



THE SHAPE OF ART AT THE END OF THE CENTURY

by Jan Avgikos, *Sculpture* April 1998

"The End of the Century" reads like the story of the Titanic—it is loaded with baggage and going down fast. We cannot get enough of apocalyptic dramas and we gorge on special effects, delivered at full volume and on a monumental scale. We are living and breathing that period which will forevermore be known as the millennium, as though it were a flashback. In a mere matter of months the '90s will be light years in the past, as stale as Christmas decorations in July, and this will all be history. From our vantage point on the other side of the divide, how will we perceive this present? This end? We are consumed with a rage to historicize—it has become our great national pastime—and yet, in the midst of unprecedented cultural change and a steady stream of hype hurled at us from every direction, we are hard pressed to make sense of it all.

It is difficult enough to know the contemporary, let alone explain it. Yet, that is exactly what we attempt to do when we broach the subject of Postmodernism. As surely as we navigate the global communication continuum with fax machines, E-mail, cellular phones, cyberspace, and satellite-fed cable TVs, we live in a postmodern world. We might all agree that certain "breaking events" are decidedly postmodern—genetic re-engineering and cloning, for example, or the evolutionary fast-track of computers that are learning subjectivity. To one degree or another, we all know something about negotiating "the postmodern condition" whether with respect to self-image or world view, or that consuming problem with time—there is never enough of it anymore. But when discussion turns to Postmodernism in art, there is little, if any, consensus.

What is postmodern art? For some three decades now we have debated, first the very existence of a postmodern in art, and then, its legitimacy. No issue is more divisive, or more defining, for art at the end of the century than the polemics of Postmodernism. But why?

Postmodernism entered the lexicon of art theory and discourse in the '70s in relation to art we know by other names—Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, earthworks, conceptual art. At issue, as the term "postmodern" implies, was what was widely perceived as a historical rupture with Modernism, when the very limits of what could be called art were stretched to the point of collapse. In order to legitimize as art a pile of rocks in the woods, or water freezing on a rope, or taking a walk, recourse to something other than the canonical values of Modernism was required. It became difficult to speak about the uniqueness and authenticity of the art object if it was ordered from a foundry or designed to function as a surrogate. A couple of lines of text typed on a sheet of paper, or photographs that documented events, for example, were never intended to be art per se, but merely to point in the direction of art. The new art asserted itself in strident opposition to Modernist authority and ideals, acknowledging the force of that which was "not itself." Could art be anything? If so, then what distinguished it from anything, and everything, else?

Twenty years ago, Rosalind Krauss wrote "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (collected in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. MIT Press, 1985, pp. 276-91), one of the first essays to map Postmodernism in art and to describe as logical that which had been regarded as eclectic. The concept of the expanded field, as Krauss developed it in 1978, is fascinating to consider with the advantage of hindsight. The "permission, or pressure, to think the complex," as she wrote, has increased exponentially and we have come to appreciate that the "expanded" field is, indeed, a dynamically expansive field. Moreover, we can easily extend what Krauss identified as one of the initializing structures of Postmodernism, "art that constructs itself as that which is not itself," as a narrative continuum that stretches from the '60s to

the present. The discursive trajectories of "art about art" that engage institutional critique, that challenge the limits of art, its functions and meanings, and that address the idea of the end of art—those trajectories crisscross many times over in the brief history of Postmodernism. Accordingly, to map this critical discourse is to trace postmodern histories of art which have been shaped in radically different ways from one generation of artists to the next. While Postmodernism did not erupt fully formed, rupture remains a restless agency in the process of change we have come to understand as synonymous with Postmodernism, whether we speak of art, or the changing world we live in, or broad changes in the nature of perception itself.

A.N. Whitehead observed that "new epochs emerge with comparative suddenness." We are still reeling from the suddenness of the emergence of the postmodern, yet we have begun to understand that it is no mere fad or movement, but, indeed, the beginning of a different epoch. Krauss was among the first to speak about Postmodernism in response to vanguard art of the late '60s and '70s, but it was not until the early '80s that artists themselves began to rally under the banner of Postmodernism. In New York, the momentum flashed into a full-fledged movement. There was the sense, if not the reality, that everybody spoke the same language, read the same theoretical texts, and struggled with a common problem—how to dismantle the outmoded, and yet still dominant, ideological apparatuses of Modernism. Even though truth in art was on trial, postmodern practice was committed to the pursuit of the next best thing to truth—critique.

Generations of artists in the '80s cut their teeth on the ironies that surfaced in the assault mounted against the institutions of art and, by extension, those of dominant culture. With emphasis on intertextual relations between spheres previously regarded as mutually exclusive, artists

took the measure of the universality of art and recast it as a high-end commodity; at the same time, they invented "endgame" strategies to forestall co-optation by the market. The perception of a crisis of meaning in art was sufficient to generate a series of tactical maneuvers-the end-game of art as commodity, appropriation, simulation, parody, and pastiche. Theatricality and terrorism were the order of the day. The manifestoes were very specific: make fake art; deploy critique within highly desirable objects which are destined for the very institutions you seek to undermine; above all, resist the production of "irresponsible baubles."

Beneath the veneer of high production values and extraordinary material presence, art of the '80s bristled with defensive mechanisms. Artists fashioned their work to reflect the "look" of power as a means to critique power. In turn, this strategy led to questions concerning the complicity of art with the very forces it opposed. Idioms of Modernist painting and sculpture were deployed as the bastard progeny of High Formalism, to mock hallowed themes of purity, autonomy, and singularity in art. (Think of Peter Halley, Philip Taaffe, Ronald Jones, and Sherrie Levine.) In addition, the space of art became crowded with an array of mass-produced objects-Jeff Koons's store-bought vacuum cleaners installed in Plexiglas cases or basketballs suspended in water-filled aquariums; Haim Steinbach's collections of consumer items and supermarket commodities arranged on laminated display shelves; Ashley Bickerton's wall-mounted constructions whose surfaces were littered with commercial product logos representing every material used in the production of the art.

One of the most defining moments for Postmodernism in art and, by extension, for art at the end of the century, is the crash of the market in 1990. It serves not only as a watershed between two decades that are as characteristically different as they are inextricably linked (in having contributed equally to the formation of Postmodernism in art), but it also marks the moment in which the tide of popular opinion within the art world went against all things postmodern. A lot of people had a hand in shaping discourse in the '80s, but when the market crashed in 1990 plenty of them abandoned what was per-

ceived to be a sinking ship. Enthusiasm for the full-fledged movement evaporated with astonishing rapidity and in direct proportion to Wall Street's waning interest in the "investment potential" of contemporary art. Overnight, it seemed, Postmodernism became a four-letter word. Suddenly, parody meant plagiarism and piracy, and anything that smacked of commodification or critique was perceived as synonymous with cynicism. Tolerance levels for theory dropped to near zero. Many welcomed the new sobriety in place of what had been perceived as unbridled excess. Many viewed the market crash, and the aftershocks that reverberate to this day, as a necessary course correction to clear the decks of those "insincere" rogue players who weren't "truly committed" to art but had been merely attracted to the glamour exuded by the art world in the '80s. A call went out for a return to quality in art. Forget postmodern metaphor-the mirror, the surface, the projection screen-in the '90s we were supposed to bank on nothing short of the real.

If the expanded field of practice in the '80s was drawn in relation to the limits of art to construct itself as above, beyond, or outside spheres of cultural influence, in the '90s artists were no less ambitious in the scope of their critique. Their focus had far less to do with the problem of art's identity than with their own, not only as artists, but as individuals. Much of what will be remembered as art of the '90s concerns subjectivity. The return to the figure in art supported a wealth of social narratives. If the '80s marked the first time that artists collectively embraced Postmodernism, the '90s was the first time ever in which the legions of artists-gay, lesbian, female, persons of color, and scores of disenfranchised others-previously denied voice were admitted into the institutions of art and given voice.

We can easily apply the concept of the expanded field to postmodern practice in the '80s to explain the perception that the space of art, indeed, the very conditions of possibility for art, were seen as compromised by the cultural dominance of the marketplace and the pervasive effects of consumerism. The manipulation of high art to accommodate the values of mass production and, conversely, the substitution of mass-produced goods for art objects, can be mapped as a function of



Bonnie Collura, "Cowboy Land", 1997. Plaster gauze, foam, paper, glue, water putty, and paint, 52.5 x 77.5 x 61 in.

Krauss's expanded field. Based on an expansion model known as "the Klein group" (a mathematical diagram borrowed from the social sciences), oppositional structures, between which art is suspended, can be expressed positively by focusing on the outer limits of the terms of exclusion. As Krauss writes, "by means of this logical expansion a set of binaries is transformed into a quaternary field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time opens it." (p. 283) We can also apply this structure to art produced in the '90s and envision the expanded field as a metaphor for cultural diversity-or what came to be known as "multiculturalism." Strategies of critique, appropriation, and commodification were not abandoned-they were, however, retooled to instrumentalize the rhetoric of identity politics.

In part, the development and methodologies of the cultural diversity movement mirror those implemented in the previous decade. There were organized, collective efforts to dismantle the institution-this time from the perspective of those who had historically been denied representation. As with their immediate predecessors, artists in the '90s sought to undermine the authority of the institution as a cultural producer, by exposing its biases and flaws. They, too, envisioned art as powerful. Instead of appropriating formal idioms seen as synonymous with cultural authority, artists in the '90s went for substance over surface. They envisioned their art as being able to right the wrongs of discrimination, sexism, and elitism; in effect, they believed in art as a powerful cultural force and in its ability to change the world for the better. Implicit in

the rhetoric of multiculturalism was belief in the truth value of art as a function of self-expression.

What is interesting about this moment in the chronicle of Postmodernism-roughly the first half of the '90s-is the struggle to substantiate the real and to ground it in the self. The anxiety generated in response to the polemics of Postmodernism in the '80s concerned more than the displacement of universals in art. If the ideological apparatus of mass culture configured art as commodity, then it also constructed the individual as consumer. In a manner of speaking, the death of art mirrored the death of the individual. The defensive tactics adopted in '80s Postmodernism were manifested in art that evinced all the signs of its own commodification and co-optation. Conceptualized to function as a Trojan horse, it was designed to penetrate the institution by means of subterfuge and to attack from within. Artists in the '90s articulated their dependency upon the institutions of art differently; instead of bringing it to its knees their attempt was, first, to rehabilitate it and, then, to be accepted by it.

As Krauss theorizes the concept of the expanded field, the category of art is expanded according to the logic of a field, as determined by sets of oppositions which have been problematized, and in accordance with "the universe of terms felt to be in opposition with a cultural situation." Once we are able "to think our way into the expansions" of the '80s and '90s, despite stridently different rhetorical structures, we begin to appreciate the similarities of two movements which were perceived to be in opposition to one another. Both envisioned art as a privileged category suspended between polar opposites-mass culture, on the one hand, and the institutionalization of art, on the other hand.

In the '90s, artists were concerned not only with the problem of the commodification of values, but with restrictive cultural conventions-gender stereotypes, the invisibility of Others within patriarchy, and the colonization of the body by the State. At the same time, however, multiculturalism established itself in opposition to the critical operations of arch Postmodernism in the '80s that rejected or denied the validity of expressive content

in art. A perception shared by many pro-diversity artists was that endgame maneuvers had emptied art of all meaning and relevancy-the new movement was out to restore that which they saw as lost.

Debate about the legitimacy of art expanded to include debate about the legitimacy of the self-particularly in feminist-influenced work. Whereas postmodern art in the '80s had ridiculed self-expression as a basis for truth in art, in the '90s Postmodernism was pulled and pushed and stretched to include expressive dimensions. The '90s spawned the creation of enough sincere, moralizing, and righteous personas in art to see us well into the next century. In the midst of rapid-fire cultural changes-the pace increased exponentially as the decade matures-there was palpable need to re-establish art's traditional values. The thinking was that the timelessness and universality of art would mirror values associated with an authentic self. The desire for an inexhaustible reservoir of "the real" is, itself, above reproach.

Despite that, however, the conditions of possibility for manifesting the ontologies of art and being as universals, in the art of the '90s, were not very favorable. Far from offering calm in the midst of a storm, essentialist doctrines of the self were under attack in numerous disciplines and spheres of intellectual activity. Multiculturalism brought new political and social texture to the "expanding field" of postmodern practice and discourse. But valorization of the self as singular and unique began to yield some strange new breeds-creatures that, clearly, masqueraded in the place of an authentic self. In short, the "self" became hybridized as ephemeral, as monstrous, as fictional; it began to manifest, symptomatically, as an absence. We could account for it only in terms of what it was not. In its "negative condition" it epitomized homelessness and displacement, and it morphed with astonishing suddenness to resemble the hordes of aliens, hybrids, and cyborgs that populate mass cultural imagery.

Actually, the expanded field that opened in the '60s and '70s-described by Krauss in relation to newly imported categories of architecture and landscape-extends far beyond the historical practices she identifies as postmodern art. In the same period, evidence of other ruptures and expanded

fields occur in genres of body and performance art, photography, and art inspired by feminist politics. Much of the art of the '70s concerned with problems of identity and representation is grounded in the figure, as in Cindy Sherman's "Film Stills" of the mid-'70s and early '70s performances and photographs produced by artists such as Ana Mendieta, Mary Beth Edelson, Carolee Schneemann, Eleanor Antin, and Hannah Wilke. These artists, among many others, qualify as "early Postmodernists" according to the logic of expansion that opens the practice of art, as developed by Krauss. One way to read the art of the '90s, in part, is as a recuperation of the roots of Postmodernism with respect to discourses of identity, gender, and self-expression. Another way to read multiculturalism in the '90s is as an attempt to re-establish the real in art. By representing the truth of personal experience (how can one challenge someone else's "experience" as real or not?) art, by association, might be restored to "the real."

The search for authenticity in art ushered in a period of Postmodernism with a human face. It was the first time in history that the institutions of art offered an "open call" in recognition of and to all whom it had previously, and egregiously, neglected. With newly found voice and sufficiently empowered to speak on behalf of the truth, the institutions were charged with malicious neglect and sentenced to unending community service. Subjective dimensions in art had been in very short supply in the '80s and the path to restoration was a veritable mine field that inevitably led through the straits of political correctness, across treacherous fields of theory and, eventually, into the placid waters of multiculturalism, steeped with fashionable stereotypes of impoverishment or liberation, depending on the flavor of the art. Perhaps the greatest miscalculation in the crusade to eliminate discrimination and to democratize the art world was the belief that the institution had a conscience. Possibly the biggest disappointment was the realization that subjectivity itself was easily commodified, and that political activism could be regarded as little other than a "style." Probably the biggest flop of all the experiments designed to "put art back on the right track" was the inability to reinvent the relevancy of contemporary art to daily

life for the masses.

If wars were fought over the relative merits of postmodern theory and practice within the art world, they mirrored cultural attitudes toward art that were surely exacerbated by the unwillingness of one of art's primary patrons-the government-to support what it considered to be self-indulgent and elitist-based practices. Another of the defining moments in the history of the postmodern concerns the 1997 report issued by the NEA, American Canvas, which reads like the "deathbed confessions" of the art world. Drawing on interviews and conversations among artists from across the country, the report takes upon itself to speak on behalf of what artists think and feel-as though that were quantifiable. Nonetheless, with authority and finality it pronounces the death knell of art and suggests that artists blame themselves for being too elitist, for neglecting their audiences, and for pursuing their own solipsistic concerns to the detriment of the vitality of art. Obviously, the NEA report, stylized as though it were an internal audit of the art world, tells us more about how conservative we have become as a nation than anything else-but it stands, nonetheless, as evidence of the deep suspicions that exist with respect to the legitimacy and integrity of contemporary art. No wonder that art in the late '90s might be prone to exhibit symptoms of battle fatigue and shell shock-so many, at present, point a finger at it and speak about its demise.

Some see the culprit of a present-day malaise as "Postmodernism," pure and simple. It was theory that alienated audiences, it was all that rhetoric about the displacement of universal values, the emptying of art's essentialist contents, the deployment of art as a weapon-plenty of folks were already intimidated by contemporary art before it went on a rampage in the '80s and so often mocked and manipulated its audiences. It was not so different in the '90s, either. There were plenty of condemnatory voices within art, ready to berate the viewer for his or her sexist ways, or lack of sensitivity to the problem of AIDS, or inability to embrace an astonishing range of social and political issues-homoeroticism, lesbian desire, violence against women, multi-national corporate crimes against humanity, poverty, homelessness, hip-hop culture,

pornography, immigration policy-sponsored as causes by newly socially relevant art.

Some would say the '90s have become awash in pluralism-which is not the same thing as diversity. In artspeak, pluralism is still code for a period that is regarded as disposable-without direction and without great art. There are periods, the experts tell us, in which nothing of interest occurs. We have also come to interpret and understand that rhetoric as a prelude to dismissing art that does not fit with some preconceived idea of what great art is supposed to be. It is only relatively recently, for example, that we have begun to peer beneath the blanket of obscurity that cloaked the diversity of art practices in the '70s lumped together and forgotten about under the heading of pluralism. And yet, "death by pluralism" is shaping up as a real possibility for dismissing the eclectic '90s-multiculturalism ran out of steam midway through the decade, and what has followed in its wake has occurred in discontinuous patches of activity. The perception of the '90s-particularly the late '90s-as an "in-between time" is already in place. Of course, given the special charge of this decade, saddled as it is with the "big story" of closing the books on the 20th century, nothing is simple or without potentially profound ramifications.

The postmodern idiom of the incredibly elastic, always permutating, "expansive field" stretches into late '90s art. A field that might appear to be eclectic assumes a certain clarity when seen in relation to the one or two discursive tendencies that we have seen are sustained throughout the many manifestations of Postmodernist art. Art at the very end of the century, however, has to contend with a deeply rooted suspicion within the art world that Postmodernism is a grand conspiracy orchestrated by a coterie of select artists, critics, and academics-a veritable Mafia of intellectuals and aesthetes who have taken charge of art-who are to blame for the decline, for the confusion, for the pluralism. There are those who "do theory," and those who do not. There are those who wish that Postmodernism would just go away. They are no more interested in the '90s in art that proposes its own disappearance into mainstream culture as "designer" decor elements (art as chairs,

tables, lighting fixtures) or as ephemeral "social sculpture" (gardens, dinner parties, a pier jutting out into a lake with a cigarette vending machine at the end of its ramp) than they were in the '80s when similar maneuvers were produced in the name of art. There are those who have given up on the virtues of self-expression; not only did it fail to achieve democratization in the art world, it ended up being co-opted as a style and symbol for liberties that did not exist. Furthermore, the figure in art has played host, lately, to hybridized selves that supplant any notions of the truth of being or the sanctity of the individual. In the '90s we have seen an endless parades of freaks, strange life-forms, monsters, mutilated and fragmented bodies, and other surrogate selves materialize in art, mirroring the proliferation of hybridized bodies, aliens, and supernatural creatures that are their counterparts in the entertainment and special effects industries.

There are those who feel that art in the '90s, once again, has sold its soul-what soul it had left-in its incestuous relationship with and almost fatal attraction to popular culture: art as cinema, as home video, as fashion photography, as vacation snapshots, as a Web site, as do-it-yourself home improvement. How many artists can we name whose works veer in these directions-Matthew Barney, Sean Landers, Wolfgang Tillmans, Anna Gaskell, Collier Schorr, Katy Schimert, Andrea Zittel, Tobias Rehberger, Jorge Pardo. There are those who "don't get" a lot of young contemporary art that generates images of decrepitude, dysfunctionism, hideous fragmentation, spectacular gore, or that conveys a sense of malaise or final breakdown. Theatricality and over-the-top imagery run at high levels in the work of Toland Grinnell, Keith Edmier, Bonnie Collura, Mariko Mori, Brian Tolle, Brian Crockett, Tony Matelli, the Chapman Brothers-and the list goes on.

What is important with respect to art at the end of this decade is a sentiment shared by many young artists who are not all that interested in fighting any battles about art. They do not remember a time when Postmodernism was an "option"-they have not known anything else. As a result, their perceptions of postmodernity are radically different than those held by all the other older generations of artists

who have participated in shaping postmodernity. An art that resists co-optation by mass culture? An art that situates itself ironically? Those strategies are about as viable today as ancient history. Artists of the late '90s continue to bring art to the very brink of assimilation within mass culture, using strategies similar to those developed in the '80s. When young artists today craft art as functional and consumer-friendly (art as home furnishings, as indistinguishable from the commercial products of other spheres of design, as "generic" art), the array of useful commodities that are also art share a common denominator in that they mirror an art which, in some fundamental way, is not itself. And yet, the narrative dimensions of late '90s art are not encumbered with anxiety or self-consciousness. There is no palpable sense that really big issues might be at stake in art that could feasibly blend into the generic environment of suburban culture. It would seem that art of the late '90s seems perfectly comfortable with the thought of losing itself. As such, it sets the stage for its own disappearance into mainstream culture and it contributes to the passive-aggressive atmosphere that pervades the closing moments of 20th-century art.

Art at the end of the century-which art shall we credit with that appellation? After the polemics of debate sustained from one generation to the next over the course of Postmodernism, art of the late '90s does not seem to display much ambition to embody and evince power, a characteristic exhibited by most of the art of the '80s and early '90s that is usually interpreted as a hallmark of postmodern art. It does not envision its function as having much to do with the truth or the promotion of social causes; it does not seem too interested in the history of polemical debate in art, either, or in challenging the forces that oppose it. Aspects of disquietude or pervasive metaphors of breakdown that circulate in the art occur, largely, in the form of fictional narratives without obvious allegorical intent-unless, of course, we consider images that traffic, comically, in stereotypes of "the end" to have something to do with mirroring what might be termed our cultural predicament.

There is far less contentiousness today among younger artists about what is real and what is not. In this respect, the influ-

ence of the digital age has been immediate and profound. Perhaps that explains why much of late '90s art seems to contribute to the formation of a kind of totalizing "replicant world"-one that is perceived as fairly normative and desirable rather than a threat, in contrast to earlier periods of Postmodernism. This attitude can certainly be seen as continuous with the development and growing complexity of the ideas that inform the expanded, or expansive, field. To create a historical framework for late '90s art-which is what we do when we bring contemporary art in line with precursor practice-is to establish grounds for legitimizing new art and, by a similar token, for legitimizing the history of postmodernity, as well. To accept the art of this period takes us some way toward an appreciation of the complexity of the present and validation, not only of connections, but of ruptures with the past.

The problem of explanation begs a much deeper set of issues than can be addressed by mapping art at the end of the century as a process encumbered by 30 years of contentious debate and unresolved polemics that fall within proximity to Postmodernism in art. This brings us to one of the real questions about art at the end of the century-do we believe in this art sufficiently to follow the path it charts? Do we dismiss the art of this period as unduly influenced by the cultural hype about the end? Moreover, do we value this historical moment sufficiently? Maybe we are poised to discover that, like the cold war, a battle we thought was long over until the Berlin Wall came down in the late '80s, we are still waging cultural wars in art and it is possible that we have become so inured to conflict that we have lost all awareness of the battle. There are an infinite number of ways to narrate Postmodernism in art, but no narrative of art at the end of the century can be written without consideration of the continual ruptures within the rupture of Postmodernism that, from one generation to the next since the '60s, has yet to stray very far from themes of art's obsession with its own limits.

We encounter Wolfgang Tillmans's photographs both as exhibited at Andrea Rosen Gallery and as published in the pages of Vogue magazine-all the result of the same fashion shoot. We can sit on chairs made by Jorge Pardo in the gallery and consider

them as sculpture, but it is really not necessary that they exude art presence when installed, as chairs or in ensemble with tables and lamps, in a public cafe. In such environments, their art value is negligible-a curiosity at best. We may stroll through one of Ronald Jones's gardens just as we do any other formal garden; we can throw Andrea Zittel's wool flannel, velvet, and linen comforters on the sofa, or we can display it as an abstract wall hanging. Indeed, on the basis of art produced in the last two decades, we could furnish an interior living space with art-which would certainly qualify as high fetishism-without ever betraying the existence of art. This is an example of the "disappearance of art"-not into reified negativity or ontological nothingness but simply into something else. We have performed this operation so many times, and over the course of so many generations by now, that the idea of art as something different than art is completely plausible. Over the past few decades we have obsessed over the malleability of the category "art," figuring it from every angle, debating the desirability and necessity of such critical operations-this predates Postmodernism, by the way-and now we are surprised at just how malleable the category of art has become, to the extent that it seems able to accommodate anything and everything, including itself as but one other integer within an already crowded field?

The roots of this polemic are buried in the opening decades of this century in those utopian-inspired movements and schools of the avant-garde that include the Bauhaus, De Stijl, and Constructivism. The apogee of Constructivist achievement is represented in the socialization of the art object. A stretched canvas, a teapot, a worker's outfit-as art vehicles, the theory was, all were potentially equal. An artist might produce a series of designs, rendering them in painting and in textile design. The paintings would be shown in an art setting while the textiles would be displayed in a fabric store. The categories of sculpture and painting were stretched to include virtually every object and element of mass culture that could be adapted in service of the new ideology that envisioned harmonious results from the seamless union of art and life. One thing we have learned from the myriad utopian moments scattered across the topology of

the 20th century-they do not last for very long, but they keep coming back. When Krauss writes, in 1978, that "nothing, it would seem, could possibly give to such a motley of effort the right to lay claim to whatever one might mean by the category of sculpture" (p. 277)-there is no question of the economy of this observation, for with it we can go quite a ways toward describing one of the most persistent of art's preoccupations, not only at the end of the century, but throughout the century, as well.

One begins to wonder-are we stuck in a rut? We have been asking these questions with some intensity for some time now: but is it art? Why is it art? As categories of art have been constantly manipulated in service of an expansion which allows for a seemingly endless number of things to occupy the space of art, it seems there might be other questions we should entertain with respect to this, by now, time-honored practice. How elastic is art? After so much pulling and stretching and pushing and manipulating of the categories of art-this is what Krauss terms "a display of the way a cultural term can be extended to include just about anything" (p. 277)-is there a point of entropy, a point at which the category that is being manipulated does not snap back in line with art? How far can we stretch the category of art before it becomes something else altogether? Where, what, when is the end of art? The question of whether such a thing could exist-the end of art-finds relevance at the end of the century. We are fairly consumed with collapse of a host of other universals such as human and animal, and organism and machine, for instance. No doubt, we will soon be consumed with beginnings, rather than endings, and yet the spectacle of the end in art did not arise as a mere symptom of millennialism.

Krauss models the expanded field and the operations that occur within its parameters according to the Euclidean-determined Klein group. One important feature of the logically structured expanded field concerns material form. The other has to do with the practice of individual artists whose prerogative is to occupy, "successively, different places within the expanded field." (p. 288) Paraphrasing Krauss, in the situation of Postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium, but rather in relation to the

logical operations on a set of cultural terms for which any medium might be used.

Since the writing of Krauss's essay, new mathematical models have been developed and are in widespread use today, much as the Klein group was 20 years ago, to map phenomena in the physical, biological, and social sciences. The new science of chaos, made possible by modern computers, opened new ways to "think complex." Computer-assisted fractal models, based on Benoit Mandelbrot's non-Euclidean mathematical equation for chaos, are far more sensitive to difference, variation, mutation, and other ways in which we might attempt to map discontinuous processes.

The mechanism of the fractal model, an equation that exhibits "scaling" in that it repeats itself over and over again on different scales, is particularly interesting as an updated mathematical model for measuring the shape of Postmodernism and its permutations over the past 35 years or so in art. Breaking down the oppositional logic of Krauss's Euclidean-derived model allows us to examine the scaling effects of discourses that extend themselves through repetition. A fractal model of Postmodernism would certainly result in different valuations and, perhaps, might dispel some of the finality of the notion of "the end of art" in that this phenomenon could be seen in endless permutation.

With each upgrade of the mathematical model, we stand to appreciate more fully the meanings of multivalence, impurity, and intertextuality, in contrast to those ideas of univalence, purity, and singularity, which are, perhaps, ideational hold-overs from another time. A chaos model might, as well, allow for a new interpretation of art's repeated attempts to "differentiate" itself in relation to cultural spheres heretofore viewed as antithetical to the condition of art. No longer is it sufficient to map formal, discursive, and social patterns of art through oppositional-based structures. There is far too much difference and nuance to account for the gaps between things than the model of opposition describes. One such question might concern, for example, the fate of the avant-garde. Do we simply resign ourselves to its vanishing and passage into the institution, the market, or mass

culture? In subjecting avant-garde aesthetics to critique, do we seek to re-imagine forms and models of oppositional practice? Or does "fractal thinking" enable myriad combinations of these options as well as others we have not quite yet formulated?

An art that is always asserting itself, acknowledging the force of that which is not itself, is a structure that remains rather consistent throughout the brief history of Postmodernism. It is this logic that has ushered us to the end of the 20th century-this continuing probing, problematizing, teasing, curious attraction of art to "the force of that which is not-itself, including that which it seeks to exclude." That this occurs repeatedly is not a matter of opinion; rather, it is part of the historical record. Given new definition of the expansive field as a self-similar shape that repeats itself over and over again on different scales, we might need to reconsider the impulse of postmodern art to "differentiate." Art of the end of the century? One is tempted to say that what is happening is that art has finally come to its truth, has appropriated for itself its proper field or problematic-except that this problematic is precisely that of art's essential impropriety-its essential, if profoundly difficult, possibility of losing itself. We used to think we knew what that meant. Lately, however, the "death of art" has begun to take on entirely new meanings. The dreaded end might well set us on the paths of beginnings which, a few decades ago, we could not even imagine.