Is This Anything? or, Criticism in the University

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I

I've borrowed my title from a recurrent segment on David Letterman's *Late Show*. The curtain rises and there, flanked by what one may take as the ornament or the distraction of Grinder Girl and Hula Hoop Girl (who each at one time featured in this segment) will be someone doing some form of vaudeville-like performance. After about 30 seconds the curtain comes back down, and Dave and his band leader Paul Shaefer decide whether or not that was something. In the event that they agree that it was something, the judgment is direct and devoid of nuance: that was something. Where the act fails to be something, there's room for considerable qualification; my favorite among the standard forms of qualification is one I think usually comes from Paul: "Well, that could have been something, but it wasn't." Disagreement between them is rare and sometimes kind of interesting: the other night they had a man riding a little tiny bicycle around in circles with a woman on his shoulders sort of waving her arms around. Ruthie and I, always willing to weigh in, knew this was nothing, and Paul seemed distinctly unexcited, but Dave was clearly quite taken with it and dwelt particularly forcefully on how very small the bicycle was—evidently entirely deaf to Ruthie's riposte that it was still only riding a bicycle and the woman added nothing to that. In

the end Paul gave in. A night to two later, it was a guy in a serape and sombrero doing a goofy dance to Mexican music, and Dave, Paul, Ruthie, and I were once again all tracking together: "Oh Thank God!" Paul said as the curtain came down, and Dave said, "Well, that was certainly nothing." After a commercial break, Dave said he just been informed that the contestant worked regularly at a theater in New York, and that it cost fifteen bucks to get in.

Well, that's it—criticism—in a nutshell, isn't it? Judgment amidst distraction and in the face of a possibly senseless market. A part of the pleasure in watching "Is This Anything?" has—I think this isn't just me—to do with its absolute clarity: you see the thing, you say what it is—something or nothing—and you're done. No reasoning your way from some first grasp to some justified conclusion and not a lot of room for discussion—it's hard to know where Dave's insistence on the smallness of the bicycle could have gone had Paul not folded. That one can in fact say something like "that could have been something, but it was nothing" is certainly worth a pause.

In the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, art criticism—the best of it anyway—may have looked a little like this; in our current unkind retrospects it's come to look a lot like this, just as most current criticism looks nothing like it. It's not in fact clear that most current criticism looks like anything at all. I spent a day this fall at a symposium on American art (now organized by Darby English), most of which was not very surprisingly devoted to remarks about the global and the local and the collapse of the national. It seemed to me interesting that we got through some six hours of papers by a distinguished group of curators and art historians without the words "critic" or "criticism" coming up once, and when I asked about this, the entire panel was agreed that criticism was nothing, not part of what it mattered to talk about. One might expect this of the curators, who seemed quite happy to say that they now did the job critics used to do, and perhaps also from a group of art historians strongly given to what has for some time now been called "theory" (I understand from the *New York Times Magazine*'s year-end summary of New Ideas that theory has now been declared dead by *Critical Inquiry*, a matter I will touch on again, albeit obliquely), but it was at least a little surprising that Arthur Danto, also on the panel and pretty widely considered our leading critic, should also have been of this

view. Not a huge surprise of course: his theory of art doesn't seem to leave a lot of room for criticism, and his talk that day—not quite in line with the globalizers on the rest of the panel—had mostly focused on the art school as not so much a place for learning, or failing to learn, something in need of teaching but as a simpler site for "the pursuit of happiness" where admission alone amounted to a ratification of one's declaration of one's self as an artist and graduation—or for that matter, failure to be graduated—was no better than a sort of afterthought. So much not only for criticism, but presumably also the hallowed institution of "the crit."

II

It's not an entirely bad description of the critic to say that what he or she does is "get about" and "say what's what." The getting about is presumably important, and it means, among other things, that the critic tends to have a grasp of "what's going on." Sometimes this will even seem the critic's defining feature; certainly much current writing seems little more than the display of such knowledge and so can remind one that if this is all you've got, you're finally only dealing with a gossip column—or, as we say in the university, sociology—and not criticism. The "what's what" part is important and not reducible to, possibly not even particularly dependent on, knowing what's going on.

In any case, the contemporary critic does not in fact do very well by the getting about part of the job. The people who really manage to get about, now, are collectors and curators. In a small city like Columbus, the world of collectors has a certain transparency. At the top of the heap, or one of the heaps anyway, is Les Wexner, founder of The Limited retail chain, major arts patron, donor of Ohio State's architecturally notable Wexner Center, and collector, primarily, of classic European modernist work. Just below him would be the developer Ron Pizutti, who focuses on somewhat more recent, mostly American work—from, say, the 1960s on. Both of these men have formed major collections of the kinds museums keep a close eye on, heavily advised and, at least in Wexner's case, possessed of their own in-house curators. Below this level, there's a group of collectors of distinctly contemporary art; their motives tend to be rather

various, so the collections—not necessarily terribly large—sometimes reflect something like taste or principle and sometimes appear comprehensible only as speculative instruments or records of relatively raw, if highly mediated, social fact. And these people do get about, both at their own initiative and through various collector's tours and the like, often bound up with the local institutions they actively support and on whose acquisition committees they often serve. They go to Venice and to Kassel and to Basel and to Sundance; they are friends—in an artworldy kind of way—with New York and LA and maybe even some European gallerists, and so on. In Miami, it's a group of collectors of more or less this kind who are the driving force behind the emergence of Art Basel Miami, the development of the Design District, and a host of thick relations between museums, artists, and various urban schemes. Typically such collectors see a vastly larger amount of contemporary art than a presumed academic specialist in the field, myself for example, can ever dream of seeing. They probably see a great deal more than even a working critic in an established center like New York or LA typically sees.

And certainly curators get themselves very much about. The past decade in particular has seen the emergence of the international curatorial star, who may have no actual home base or have only the loosest of ties to such a base (to the point that in hiring a curator of contemporary art it is an active question whether or not a candidate is actually willing to stay home and work). There's now a very real community—a sort of airport-and-kunsthalle community—of curators in more or less continuous conversation with one another as they circulate from Rio to Venice to Johannesburg to wherever the next newly invented Biennial is being held, and these conversations effectively amount to both what is going on and the knowledge of what is going on. The critic mostly does not travel in these circles, does not get about in these ways, and is now more often than not a distinctly belated arrival in front of work that has already been received, swathed in discourse, located and described, and, often enough, already sold. To a considerable degree there appears to be no job to be done beyond ratifying that situation, and the language of contemporary criticism has, accordingly, has become a curiously reduced version of languages once central to criticism's way of

embedding judgment in description—of saying what's what: it now seems enough to note that a given work "references" another or refers to itself or to art to imagine that one has somehow made contact with the whole complex of issues that were once carried by the term "self-criticism."

These are facts not simply about the institutional world through which we might imagine art to travel, conditions to which it simply submits willy-nilly. They are intimately related to a range of new shapes art is proposing for itself, or at least that artists and curators and, indeed, critics are proposing for their selves. It's a matter of, I suppose, a sort of tipping of balance at first: it's not unusual for an artist to act, as it were temporarily, as a curator—as, for example, Mona Hatoun is currently doing at the Museum of Modern Art—but something tips a bit when artists curate their own work and present that act of curation as itself part of the work, as Chris Williams and Albert Oehlen did a couple of years ago at the Wexner Center; similarly, we are used to the idea that an artistic work might take the form of a curatorial intervention, as in Fred Wilson's work, but something will seem to have tipped a bit when the artist's work seems to consist in nothing but the formation and exhibition of a collection, as in much of the work of Annette Messager, among many others. And finally, the absolutely familiar business of a curator putting together a show around a theme or argument will seem to be tipping into something else when the curating itself is reviewed as if it were the work—as seems increasingly the case of the large, international exhibit (and as Diarmuid Costello has recently argued may be the case of Tate Modern overall). The cumulative effect of all these little shifts in balance is an increasing uncertainty about what counts as work and what as an exhibition of it, and the past couple of years have seen this uncertainty increasingly jell into a new vocabulary of "platforms" and "stations" that presumably means to make it possible to speak of art activity—a phrase to be preferred, I think, in this context to the more familiar "artistic activity"—without having to speak separately of works, their exhibition, and the relations between them.

But of course now the question of who gets about and how has turned up a new wrinkle in the shape of that other question about what's what.

Before leaving this turn around the critic's way of going about his or her business, it's maybe worth dwelling about on how or where the critic mostly got about. One might say that typically the critic got about on foot—that is, participated in a certain urban situation and history, sharing features with such other urban inhabitants as the flaneur and the dandy, and typically the places the critic got to were studios and galleries and museums and their social extension into various bars and cafes, assorted openings and parties, and so on—very much the same ground on which collectors and curators now move with their new or at least greater visibility and the considerable aid of the airlines. A place the critic typically did not go was the university. Critics often came from the university, in the sense that they were educated there, although often not in the field—art or art history—central to their activity as critics. And in a slightly different sense they often continue to come from the university—they may teach or be studying in it—but are quite clear about leaving it behind insofar as they engage in criticism. It may be that the university-based critic brings a notable art historical sensitivity to her criticism, but for the most part she is entirely clear that she is setting aside most of the protocols that guide and define her as an art historian in moving out into this rather distinctly other world. Typically, too, the critic has not been taught to be—not been actively formed as—a critic (and we often, I think, feel that one of the things that a critic somehow has to discover is what it is for him or herself to be a critic: the thing we call "voice" counts a lot here and is found only in a certain kind of sustained trying of it). This means, mostly, that one cannot major in "criticism"—it's just not on offer. There are, increasingly, exceptions to this, and they are perhaps interesting: art schools seem to be taking an interest in what are often called "writing courses," sometimes explicitly oriented to "criticism" but also, I think, conceived as giving art students a presentational skill they are taken to need, and criticism appears as an explicit field in at least some art education programs, where it comes complete with textbooks with titles like How to Criticize a Photograph—sorting this out can't really be separated from a larger question about what kind of thing art education is or is becoming. Apart from these two developments, Bard College has recently supplemented its rather interesting graduate program for curators of contemporary art with a separate track in criticism.

The university has historically not been a place friendly to criticism; it is, after all, basically organized around shapes of knowledge and it's not clear that criticism has that shape or even that it has an object in the sense that we assume for knowledge. The contrast is perhaps particularly pronounced in art history. I think it works pretty much the same way in literary study, but it's certainly true that literary academics will easily refer to themselves as literary critics even if they don't so easily call what they do criticism, and it's also true that they don't, simply as a matter of names, have the same inescapable attachment to "literary history" that art historians do to art history. And of course criticism is itself a literary genre and so more or less teachable within a literary curriculum at least as a history—courses in the history of criticism are pretty much standard fare in English departments and, to the best of my knowledge, almost non-existent in art history programs.

More to the point, literary study's institutional invention is substantially less explicit than art history's. The art history we have now is the product of, among other things, a very active project of foundation—which has itself been the object of deeply interesting re-examination in recent years—that includes strong, if also sometimes deftly subterranean, arguments for, for example, historical distance of a very particular kind as a precondition for any art historical knowledge, thus cutting the contemporary and the critical out of the field from the outset. The contemporary has, of course, crept back but its curricular presence remains fragile, the place most frequently filled by someone suspected of not being a real art historian or of not teaching at the heart of the thing. The heart of the thing is, of course, still the Renaissance, and it is so because it is now deeply established within the discipline as the mirror in which the art historian repeatedly discovers and recognizes himself.

The critical too has found its way back into the disciplinary margins of academic art history, and these margins are perhaps particularly interesting because they are inhabited by a number of the most intellectually powerful figures in the field—such figures as (my little list is merely exemplary) Michael Baxandall, Michael Fried, Tim Clark, Rosalind Krauss, Leo Steinberg, and Joseph Koerner. That's at least enough of a list to allow one to see that this is not simply a matter of working in contemporary or modern art, although

a certain tropism is clear enough and certainly not accidental; it's also, I think, not a list that depends on an underlying commitment to "theory" in its current sense, although once again there is an orientation of sorts that shouldn't be simply ignored. When I say that the critical finds its way back into art history in the work of people like these I mean, quite simply, that they all, with varying degrees of explicitness, understand their art historical activity as essentially critical, thus understand the discipline not in some sharp distinction from criticism but as a particular modality of it. Baxandall is in a number of ways the most interesting figure on this list—the most explicit about referring art history always to criticism and the one whose work is most fully at home in the very place—the Renaissance—in which art history had seemed to secure its distance and distinctness from criticism.

But before turning more directly toward his work, it's perhaps worth offering a few remarks on Fried and Krauss. Both not only belong importantly to the history of recent criticism, but also come quite directly out of the notably sustained and self-conscious exploration of criticism that *Artforum* was in its glory days. There's some tendency to think of Fried as having turned from criticism to art history with his departure from *Artforum*—Fried has himself, I suspect, entertained this view at times—but I'd argue that his most recent book,[1] on Adolph Menzel and including what amounts to a renewal of the conversations with Stanley Cavell that so informed his writing of the 1960s, makes that view untenable. Krauss, on the other hand, seems to have considerable success in maintaining a continuing critical contact with contemporary art over a long period in a time arguably distinguished by real difficulty in maintaining such contact, in sustaining a career in criticism; at the same time, her way of continuing *Artforum*'s impulse clearly moves the whole enterprise much closer to the university—*October* is, admittedly somewhat uneasily, an academic journal in a way *Artforum* was not and did not aspire to be. One might, of course, feel that whatever *Artforum*'s conscious aspirations, *October* does show something about its inherent trajectory, and one might feel also that what shows in that trajectory is criticism losing touch with its actual situation and audience, becoming academic and in the process ruining the particular clarity and openness that has always been the hallmark of great critical

writing. Maybe. I prefer to think of this as showing something about the possible scope of criticism and so also the actual standards of "theory."

Viewed as a kind of experiment in criticism, *Artforum* was open to a fairly wide mix of writers, and in that mix Fried and Krauss are particularly distinguished by their indebtedness to Clement Greenberg's criticism. It's important that Geenberg shows up here, and it's important not only—maybe not at all—because he's a figure it's altogether too easy to see emerging through the comedy of "Is This Anything?," but because whatever the fate of Greenberg's particular art historical claims—they've certainly come in for all sorts of attack and criticism, by Fried and Krauss among many others—Greenberg has exerted a strong, if not entirely clear, claim on art history itself. We've been, you might say, unable to relegate him, for better or for worse, to his moment within the history of art or the history of criticism but instead find him repeatedly showing up as if offering something that bears on the possible shape and self-understanding of the discipline, as if offering at least hints toward how it might re-imagine itself on the grounds of its attachment to the contemporary rather than its distance or detachment from the past. In trying to think about this situation, one may find oneself also having to think about the angle of incidence with which "theory" strikes or might strike a discipline that has its construal as criticism as a distinct problem and possibility. This doesn't seem to me as true of literary study in its moment of being struck by "theory," and so it's been a bit of a problem for art history, running behind as it tends to do, that so much of the "theory" by which it was eventually struck was reflected off of literary study.

Thus, however oddly, to Baxandall.

III

Baxandall's favored rhetorical mode is irony, leavened, particularly in *Patterns of Intention*, with a strand of pun-driven allegory, so that even his most explicit moments remain systematically understated. I like passages like the following:

> The specific interest of the visual arts is visual, and one of the art historian's specific faculties is to find words to indicate the

> character of shapes, colors, and organizations of them. But these words are not so much descriptive as demonstrative: I am not sure how firmly we have grasped the implications of this.[2]

Of course what he means is that we mostly have no clue what we are doing when we set about saying the various things we say faced with a particular work—not just no clue about how our words attach or fail to attach to their presumed object, but why we are saying them at all, particularly in an age of mechanical and other reproduction that would seem, on the face of it, to spare us whatever need we might once have had (say, in the Renaissance) to produce words just because we could not produce the thing, and no clue perhaps most of all about how clarity about the words we produce in such circumstances might amount to a radical clarification of art history altogether. Take it this way: Baxandall's suggestion is that art historians demonstrate their objects in something like the way one might be said to demonstrate those toys called Transformers: one can describe one of these things pretty easily—"It's a truck that turns into a robot"—but demonstrating it is a different matter, a matter of making explicit how it turns and how it doesn't turn, the degrees and sites of freedom and constraint that make it be just that and nothing else. It's possible that some things intended as Transformers might turn out to be indemonstrable: you fold and unfold and flip and flop and suddenly you've got a senseless shape you can't get out of. It meant to be a Transformer, and there may even have been a truck-shape and a robot-shape within the sequence of permissible transformations, but the thing was falsified, undone, by a particular kind of failure. I suspect Transformers can't actually fail this way, but it seems to me not a bad analogy for at least one way in which putative works of art fail.

Baxandall's ostensive demonstration of works amounts to a kind of proof of them, very much, I think, along the lines Hegel standardly proposes for his kind of argument: "Philosophy has to consider an object in its necessity . . .; it has to unfold and prove the object, according to the necessity of its own inner nature. It is only this unfolding which constitutes the scientific element in the treatment of a subject" (*Aes*, Intro). Hegel, of course, eventually harnesses this somewhat peculiar sense of "prove" to a more familiar and logical construal of it, but the formulation itself seems one in which the

critic catches a glimpse of his or her own activity. If Baxandall's verbal pointing can carry this kind of resonance it is at least in part because Baxandall and Hegel share an understanding of art's work as essentially thought; as Baxandall puts it, in his favored not quite theoretical idiom: "One can work the ostensiveness of one's language hard, so as to draw the hearer sufficiently into his own active act of perception for his attention to shift away from one's own. One can also shun expository sequences that look like representations of perceiving, for example descriptions, in favor of ones that assimilate themselves to thinking."

Thoughts like this are important to me as an art historian: if art history is a mode of criticism, then its objects—and its object in the larger, disciplinary sense—remains in need of proving, its or their thought not yet exhausted. By the same token, where art history cannot grasp itself as criticism, as having always this task of proof in front of it, it has, I would suggest, no object, or at least does not have the object—art—it seems to claim. It is, whether it admits or not, simply the study of visual culture (in this sense, much of the current fuss around this term has relatively little to do with the particularities of French thought of the 1960s and 1970s and everything to do with the path Panofsky laid out for art history in the United States).

Taken directly as thoughts about criticism, this view does something to move criticism out of what might otherwise seems its pure belonging to some continuously moving present in which it finds no support outside either that present's sheerest social facts or the always empty or badly formed promise of a future that will administer "the test of time." "My question," Stanley Cavell writes, pointedly bringing out the complicity of empty promise and social fact, "is: *What* will time tell? That certain departures in art-like pursuits have become established (among certain audiences, in textbooks, on walls, in college courses); that *someone* is treating them with the respect due, we feel, to art; that one no longer has the right to question their status?"

Recognizing that art history is a modality of its criticism is recognizing also that the arena of art's presence, its unfolding and proof, is always also the past, not because the past stands as its guarantee—"what counts," Cavell also writes, "as the genuine article is not *given*, but itself requires critical determination"—but because

art has no other objectivity than this. This is why Baxandall calls criticism "an heroically exposed use of language" and it's also what underlies Jean-Luc Nancy's formulation, which I like very much, that "art is each time radically another art . . . but is at the same time each time all that it is." Criticism is the continuing proof of what is never given other than in time, "infinitely finished" Nancy writes.

Nancy and Cavell and Baxandall are all in agreement about what this means: that what is called for—what it takes to say what's what—is reading, an activity whose relation to both description and interpretation is, at best oblique (*Patterns of Intention* is, among other things, a sustained quarrel with Panofsky, conducted on terms only intermittently recognizable to him). It's likewise an activity uninterested in and unsecurable by any methodological guarantee, thus not in that sense an exercise of theory: here the cunning ordinariness of what Baxandall calls "plain reading" and the high post-Hegelian idiom of Derrida and Nancy go, maybe not so simply, hand in hand. That American academics may have thought Derrida and others had something other than that to offer may be reason to underline one of Baxandall's closing thoughts: "Newly professionalized and academicized activities like art criticism tend to don special authority rather fast . . ." Baxandall is inclined—it's near the heart of the motives to his systematic virtuoso irony—to think that this is reason also to refuse idioms like Nancy's, or at least to bury his awareness of them in, for example, the calculated choice to let the Renaissance Italian *commensurazione* guide him through his discussion of Piero rather than be drawn into Foucault and Lyotard and Davidson et al. on "incommensurablity," but it seems to me that the justice of this will depend in no small part on what it is you have before you. My worries start at the moment you allow yourself to think that you don't have to worry about what's before you because you have a method.

Baxandall's "plain reading" is, in any case, hardly simple and gives rise to its own, complex demands, most of which center on the ways in which we—Baxandall's readers, followers of his book—are asked to find or assume our present both as a condition for our work and a consequence of it. What remains simple about reading—even in its high theoretical modes—is that it finally claims no support apart from an experience that is, in principle, yours as well as—sometimes

even over and against—say, Baxandall's. This does of course mean that you may find your experience corrigible by his—that seems to me one of the most serious things we expect criticism to do. "Publication" emerges as an interestingly key term in *Patterns*'s closing pages: it is what is entailed by the work's essential exposure, what Fried poses as the deep convention that artworks exist to be beheld. Unlike research, criticism writes not to notate its results but because writing is the actual shape of the proofs it offers. As Baxandall means the word, the accent falls on the "public" bit—on, say, how one makes out what's what by being willing to make out one's experience, testing its and your capacity for articulation and so for conversation—that's perhaps a clue to the deep relation between the critic's interest in getting about and in saying what's what.

Baxandall calls this "democratic," and I think that's right too. Of course he doesn't mean that any of this is a matter of opinion or resolvable by voting, but that democracy—presumably in general—is the willingness to demand sense of one's opinions, thus risking the discovery of their senselessness. It sounds like a good idea.

IV

I used to joke that the History of Art department at Ohio State only hired me—given my utter lack of art historical training—because they needed someone who could explain the Wexner Center, Peter Eisenman's newly built and presumably radically deconstructive or deconstructivist campus arts center. That was, of course, before I started struggling with trying to write about the thing—trying, more particularly, to say something about how it might be seriously taken as a sort of curricular intervention. There are a number of reasons why I'm doing this, but certainly mixed up in the middle of the more straightforward intellectual motivations there are a lingering bundle of real questions about what, after some dozen years, I am in fact doing at Ohio State, in the History of Art department, looking out my window at the Wexner Center.

The museum, the art school, and the university, say more particularly the department of art history, form a fairly familiar triangle. We might think of these three things as facing one another really quite directly, people regularly passing out the door of one

building and entering another as they go about their business nodding in recognition to those they pass headed some other way. It doesn't, I guess, always work out exactly like that; I remember, a bit late at one party, a colleague who normally doesn't have much to say to me coming over to announce that the problem was that since Courbet the artists really haven't listened to us art historians, so there are perhaps some bits of grit in the system. But it is or has been largely a sensible and workable piece of landscaping, and it has likewise made sense that these three institutions might sit comfortably together on a university campus—knowledge and object of knowledge, practice and standards, theory and practice, all more or less smoothly opening into one another.

The Wexner Center—not only an architectural form that is certainly odd-looking and perhaps actually radical or critical, but also a *kunsthalle* rather than a museum—is in fact a disturbing presence. For one thing, you're very likely to be stopped on your way to lunch by someone trying to find the door. This is one of the many minor ways in which the terms of its conception—a game played on the different grids of campus and city—mean that it literally does not face the university it sits within. As a *kunsthalle*, it likewise seems to face more fully toward the art world in which the objects it shows for a time largely circulate than it does toward the university and its shapes of study; certainly it cannot do the job most art historians want of a campus museum, which is to be a site for real engagement with the objective givens, the given objects, of the field.

The disturbance runs both ways: it's clear that those who have to look out the Wexner's windows (this often means having to get down on one's knees, but never mind) are often puzzled by what's out there, uncertain what it wants from them or what they might have to do with it. If the Wexner is not to be the art historian's other home, is there some other intellectual or disciplinary stake it can find for itself in the university? Should it have, for example, a curatorial kind of appointment somehow aimed at intellectual or academic programming? A critic-in-residence, more or less in parallel with the artists it regularly invites in? (And what would that be, given the critic's deep desire to get about?) And what might the Wexner be to the studio program beyond a sort of animated art magazine? Or perhaps a chance for its faculty to show their work (most places of the Wexner's

size and prominence don't have to worry about this one, but the building that became the Wexner was initially proposed as merely a better gallery for the art department and nothing of the difference $48 million dollars and Eisenman's involvement made was actually sorted out until the building was pretty well up and running, so there's a peculiar history still at play around these matters).

Mostly Ohio State hasn't much cared about these things—like too many other colleges and universities, it is these days overwhelmingly interested in excellence, rebranding, budget restructuring, and so on—bits of business that tend to get slowed down if you insist on worrying about curriculum, program, and things of that sort. Art education, the leading edge, in our particular stretch of terrain, of the social sciences that now order the university, is the only relevant part of the university that has had no trouble swallowing the Wexner in its capacious maw. You can't get indigestion if nothing calls for digesting.

The Wexner, I've come to feel and would like to find my way to argue, sits on the campus essentially as an unanswered demand for criticism, and its architectural overlaying of two grids awkwardly angled across and through one another might thus be read as a concrete allegory of how thought—the proving of objects—and knowledge might be put to work within and against one another, a model for an interdisciplinarity that doesn't consist in slicing the pie of the given ever finer but of asking after the relation between the object and its giving—its invention or discovery or continuity. When I say "might be read," I am pointing on the one hand to something someone like me might write and publish and so on—except that so far I don't know how to write it without its turning out to be willful and merely mine—and on the other hand to something that would have its proper and compelling publication as a curriculum, a rearticulation of the university around the Wexner's complication of its axes. Among the prominent features of such curriculum would, I think, be an insistence on the real continuity of acts of material making with the apparently more abstract business of thinking as well as a determination to renew, or at least strongly test, the still, it seems to me, unreceived promise of theory as criticism (and so also as exposed to essentially critical conditions of objectivity, of conversational and demonstrative sense).

These remarks yield no particularly strong or pointed conclusion. I suppose I've simply been trying to think a bit about critical positions—positions in criticism, positions on criticism, about the ways in which the critic is perhaps asked now to get about a bit differently and about how such critical movement might affect the practices and institutions it would then find itself variously traversing or engaging. We are now and have for some time been at a funny moment—unsure about the justification and availability of our objects, not sure what in our institutions and the larger world calls for diagnosis and what demands embrace, what's what and what's a symptom of what. My hope is that I've given a plausible picture of the terrain and of what a position for criticism might be in it.

Notes

1. Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2002).
2. Michael Blaxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

3
THE ART SEMINARS