

*The following is a letter I wrote to, and was published by, The Literary Review of Canada. The immediate occasion for the letter was a very negative review of Ann Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920-1940* by the University of Toronto professor Bart Testa. I felt badly about the review primarily because I felt it was wrong-headed, but also because I had recommended the book to Prof. Testa's attention, saying that from it I had learned a great deal about visual forms of Harry Smith's abstract film. But the larger issue that was raised was the resistance that sober academic showed to the discussion of hermetic, esoteric and mystical ideas. At the time, modernism was discussed as a hard-headed, self-reflexive, materialist practice, and art historians who pointed out that many of the great modernists had embraced spiritualist and esoteric ideas were ridiculed and dismissed.*

### **On Modernism and Esoterism: The Power of Art and the Power of Critics**

I keep harping on the same few themes: Modernity consolidates itself and ensures its longevity by impoverishing experience; it impoverishes experience by homogenizing it, reducing it to a single a mode. We can describe modernity's efforts at consolidating its regime as a battle for people's minds since its fundamental drive is to authorize certain modes of experience—a modern way of saying that it is a fundamentally spiritual (by way of being anti-spiritual) enterprise. I keep saying that discovering the character of modernity is a simple task, for all one need do is to read Kant (just as to discern the greatest potential resistance to modernity one needs only to read Hegel.) Among the most telling features of Kant's writing is, as Benjamin pointed out decades ago, that "it was undertaken on the basis of an experience reduced to a nadir, to a minimum of significance." Kant uncritically accepted the standard of "valid" experience characteristic of his age, the Enlightenment, the age when modernity's project first emerged into clarity.

Too, I keep insisting that the principal agencies of the reduction of experience are (mis)education and (pseudo-)art, for both collude in restricting experience through the tyrannical linguistic effects of narrative; syntagmatic structures that are essentially homologous with linguistic structures organize the narrative and their effect is to enfold all experience within a system of language -- to bring all experience under the effect of language. More deleteriously, a "post hoc, ergo propter hoc" principle informs the narratives on which (mis)education and (pseudo-)art rely. Those who think this claim is results from a misplaced poetic drive might consider the work that applies ideas from cognitive science in examining how we understand and form political ideas. Some interesting work of this sort has applied the concept of a frame to understanding political concepts—a concept of the frame that derives more from Roger Shrank than Marvin Minsky. An interesting example is J. Farr's "Framing Democratic Discussion."<sup>1</sup> Farr defines a political frame as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue. Frames . . . often include a rudimentary causal analysis and appeals to honored principles. We believe that frames lead a double life, that they are structures of the mind that impose order and meaning on the problems of society and that they are interpretative structures embedded in political discourse." I point out simply: 1) that I have argued that we use narratives to impose order on our circumstance, and that the will to impose order on reality (instead of discovering order in experience and attempting to conform oneself to that order is characteristic of modernity 2) that Farr's comments lend support to the

claim that narratives often operate without our being aware of them, and shape our understanding of the world in ways of which we are not conscious 3) that these unconsciousness patterns impose familiarity on new experiences, and so render less intense our experience of novelty (which experience opens us to the Creator) 4) that Farr's method lends support to the claim that contemporary thinkers strive to reduce all meaning to propositional meaning 5) that perhaps we should strive more for non-understanding, for Keat's negative capability 6) that cognitive science lays out this concept of political understanding in a way that they could almost be incorporated in a simple computer programme indicates something about the relation between narrative understanding and the modern paradigm of reason, reason as calculation.

The role that the "*post hoc ergo propter hoc*" principle has in founding modernity's explanatory narratives has three damaging implications. First, it elevates the principle of temporal succession to a privileged position. The status of the elements that belong to temporally successive sequences was long a contentious issue among philosophers and theologians, just as the contrast between two orders of time has concerned artists from Homer to Pound. The elevation of the "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*" principle has rendered all these concerns between orders of existence irrelevant, through the same dynamic that it has rendered obsolete all modes of experience that are not implicated in the regime of technique. Secondly, this "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*" principle has come to serve as a principle of explanation in all domains not amenable to quantitative analyses, and the causal sequences it serves to construct have the same role in these fields that deductive patterns of calculative reason have in the various areas that science and technology comprise, that of bolstering the sense that humans, because they possess reason, are lawgivers to reality. Thirdly, as modernity extends the scope of narrative, to that same degree the spiritual practice of memory diminishes; those who have observed children's memory weakening as they become more involved with books are aware of how external, public, material, forms can substitute for inward, private spiritual forms.

Diminishing the experiential faculties in favour of an outward form is a Faustian gambit, for the cost moderns pay for the exchange is the price of the soul. That gambit involves sacrificing our intimate acquaintance with the power of prayer, with the sublimity of *participation mystique*, with the ecstasies of contemplation, with the transports of identification with other spirits—generally, with a variety of forms of experience, ranging from the spiritual insight to cognitive effects of corporeal nudity, that cannot be translated into the language of positivist reason. In political theory, it has led to our inability to understand the function of community and to contemporary political thinkers' emphasis on the rights of the individual. For the ties that bind us into a community are matters of affective relatedness that reach across time, and so are relations that modern, positivistic reason cannot apprehend, for modern reason recognizes only concrete, localized existents—and this form of reason has become the sole arbiter of truth in our bankrupt universities, scholarly journals and popular media alike. Modernity's intelligence is equally incapable of dealing with the idea of nation nor can it understand how, as an example, Baltic nationalism, was able to resist the Soviet tyranny. Just read the expressions of amazement and you'll have the evidence you need. One suspects most writers haven't a clue about the origins of Herder's ideas on national character.

The historic mission of modernity provides the basis of the most fundamental explanation why, as Dr. McGregor complained in the last issue of the *LRC*, the "posties" are erasing Canada. She is absolutely right making this accusation, and with much of what she

says, I am in complete accord, but I do think that her commentary misses the fundamental reason the “posties” want to erase Canada. Examine any feature of the “posties” practice—from their concern with theory, with popular culture, the adherence to a contextual aesthetics which has had the effect of reducing art to commentary, or, what is most telling, their treating poems as “text” and one discovers that they all demonstrate that academics have been successful in reducing experience, making it less varied, and less disruptive, less complex. (Let’s note, as just one example, that it is not a theory that could appreciate, for example, the manner in which James Herbert’s films call forth the experience of nakedness. The debasement of this form of experience is evident in the currently fashionable theorization of ‘the body’ which has managed to convert the last site of resistance to the hegemony of the word into yet another empty, metanarrative signifier. In the end, the sense of the body this theory articulates resembles that of the man in Godard’s *Hélas pour moi*, in the exchange between a woman and the apparently well-off business-type. “I learned yesterday that the flesh can be sad,” the woman says. “Who taught you that?” he asks. “My body,” the woman answers. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says. Yes, here is experience at its nadir.)

Few have understand the dynamic by which linguistic consciousness has enfolded us. The odd, great artist like Stan Brakhage has. Now he makes only films only by hand-painting, creating works that look a tiny bit like Abstract Expressionist canvases that have “come to life” and begun to move. Recently, he has foresworn creating films that use “moving photographs” for he wants not to incorporate what he refers to as “nameable things” in his films (i.e., objects we can identify as, for examples, “a cat,” “a car,” “a little boy,” or “a sofa.”) He recognizes, I suggest, that when nameable things are included in a film, than a linguistic form of consciousness begins to operate—and among its effects is to close us off from the glory and beauty of that which has no name.

As fine (and true) as McGregor’s piece is, its various themes could be unified by considering the modes of experience “po-mo” relies on and authorizes. “Po-mo” is not at all radical—it is simply the form that modernity’s most recent efforts to become an all comprehending regime have taken. “Postmodernism’s” historical role, that of consolidating modernity, explains the academic character of the posties’ writing: the theory of meaning which “po-mo” advances—the theory of meaning that is basic to modernity—is a discursive conception of meaning. In fact, the major shift between modernist and postmodernist literary theory is that while modernism carved out a special domain of “literary meaning,” postmodernism has rejected the distinction between “everyday meaning” and “literary or artistic meaning,” has collapsed all meaning (like all experience) into a single type. Their motivation for rejecting the idea of “literary language” and “artistic meaning” is to discredit the claim that alternative types of meaning make available alternative types of experience.

When one understands that “po-mo” is a struggle to authorize a mode of experience, the dynamic of the process that is the subject of McGregor’s commentary becomes quite clear. The metaphysics of Canadian experience has constituted a point of resistance to modernity’s achieving the hegemony it desires. Inevitably, therefore, modernity seeks to eradicate whatever makes Canadian discourse specific—and this is what “po-mo” now does. That is why universities prefer American pseudo-scholars to the genuine article from Canada. That is why the posties prefer citing American and European writers to Canadian. And, since Hegel’s metaphysic, too, represents a resistance to modernity, those academics who have taken an interest in Hegel’s thought have often had hell to pay for their interests to their masters imported

from America. The posties' discursive conception of meaning explains why they prefer theory to art (for the meaning of a work of art is never discursive) and why they prefer writing commentary on theory to writing commentary on real works of art.

When one understands the dynamic by which modernity consolidates itself, the various things that Dr. McGregor complains about in her piece are all easily comprehended without the resorting to the falsehood that film studies has escaped the effects of the onslaught, when in fact, as one would might conjecture about a subject whose most common object of inquiry is a product from Hollywood, it has provided many key agents in the destruction of Canadian identity, most from outside the country and brought into Canadian universities to "raise our standards" i.e., put an end to our non-modern deviationism. Sometimes it seems that whole departments serve this purpose. One cannot expect academics who spend their lives concerned with Walt Disney and Martin Scorsese to suggest that the artist is a cherisher and protector of the highest sorts of experience. I believe that if Dr. McGregor ever deviates and turns her attention from popular films to those films which are Canada's true glory—not popular films but "high-art" (tut-tut) films—she'll quickly discover how welcoming film academics are to notions that challenge postmodernism à la Hutcheon. The professors of movies welcome studies of popular narrative cinema because that cinema furthers the advance of the modern paradigm, and the historical role of the professoriat is to further that advance.

I continue to offer these few simple ideas because I believe that they seem to say something about the character of the times—something that would be obvious to all, if some did not wilfully blind themselves to them. The effect of not recognizing the process by which modernity consolidates its regime seems to me to be highlighted in the unfairness of Bart Testa's review of Ann Davis' fine and important study, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920-1940*.

Testa accuses Davis of presenting "a sort of collage of statements and observations . . . [a] *mélange* [delivered] on to the page in an uncooked state." This accusation strikes me as unfair. If, for example, Davis had written a study of the influence of Idealism on Coleridge's poetry, and proceeded by first providing a potted summary of the main Idealist themes and then providing a compendium of quotations of lines from Coleridge's poetry that use language that suggests the influence of Idealists, Testa would recognize the provenance of the vocabulary, and accept that the author had made her case. When he comes to a collection that interweaves visual and verbal forms, Testa is unconvinced—I think because he wants the visual form to illustrate the textual gloss. Testa wants explanations that depend on the familiar power of the word and so calls for Ms. Davis to provide a narrative account of the paintings.

Testa is on more solid ground when he accuses Davis of sometimes relying too heavily on the Panofskian model in her commentary. Panofskian iconography parses imagery into textually explicable units (and often those explanations depend on the visual unit's provenance and history, that is, on a narrative about it)—and in this way it is another avatar of modern consciousness. That Davis sometimes relies on iconography is a weakness, but to render definite and precise what is indefinite (but infinite) in meaning and plurisemic, is a constant temptation when writing about works that attempt to evoke the sensation of what is essentially ineffable, and I doubt that Davis' writing is really that much more Panofskian in its approach than most commentary on works that evoke a sense of what is ineffable tend to be. Furthermore, Panofskianism is not Testa's main accusation against Davis' book. For Testa calls for a more highly "cooked" analysis, when a stew whose ingredients are in a yet rawer state is

what the paintings really call for. Nor does he admit how often Davis avoids the limitations of Panofskianism and does not parse the paintings into sememes, but shows how artists used painted forms to evoke the sensation of the Divine's attributes. (Consider the discussion of Carr's *Indian Church* on page 12 for example, only one among many.)

Testa makes matters much worse for himself when, on one of those times when Davis escapes the iconographic model of analysis and considers such matters as the painters' interest in the quality of the brush stroke and the sensations it elicits, he criticizes her for leaping too quickly from physical to metaphysical reality, from the concrete to the abstract, from material form to proposition. This criticism depends on a conception of artistic meaning. The same is true of Testa's complaint that Davis' conception of the mystical is all too vague to be serviceable. Davis does stress, time and again the vagueness of yearnings that fuelled the painters' efforts; perhaps that vague ideas of the Divine are not serviceable for a theologian, but they served the artists—and Davis—quite well.

Testa's proclivities are abundantly clear right in the opening paragraphs of the piece, in which he suggests that Ann Davis treats mystical themes in paintings by members of the Group of Seven as an artistic doctrine that has a similar aesthetic status to the programmatic pronouncements of socialist realism. His assertion that Davis treats Carr's or the Group's theosophical ideas as a doctrine that their paintings illustrate is terribly unfair. Davis repeatedly stresses the vagueness of their notions. She makes it clear that the painters she discusses did not use Theosophy as Testa suggests they did, as an aesthetic doctrine or a set of principles to illustrate in the art, as, say, Social Realism illustrated the conception of the Good of the Soviet polity. Theosophy helped them understand the vague, sensation of an Infinite One that suffuses all, the indefinite, but powerful feeling that sometimes drove them to make their work. Davis regularly distances these sensations of the Divine from theory by stressing their vague, indefinite nature. Testa's modernity leads him to want the precision of language-based cognition and criticizes Davis' book for not conforming to the standards of modern reason. I would say that Davis' approach is closer to the spirit of the painters she discusses than the approach that Testa prefers.

Testa goes as far as to claim that Davis' work suggests that the Group of Seven were illustrating Theosophical ideas in their painting. This is preposterous, of course. Testa's conception of the activity of a painter relies on an egregiously wrongheaded notion of 'meaning' in poetry and painting that allies it with propositional truth. It should be too trivial to need pointing out (but it appears not be) that the painters Davis discusses were trying to create forms that elicit certain sensations about reality—sensations akin to vague intuitions about reality that Theosophy helped them to deal with these vague intuitions and indefinite yearnings. This effort of eliciting raw sensation, not that of illustrating doctrine, is the most common effort that poets and painters engage in, and it was that of the painters that Davis discusses. Mr. Testa should know that—indeed, I suspect he does, because he often writes very well about art and literature.

I suspect that the explanation for Testa's failure to acknowledge such a simple truth about art (that good art is never doctrinal) is, quite simply, that the book irked him. And I think that what really gets his goat about Davis' book is what so often irks members of the professoriat—the book's concern with modes of experience that lie outside the approved modality. As one trained in the tradition that extols as evidence of God's goodness His taking the form of human logos, Testa doesn't like religious ideas that have a non-textual experiential basis. His preference for textually authorized religious experience results in his privileging the

same mode of experience that modernity wishes to make a hegemonic regime. Too, Testa is certainly familiar, as few are, of the greatness of Eric Voegelin's writings on Gnosticism, and in particular with the connection that Voegelin draws between Gnosticism and modernity's domination by technique. In this he deserves his due: when I first wrote on film and modernity, alluding to ideas from a tradition of inquiry into technology that comprises writings of Heidegger, Ellul, Grant, Voegelin and Strauss, the good Professor Wood responded with fury, launching simultaneous offensives against my nationalism (stating that gays and lesbians, not Canadians make up his country) against useless art—asking what the cinema for I speak does to combat homophobia (this apparently the sole function the art is now to serve; when I demanded in print to know what Bach's *Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*—for Bach is surely the norm in art against which all statements and all achievements can be measured—do to combat homophobia, he failed to respond) and against my ridiculous claims that technology both reflects and alters what, as humans, are—technology is completely neutral, he claimed. My polemic was also attacked by many others in the film community, both by academics such as Peter Harcourt (who considered my ideas evidence of madness) and by some who remain *extra ecclesia*, such as Piers Handling, now the director of the Toronto International Film Festival, (who objected to the importance I accorded to “high art” by stating what is true, that recent years have not been kind to difficult, “experimental” art, that this not what they people, yes the people want—a comment that surely reflects acquiescence to modernity). In a similar vein, Geoff Pevere responded that the cinema that advocated didn't mean anything to guy at the local Mac's milk store and so it didn't mean anything to him. All in a way spoke to the “madness” of failing to succumb to modernity and the “madness” of unseemingly non-modern ideas.

Testa would never make a comment as ill-informed many these commentators made.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Testa did enter the fray and, alone among all the commentators, understood the tradition I drew upon in writing the piece. Perhaps, therefore, Voegelin's discussion technology's Gnostic character has influenced him, too, and helped shape his negative feelings towards Gnosticism. If it has, he think he guilty of confusing modernity's Gnosticism with the vestigial remnants of early forms of Gnosticism that one finds among the cults. Modernity's Gnosticism, the Gnosticism exemplified in its enthusiasm for technology is a transmuted, reduced form of Gnosticism, drained of any experiential basis. It preserves only the belief in the saving power of knowledge (and does not even recognize a hierarchy of types of knowledge) and humans unlimited (that is to say, magical) power to transform reality through technology.

The conception of logos that grounds Testa's attack on the book is the very notion that modernity transmuted into its notion of reason, so it is not surprising that Testa ends up by evaluating writing (and art) in terms that further modernity's consolidation of experience. That he privileges the modes of experience that modernity validates explains why, when Testa wrote in a monograph on the use that avant-garde filmmakers have made of films from the early years of film, he was constrained to deny the surrealistic character of the creations they produced, and to turn them into arid illustrations of some professor's art historical thesis. That is why he could credit, in the pages of this periodical, a ‘Who wrote what in a letter, and when?’ approach to Marey's chronophotography that does not deal at all with the key issues his work raises—the way that the experience of the acceleration of change in the early nineteenth century produced a crisis concerning the validity of perception that led to the developments of a variety of instruments to augment the corporeal knowledge, developments that, in their turn, led to crises that concerned the nature of the body itself. He doesn't mind these meagre omissions and

instead praises the book in much the same terms that as those he uses to praise Robin's work on Socialist Realism, for telling the story of Marey in plodding detail, with lots of textual evidence from letters and notebooks. One wonders if he *feels* the crisis of perception in Marey's work. Nor is he affected by the ugliness and silliness of so many of Marey's images, any more than he is repulsed by the hideousness of Socialist Realist art and by any show of interest in it.

Testa doesn't like the idea that modes of experience that lie outside those he deems to be in good taste sometimes intrigue major artists. His bias against modes of experience he deems not to be in good taste is evident in his preposterous remarks about Surrette's *The Birth of the Modern*, that the book has the strength of treating the notions (or intuitions or sensations) that inform Pound, Eliot and Yeats' writings as an "archive of obscure, 'secret' texts whose relation with any living experience is, at best, remote." Testa might wish that these writers believed that the Occult was a separable domain of experience that did not taint their everyday beliefs, or even more, that Surrette had adopted the good professorial position of suggesting that the Occult is a separable area of experience, safely isolated from the everyday world—or that the early modernists believed that is. Testa might wish this, but the idea is ridiculous. Surrette well understood that all three writers treated the experiences with which the Occult Tradition deals as permanent, real possibilities that are still available to contemporaries. The intimate relation between the Beyond and everyday was the crux of their poetry, as it was the crux of Eliot's poetic theory—even more telling, their belief in a higher, but repressed knowledge was the basis for the political ideas that Eliot and Pound expounded. Testa is generally a very good reader, so we can conjecture that there must be some reason for his failure to discern this. Further, he is too well-read not to know that the Occult is the source of Eliot's ideas on the dissociated sensibility, unless that ignorance be motivated. I hope I have made clear why he denigrated Davis' very important discoveries and misrepresented Surrette's.

Socialist Realism was constrained by a doctrine that can be laid as a series of propositions about cause and effect (for Socialist Realism was an art of effect, an art that engages in what Collingwood condemned as magic.) Thus Testa's soul warms to a book that deals with this dreary doctrine that, to my knowledge, produced not one work of art worth a hill of beans. He extols the book as exemplary literary history and commends the author for sensitivity to these artists' longings. Perhaps Testa might reconsider his beliefs what is in good taste as one could fairly describe Robin's book as exhibiting proctological tendencies, by treating with curiosity and respect an artistic channel that produced so much excrement and by asking after its pathologies. This is not the approach of someone who writes about art because s/he finds him-/herself deeply moved.

Testa might not like it, but those artists mucking about with unseemingly mystical ideas have produced much better art than those whose experiences remained with the approved mode. This is perhaps as unpalatable as the equally offensive, but true, proposition that fascists (from Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot to Martin Heidegger and Leni Reifenstahl) produced much finer art than the more politically correct artists. In a similar way, artists who become enthusiastic about the Memphite Theology have often been more worthy of attention than those interested in the venerable St. Thomas. Professors like Testa, in order to play their appointed role in the consolidation of modernity, may wish to tighten the relation between art and doctrine by suggesting that artworks convey propositional truths and by evaluating artworks according to the propositions they offer, but I fear that they miss the significance of art.

Not long ago, several avant-garde filmmakers (and a few critics and curators), selected

for their interest by the organizers at the University of Colorado, convened to show and discuss their films. Experimental film, as I also keep pointing out, is extremely important in Canada (much to the dismay of film professors, who, according to the role that modernity has assigned them, use what clout they have to lobby for an “indigenous” narrative cinema and to write non-narrative filmmaking out of the books.) Given this importance, it was not surprising the Canada was disproportionately represented at the gathering (by David Rimmer, Susan Oxtoby, David Morris—whose extraordinary super-8mm. films would be widely heralded if their were justice—and Jim Sheddin), and would have been even more disproportionately represented had not Michael Snow had to decline, since he had to install *Red, Green, Orange* that weekend. I was also present, as was Mr. Testa. I showed on the first evening, and the Christian imagery in the film I presented elicited an expected assault from Ken Jacobs, an extraordinary filmmaker, but as a Jew, an individual who has suffered at the hands of “Christians.” The next day Stan Brakhage showed *For Marilyn*, a splendid film made in a Finnish church, for his young sons, and out a conviction that he had failed to provide his earlier family with a sense of the importance of religious feeling; *For Marilyn* includes a poem addressed to “the Saviour.” Again Jacobs kicked up a storm.

After an early screening, that evening was turned over to discussion of what drives those of us who were present to make our art. I was angry by this point and, fully expecting to be lambasted, stated that like a poem, a film gives the gods a place to dwell and that this is an important task now, since ours is an age when the gods have departed; the poet calls the god to nearness and, in the slow difficulty of his or her work, gives them a place to linger. The response to my comments stunned me. The next filmmaker said he agreed, and that my comments identified his reasons for creating, too. The next did the same. At this point, Ken Jacobs exploded, accusing the gathering of being a collection of “Jesus freaks.”

The response tells much about the power to endure possessed by that which our culture despises. But Mr. Testa’s commentary on the event was just as telling, and very revealing about the attitudes he brought to Davis’ book. His commentary on the event erased the role that my film, Brakhage’s film, and my comments played and blamed ugliness of feelings in the room that evening on the Gnosticism (on his account) of a film that Larry Jordan showed earlier that evening—a film entitled *The Black Oud* and based on H.D.’s great book of poems, *Hermetic Definitions*. It must be that the mere mention that the film was based on a book whose title contains the word “hermetic” was enough to set Mr. Testa off. For the *Black Oud* did not draw upon H.D.’s hermetic interests—it was a film about finding a new lover—about falling into a new sexual romance—in one’s later years, and it drew principally from H. D.’s lines, “Why did you come to trouble my decline?: I am old (I was old till you came) . . . The reddest rose unfolds (which is ridiculous in this time, this place, unseemly, impossible, even slightly scandalous.)”

It is unfortunate that Mr. Testa allowed his logomachy, that results from identifying the ideals of a political theology of language with the positive languages of humanity—an identification that is really part of modernity’s paideuma—, to inflect his reading of an important study of an important group of Canadian painters. These were painters who are important partly because they, like many Canadian artists, represent a resistance to modernity’s consolidation of its regime; their historical role makes Testa’s dismissal of interests all the more troubling.

Recently Stan Brakhage told me a story about Hollis Frampton, a great experimental filmmaker whom Pound, in his last years in Rapallo, remembered as the brightest of that extraordinary collection people who came to visit and to learn from him at St. Elizabeth’s. The



child genius growing up in small town Ohio, at age six already an aspiring scientist, made two weekly trips—one, with his American Flyer wagon, to the library to load the vehicle with books, and the other to the town centre to spend his weekly allowance on DoubleBubble gum. At that time they had trading cards, of baseball players and the like, in packages DoubleBubble gum. But for a short time, no doubt, as Frampton himself remarked, sponsored by an executive who did not remain with company for long, the cards depicted Masterpieces of Art. At just this time, the child genius entered a variety shop, purchased his weekly supply of DoubleBubble gum, opened one package, popped its contents in his mouth, then peeked at the enclosed trading card. He was dazed and sat down on the curb to examine what he held. When he became aware of his surroundings again, night had fallen. The picture was a reproduction, perhaps two-inches square, of *Las Meneinas*.

Professors might find unpalatable that we cannot reduce such experiences to that of the apprehension of propositional truths. And the likes of Testa might find unpalatable that most poetry develops from silly notions and that its statements are announced with embarrassing intimacy. But as the story illustrates, art has a strange, primitive appeal. The silly notions that often inspire artists to make their work sometimes represent, in however distorted a form, a connection with a tradition far older—and we might hope stronger—than modernity, and their art draws strength from them. Professors yearn to tame art's unruly power by turning it into a form of discourse (now, increasingly, discourse about the issues around equality in society.) They want to convert the unruly, raw and strange aesthetic experience into a cognitive experience, to flatten it into a form that modernity validates. They do this by writing criticism like Testa's on *The Logic of Ecstasy* that sniffs and dismisses not only those vague but powerful intimations of the Divine that drive artists to make art, but also those non-categorical apprehensions that artworks elicit. Modernity's power enfolds us more surely and completely every year. If art is to endure (and I am not sure it will), we require critical practices more open to unauthorized modes of experience.

We also require viewers, readers and listeners more open to types of experience than those the universities are training them to have. But that, though closely connected to the ideas I have set out above, is something for another time.

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1. G. Marcus and R. Hansen (eds), *Reconsidering the Democratic Public*. University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1003, pp. 379-391.

2. I must in fairness exempt Peter Harcourt from this charge. The piece appeared some time ago, back in the days when film professors made a livelihood by counting up the number of girls and the number of boys represented in film programmes. (As evidence of discriminatory practices, these surely reflects the grip of modernity, for it relies on the conviction that assertions about quantity can be objective while assertions about quality are simply subjective. Those few who dared suggest that woman's cinema possessed features different from men's, and features what might have cultural importance exactly because of those differences were condemned for essentialism.)

Those days, thank Goodness, are long gone. But one must acknowledge that introducing Straussian, or Voegelinian, or Heideggerian, or Grantian ideas must have seem mad. Harcourt, really, only spoke in defence of a tradition he loves, a tradition that relies on narrative, and cannot consent to my claim that modernity has corrupted narrative as much as narrative has corrupted modernity.