

General Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide students of art, art history and aesthetics, as well as the interested general reader, with a substantial and representative collection of texts, drawn from a wide variety of sources from the mid-seventeenth century to the early nineteenth. As the third of a series, this volume completes a long project begun with *Art in Theory 1900–1990* and continued with *Art in Theory 1815–1900*. The result is a comprehensive overview of the art theory of a broadly defined modern period. *Art in Theory 1648–1815* is similar to its two companion volumes both in extent and in the principles of selection and organization employed. It continues our enterprise to improve access to the written materials associated with the development of art, both by rendering a broad selection more generally available for study and by providing information about original editions and about relevant complementary publications. While we have included those texts that are deservedly canonical, we have also aimed to improve understanding of the range and diversity of artistic theory during the period surveyed. Many of the relevant documents are difficult to trace without the resources of a specialized library, and several documents are reprinted here for the first time in a century or more. There are also many important texts that have not previously been published in English. The present volume includes original translations of material from French, German, Italian, Dutch and Latin sources, amounting to approximately a third of the contents.

The Extent of the Modern

Art in Theory 1900–1990 was motivated by the need for an up-to-date anthology of twentieth-century documents at a time when the end of the modern was being widely announced. When we originally undertook to compile it, we had no plans for further publications. A provisional proposal for a single additional volume was developed in response to two complementary promptings. One was the warm welcome extended to our first publication. The other was a growing conviction that most proclamations of the demise of the modern entailed unexamined assumptions about its historical character and its duration. If these assumptions were to be adequately reviewed, it would be necessary to consider relevant material from well before the beginning of the twentieth century. Accordingly, we envisaged a companion

volume extending back from the close of the nineteenth century to the last decades of the eighteenth, which is as early as modern art historians have generally been wont to look.

We aimed to preface this volume with a short selection of documents from the previous hundred years or so. These were to represent the practical and theoretical materials from which the modern had emerged. Two mutually reinforcing factors led us to revise this plan, however. It turned out to be very difficult to restrict the extent of the proposed preliminary section. And we found ourselves faced with an extraordinary wealth of potentially relevant material from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, much of it now difficult of access or as yet untranslated into English. It seemed that if we were properly to trace the theoretical development of the modern in art, we would need to accord due proportional weight to its earlier phases. We were also obliged to recognize that the artistic culture of the modern had had a longer and a richer life than we had at first believed. Taken together, these factors led us to conclude that we should consider not one but two new volumes to cover the earlier period.

Art in Theory 1815–1900 was accordingly published in 1998, representing a first division of material from this extended period. The present volume, covering the earlier phase, was from the start planned to follow as its complement. The end of the Napoleonic Wars provides as convenient a point of termination for our present period as it did previously for a commencement. In general and in the long term, the settlements that followed the battle of Waterloo were such as either to enable or to recognize government in the interests of the capitalist middle class, at a time when the powers of that class were sustained and increased among the countries of the West by the spread of industrialization. But as we acknowledged in our previous volume, an account of the modern that *starts* circa 1815 assumes a connection between the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the development of artistic modernism that must have its roots in the previous century. Other relevant issues are also left in need of examination, not least those which concern the identification of modernism with the currency of the Enlightenment project. If we were not to begin at some arbitrarily chosen date, it seemed that we could fix no *later* starting-point for the entire *Art in Theory* project as a whole than the middle of the seventeenth century. Accordingly we have taken as our marker for the commencement of the present volume that critical twelve-month period which brought the foundation of the French Academy in 1648 into a near coincidence with the end of the Thirty Years War, the achievement of independence by the Dutch Republic, and the execution of the English king.

Some of our texts pre-date 1648 by a few years. But we feel that all of these have something to contribute to the picture we are presenting. Thus, to take an example, while Franciscus Junius' *The Painting of the Ancients* first appeared a decade before the foundation of the Academy, we have felt able to include extracts because the text offers an unparalleled summation of the state of knowledge of the art of Antiquity. The legacy of Antiquity was itself of unparalleled significance for debates about the way forward to an adequately 'modern' seventeenth-century art. The materials of history do not fit into clean compartments. That said, whatever the actual dates of a few of our anthologized texts, our conceptual starting-point is the foundation of the

French Academy; just as our conceptual finishing point for this first phase of the art theory of the modern period is the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

We anticipate some deprecatory comment from those already well-versed in the art and art theory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, along the lines that it takes an ignorant modernist to be surprised by the wealth of material from earlier periods. We are happy to acknowledge that we have been engaged in an absorbing process of self-education. However, it is of the essence of that process, and of the *Art in Theory* project as a whole, that we have worked with the idea of a modern art always in mind. We have been at least as concerned to enrich our readers' understanding of the present as to provide adequate reference material for the study of earlier periods. Overall, our aim has been to deepen the historical ground from which significant issues can be seen to have emerged, and to enlarge the problem-field on which evaluative judgements are made.

We remain aware of the dangers of anachronism. Yet while our selection of texts has never been entirely determined by considerations of their relevance to subsequent practice, we have felt it legitimate in our editorial matter to draw attention to features of historical debates which were to become significant for the work of later writers and artists. Again, we offer an example. There is nothing particularly modern, let alone 'modernist', about the recipes for making a painting published by the Spaniards Pacheco and Hidalgo. Yet they offer a fascinating glimpse into the sheer physical business of art-making: an aspect of art which tended to be sidelined at the time, the better to defend the case for painting as a liberal – and hence gentlemanly – pursuit; an aspect which it remains important to stress now, even if the material in question is video-tape rather than pigeon-droppings. We have always been less concerned to dig up the past for its own sake than to present an interesting archaeology of the modern. After all, if 300-year-old art theory is not of *some* relevance to our concerns in the here and now, it must appear a prime candidate for being consigned to what Marx called 'the gnawing criticism of the mice'.

One clear advantage in commencing a study of the modern with the theoretical writings of the mid-seventeenth century is that it serves to remind us how deeply the very concept of the modern is implicated in a contrast with the ancient. It thus becomes easier to understand why the classical should for so long have retained its powerful fascination, both as a positive repository of authority and as a negative image of resistance to change. The classical heritage received its first wholesale rebuff from the Romantic generation at the turn into the nineteenth century. Thereafter, the avant-garde tended to set its concern with modernity against a sense of the classical-as-moribund. But by the end of the century, avant-gardists such as Cézanne were re-engaging with the classical precisely as a way of advancing their modernism. So it continued into the twentieth century, with figures as different as Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) and De Chirico explicitly drawing on the legacy of the past, while others such as Marinetti were still sufficiently exercised by Antiquity to want to smash it to bits. Even in the allegedly post-modern period it is not unusual to find artists drawing in various ways on the imagery and narratives of Classicism, particularly in countries such as Italy which possess a deeply rooted classical tradition.

It is also significant that while the Academies served to maintain the prestige of classical art and culture, they also acted to focus debate about the different

requirements of the modern. While they generally paid due respect both to the heritage of Christian art and to the authority of the established Churches, the Academies were also fundamentally secular institutions, within which religious subjects generally had to jostle for a place along with the rest. We are reminded that in the establishment of distinctly modern theories of art, the process of secularization is a further significant strand, gaining in force throughout the eighteenth century. The type of criticism represented in the writing of Denis Diderot and his associates would be unthinkable in a culture still dependent on Christian doctrine for the establishment of its highest values. Indeed, the search for substitutes for religious values and functions is one of the impelling factors in the art theory of the later eighteenth century. And this search in turn needs to be understood in relation to the development of new social orders and market structures, within which art would have to establish its position in order to survive.

In *Art in Theory 1815–1900* we were at pains on the one hand to emphasize the relation between emergent modernism and the rise of the Western bourgeoisie, and on the other to stress art's relative independence from values associated with the market as such. In surveying the theory of the period 1648–1815, we confront a world in which many of these concepts are far less securely established or only emerging into currency. Thus, even the notion of the West was far less clearly defined at the beginning of this period than it was by the close, while its modern history had yet to be clearly detached from its roots in the ancient world. Nevertheless it needs to be acknowledged that there were powerful negative factors at work in defining the West from the start. The very manner in which the writers of the seventeenth century laid claim to the legacy of the Ancients served both to rule out alternative claims to that legacy, from the cultures of the Middle East among others, and to eliminate from significant consideration those contemporary cultures, particularly in the Far East, that were untouched by the classical heritage. The more the 'known' world enlarged during the eighteenth century, the more strongly a continuous Western culture came to be identified with civilization itself. In the margins of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought on the arts, we often encounter as an interesting supplementary theme the question of the relation of the Western canon to the visual cultures of the 'rest' of the world – the 'rest', that is, both geographically and historically speaking. A sense of the universality of taste or truth or value often sits uneasily with the acknowledgement of a certain cultural relativism. Our authors frequently display a willingness, deeply uncongenial to the contemporary sensibility, to trade in uncomplicated oppositions of civilization and barbarism, and in assumptions about the naturalness of gender and class distinctions. And yet they are equally often involved in sophisticated consideration of the competing claims of nature and culture, of the grounds of judgement either in experience or in the structure of our minds, and of the possibility that value in art might be somehow internally given, rather than being the result of mere fidelity to some external standard.

Terms of reference for social classes provide further examples of relative instability in central concepts. To speak with the late seventeenth century in mind of a middle class, or *a fortiori* of a bourgeoisie, is to conceive a social constituency still largely in the process of emergence, with a much less secure relationship to the very idea of culture, let alone of art, than it was to acquire by the end of the ensuing century. In

much of the material anthologized in the present volume, the practical possibility of an ambitious art remains inextricably associated with the interests of aristocracy, if not of royalty. The struggle to dissolve this association, we suggest, was a further condition of the emergence of a modern art, and one to which many of our texts bear vivid witness. Similarly, it was not until the very end of the period now under review that the idea of the aesthetic emerged clearly in its modern – or modernist – form, as a value to be set against the monetary or the utilitarian.

The Selection of Texts

As regards our principles of selection we repeat a point asserted in the introduction to *Art in Theory 1900–1990*: ‘It is art we are concerned with, and the theory it is made of; not the culture it is made of, nor the theory of the culture.’ Our attention has been primarily concentrated upon the practices of painting and sculpture as fine arts, and we have considered theory as relevant *prima facie* where it can be clearly connected to the pursuit of these practices or to the business of their critical reconsideration. We have also devoted considerable space in the present volume to the emergence and development of art criticism as a specific literary practice bearing upon the practice of art.

This conception of our primary concern carries with it an implication for our book relative to the concerns of much contemporary writing in the fields of art and cultural history. Much of the most influential work of the recent past has consciously sought to blur the boundaries of art history and cultural studies, or to expand the purview of the former to include issues hitherto deemed the proper concern of the latter. Numerous books and exhibitions have featured an interest in, say, science or the body, in sexuality or surveillance, or have issued from a redirected emphasis on the so-called ‘minor’ arts as important sites of women’s creativity. The list of such revisions is endless. They provide recent historical writing with much of its distinctive flavour, and with the grounds of its claims to interest and innovation. But in compiling an anthology of those ideas out of which art has been made in the modern period, we have had to draw our boundaries somewhere. Thus, the writings of the Marquis de Sade may have been influential upon the artwork of, say, the mid-twentieth-century Surrealists, or upon some contemporary feminist work. But as far as we are able to establish, it was neither influential upon the art of his contemporaries nor in any way responsive to it. The logbook of Captain Cook’s voyages to the southern continent may have much to tell us about Western men’s perceptions of other cultures in the 1760s and 1770s, while the modern art of the Pacific area may in turn have much to say about the impact of European colonization in the aftermath of Cook’s and others’ voyages of exploration. There is no doubt that such texts, as well as related accounts and books of drawings and so forth were of significance to European civilization and to its sense of itself. But again, we have felt that the connections to art practice *per se* are too tenuous to merit the inclusion of such texts in our collection. For the most part, we have confined ourselves to texts and debates which were either responses to, or in some relatively direct manner influential upon, the practice of the arts in the period with which we are concerned. There are grey areas. Sometimes we have included texts to which these criteria may not be

thought to apply. As our guiding principle, however, we have always aimed to represent the ideas that bore upon the making of art, and we have looked for those texts that would enrich and animate our account of them. In the end we have tried to let that be the qualification, in all its historical ebb and flow, which decides our various inclusions and exclusions.

As with our two previous volumes, the process of selection of material started with a review of the work done by our predecessors to establish a body of relevant texts. Even in cases where we have decided not to duplicate the choice of any specific material, we have learned from previous surveys of the field. We have had reason again to be grateful for the extensive publications of Elizabeth Holt, in particular to the third volume of her *Documentary History of Art: From the Classicists to the Impressionists*, first published in 1966, and to her subsequent collection *The Triumph of Art for the Public 1785–1848* (1970). We are indebted to the two volumes of *Neo-Classicism and Romanticism*, edited by Lorenz Eitner, and to *Italian and Spanish Art 1600–1750*, edited by Robert Engass and Jonathan Brown, all first published in 1970 in the series *Sources and Documents*. Joshua Taylor's *Nineteenth Century Theories of Art* (1987) has also been a useful guide.

Invaluable as these various resources have been, we have been obliged both to look into areas of theory opened up by more recent publications, and to take account of those changes in the interests of art history which have led to a broadening of the very field of theory itself. Viewed through the legacy of modernism, the place of art in theory becomes ever harder to fix with any security. It is a consequence of the exorbitation of theory itself that, when one seeks to distinguish those theoretical considerations that are relevant to the production of art from those that are not, there are relatively few decisions that the art historian can still make *a priori* on secure methodological grounds. In the face of this circumstance, rather than seeking to reimpose an overview on the material surveyed, we have sought to profit from the opportunities for revision and expansion. As with both *Art in Theory 1900–1990* and *Art in Theory 1815–1900*, we have been more concerned to represent a body of ideas, of arguments and of concerns than to assemble a corpus of artist-authors or to do full justice to specific careers. We have intended no *a priori* distinction between authors. A text is a text whether the writer be a practising artist, a critic, a philosopher, or a functionary in a relevant institution. In general we have felt justified in positively pursuing such themes as seemed both to emerge from the material and to resonate with those concerns that may be identified with the longer development of a modern art. Once again, we have done what we can to strengthen the otherwise poor representation of women's voices within the established literature of art theory. But once again we have stopped short of retrospectively redressing those powers and mechanisms by which women were deprived of opportunity or otherwise silenced at the time.

In one significant respect, the problem of selection of texts has increased the earlier we have looked into the larger period surveyed by the *Art in Theory* project. Among the twentieth-century documents that come up for the count, there are many manifestos, letters, artists' statements and critical reviews. Of the items included in the present volume, however, very few presented themselves as complete texts capable of being anthologized without reduction. The typical seventeenth-century

treatise is a substantial work in several sections; in the later eighteenth century a Salon review might be a substantial book (Diderot's *Salon of 1767* ran to some 400 pages); an essay in aesthetics might run to several volumes. Faced with such quantities, we have hoped to reconcile two related though not always identical aims: to provide a representative selection of some relevance to a continuing body of concerns or to the wider development of art; and to interest the reader in the ideas of the author concerned. We are aware that some readers will be disappointed to find relatively few texts printed in their entirety. We hope that they will take consolation from the sheer range and variety of our selection. We have attempted to compensate for the necessities of excerpting and editing, on the one hand by providing careful indications of any excisions, and on the other by supplying full bibliographical information concerning dates and locations of original publications and, where these differ, of editions consulted.

Principles of Organization

The organization of material for this book has been the subject of a continuing conversation between us over the period of its production. This conversation was begun by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood in work on *Art in Theory 1900–1990* and was joined by Jason Gaiger at an early stage of work on *Art in Theory 1815–1900*. Argument among us has continually focused on the division of material into sections and subsections. At the heart of our project there has thus been a persistently discursive and dialectical process. Respecting the interests of a larger history, we have attempted to group the material into broad chronological divisions, but we have often had to reconsider what seemed like secure forms of periodization when the currency of theoretical debates proved these to be inappropriate. On the other hand, we have tried to recognize the tendency of the material to cluster about certain themes and issues, but have sometimes had to recognize that the significance of an aesthetic issue changes when the historical context of debate has shifted beyond a certain limit.

The titles of our sections and subsections represent the fruits of this process, in the form of topics and concepts. We have divided the material into seven broadly chronological sections. These contain the cross-currents of debate as to the role and concerns of art. Each section is introduced with an essay outlining major practical developments and theoretical concerns during the relevant period and, where appropriate, relating these to the wider political and economic forces at work in the history of the time. Within each of these sections texts are then grouped under thematic subheadings. Within each subheading the arrangement is generally chronological – the exceptions being where we have grouped a number of texts under a common author, or where we have meant to preserve a sequence of debate or a geographical connection. Each individual text is then provided with a brief introduction, specifying the original occasion of its publication and, where relevant, explaining its connection to contemporary events or controversies. A given text may thus be read for its independent content, as a moment in the development of a specific body of argument, or as a possible instance of a larger tendency or body of concerns within a broad historical period. Our organization of material intentionally reflects the

interests of a retrospective regard. But we hope that the categories we have devised are sufficiently open to encourage rather than to inhibit the exercise of historical imagination.

Finally, we should reiterate a point made in respect of the two previous volumes of *Art in Theory*. We have aimed to be responsive to the demands of curricula and of modern developments in theory and in art-historical work. But the agenda for this book has nevertheless been largely determined by a specific body of practical work to which nothing can now be added except through rediscovery: those actual paintings and sculptures of the period that constituted the practical outcomes of artists' aims and ideas, that stimulated the production of critical theories, and that served to illustrate debates on aesthetic and cultural matters. In the end, it is this absent resource that serves as an organizing principle for the material in the pages that follow. Like its companions, this anthology will be of greatest benefit to those readers who treat it not simply as a resource for the study of art history, but as an accompaniment to the first-hand experience of works of art.

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