a change in everything else. Given the value of social stability there is a question of the political price of re-enfranchising art.

My concerns, naturally, are with the philosophical re-enfranchisement of art, inasmuch as the disenfranchisement itself is originally philosophical. Here it seems there are two tasks. The first is in a measure archeological. One has to return to Plato, and to identify what it was, however he characterized it, that he perceived as dangerous in art. And this of course then leads to the difficult question of the correctness of his analysis and the explanation, finally, of where the danger *really* lies, if

there is one. There have been some wrong theories of representation, fascinating but erroneous nevertheless, which have precipitated iconoclastic movements in any number of cultures. These theories are fascinating and fateful in the moral history of art, but they do not explain the dangerousness of art because they are false. My own sense is that the power of art is the power in effect of rhetoric, which I sought to argue in the last pages of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*—and rhetoric, aimed at the modification of attitude and belief, can never be innocent and is always real because minds are. The problem with the Platonic theory of art is that it recognized the power but sought to respond to it by offering philosophical theories of art from which it follows that art could not possibly be dangerous because too metaphysically ephemeral. This is a form of denial familiar as a kind of psychoanalytic reflex.

Once the power is understood, the next task is a moral one, to remove the merely formal freedom the concept of art has acquired, through which artworks can represent anything in any way without effect “because it is art.” This is an empty freedom, and we see it colliding with reality in racism and pornography. When Thomas Messer, Director of the Guggenheim Museum, refused exhibition of a work by Hans Haacke, he did so on grounds that it was not art, which he clarified by saying that it was not universal, by definition excluding from art the possibility of politics, which is essentially conflictive. This was a double insult to Haacke, the status of whose work as art should be acknowledged. If one then wanted to exclude it on grounds of taste or moral revulsion—it was perceived as antisemitic by Messer and is so perceived today by the distinguished art historian, Leo Steinberg, who is sympathetic to Haacke’s work *and* sympathetic with Messer’s position, giving them both a certain dignity. The art world rallied round Haacke, insisting that art should never be censored, the position being the mirror image of Messer’s. My sense is that Haacke’s work was dangerous only because it was art, and that it was intentionally aggressive, using the sanctity of art as a moral shield to infiltrate a politically important space. It was like guerrilla warfare, which uses the morality of the opponent as a defensive weapon. It is a cynical posture, and perfectly exemplifies what Kant had in mind in his analysis of the disgusting. It is an awkward situation for all of us, my contribution only being that we erase a concept of art that refuses its moral consequences, and hence the kind of freedom that goes with that. And then we deal with those consequences as we can, case by case, recognizing that these consequences follow in part from its being art, which raise dilemmas art-for-art’s sake spared us during its long and sanitary reign.

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