3. Through the Eyes of the Spectator

Seeing the Other – Otto Pächt's *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*

While Gombrich views art history from outside, Otto Pächt adopts a different position: Pächt, who, like Gombrich, studied in Vienna,[1] argues from within the discipline. Or, more precisely: from within its practice. The above-mentioned lectures from 1970/71, first published in German 1977, systematically describe what remained vague to me as a beginner: seeing in art history as an analytical activity. In my conversations with fellow students and staff at the Vienna Institute of Art History at the time, there was much talk of "style analysis", a term no one was able to adequately explain to me and which, interestingly, Pächt does not use. Pächt's lectures have also been translated into English and published 1999 as *The Practice of Art History: Reflections on Method*, with an introduction by Christopher Wood, revealing that Wood's reservations concerning Pächt are considerably less serious than the reservations harboured by recent Anglo-American art history with regard to Panofsky and Gombrich. One reason for this may be that Pächt's influence in the English-speaking world never reached a level that would have called for distancing gestures in the sense of a "rebellion against the father figure". Another aspect also strikes me as important. Pächt did not claim to offer a complete theoretical framework. Rather he was interested in: "finding initial approaches to a method that is not devised speculatively but obtained by developing an awareness for the processes of perception that take place when we are 'getting

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1   Gombrich, born in 1909, studied from 1928 to 1934 and emigrated to England in 1936, like Pächt. Pächt, born in 1902, obtained his doctorate in Vienna in 1925.

our eye in' with artworks."[2] Any accusation of a holistic or determinist basic position, as formulated by Wood against Gombrich, Panofsky, and the structural analysts of the Vienna School, can thus not be levelled at Pächt – who systematically examines practice without subjecting it to a unified theoretical model. Rather than offering closed answers to questions such as the value of an artwork or the telos of art history, he addresses these issues as open problems for which there are no pertinent solutions – although he is also at pains not to abandon art history as an academic discipline to unrestricted relativism. This preserves the processual openness of research itself, which is far closer to the critical thinking of New Art History than the universal or scientist models of people like Sedlmayr and Gombrich.

Pächt's art historical practice also differs from that of Panofsky and Gombrich in the place it accords to seeing as the central heuristic operation of the discipline, defining its methods and objectives in processual terms. In particular, this approach problematizes the heuristic trap of seeing what one is looking for, what one wants to see. Hence Pächt's attempts to describe how it might be possible, via a form of "analytical" seeing (my term, not Pächt's), to set aside what one is looking for and then, by comparing it with the results of this other seeing, to check and if necessary revise it. Attendant questions here include: What *can* be seen by seeing an artwork? How does seeing an individual artwork and reaching specific conclusions relate to arriving at conclusions that apply to a group of works? How does today's seeing relate to the unfamiliarity of a historically remote culture whose artistic legacy one is looking at? What is the situation concerning the verifiability of such findings and their claim to scholarly rigor? What does such analytic seeing focus on? As these questions show, Pächt's attempt to frame seeing as a heuristic activity gives rise to conflicts that are usually either not addressed at all (as was the case when I was studying in Vienna) or compensated for by models that are superimposed over the empirical practice of visual knowledge production (models that Pächt criticizes in emphatic terms): the conflict between "innocent" and pre-informed seeing, between individual findings and the generalizability required by scholarly method, between the cultural and visual influences on interpreters today and their historically "foreign" object, between seeing and the transfer of its results into language, between form and content (this

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2   From Pächt's foreword to the third, revised edition of the book: Otto Pächt, *Methodisches zur kunsthistorischen Praxis. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Munich 1995). (trans. NG). All other quotations are taken from the English edition.

latter being a basic conflict within art historical tradition, especially in Germany). All of these conflicts have genealogies and effects both theoretical and methodological.

In the following I will subject Pächt's text, which fills a small book, to a selective reading, concentrating on his discussion of the art-historical *act of seeing*. As he says in his introduction, he is interested in *Arbeitshygiene* (work hygiene), stressing the importance of a clear-cut approach "to the practical exercise of our craft as art historians." For him, this means developing both the "mental and sensory receptive organs" and the "conceptual apparatus", in turn calling for "introspection: we must look both at ourselves, the viewer, and at our object, the work of art" (19). Here, then, attention is focused for the first time on the viewer as a practicing art historian, for only via historical scrutiny is it possible "to transform object into work, the material substrate into the artistic phenomenon" (20). It should be added that this relationship between artwork and viewer is being discussed here with specific reference to art *history*. I emphasize this because the history of 20th-century art is marked by a similar view whose influence is felt not only in interpretation but also in the production of art itself – the view that an artwork is only realized in the eye of the beholder/viewer. Pächt, by contrast, does not deny art materiality or reality beyond its perception. Instead, he is interested in the character of art history as a historical discipline and the resulting problem of the unfamiliarity of the "art objects" under study that are to be released from this unfamiliarity by a specifically trained mode of seeing, rendering them visible as aesthetic phenomena to today's eyes. In a single sentence, Pächt then manages to make a fundamental critique of Gombrich in passing, without mentioning him by name: "The danger of mistaking the art object for the work of art is greater with naturalistic representations than with non-naturalistic ones." (20) We recall: Gombrich's narrative of progress in fine art turns on the problem of imitating nature. As deviations from this narrative, styles like that of the Middle Ages require complex explanations. For Pächt, by contrast, rather than being special cases, they actually justify the practice of historical seeing on account of their specific "unfamiliarity" to today's viewers.

This "unfamiliarity" is Pächt's way of rephrasing a central problem in art-historical research; on the one hand, it brings the necessity of interpretation into play (how else can today's viewer attend to an art object from a bygone period?), while at the same time implying the relativity of interpretation and the embeddedness of art object and viewer in a network of relationships. If something is unfamiliar, why, and from which viewpoint? Assuming artist

and viewer to be in possession of an "innocent eye" would be quite wrong. This unfamiliarity refers not only to the content of the work in the sense of conventions, symbols, gestures, objects and customs that would have been known to viewers at the time (and that are deciphered within art history as material culture and iconography), but also to the "habits of seeing and thinking, modes of the pictorial imagination. The question, therefore, is this: how are we to make ourselves familiar with these idiosyncrasies of vision?" (23) While Baxandall develops a method to make the eye of the historical client accessible to today's viewers and readers, based on its reconstruction through written sources, Pächt wishes to historicize the eye of today's *viewer* by embedding his/her seeing in a process of learning historically unfamiliar visual habits. He calls on the viewer to pay attention to him-/herself, his/her own habitual ways of seeing; he cites examples of the rediscovery of art from the past in which a significant role is played by an "affinity with the prevalent stylistic fashion of the age when the rediscovery takes place" (24), as in the love of the Impressionists for the painting of late antiquity. But he finds such dependence on fashions of taste problematic: he is interested in insights that can be rendered objective: "When we think we have finally managed to see the work of art correctly, how do we know that this is really so?" (29) – that we are not taking a subjective interpretation for the correct one? This is where the above-mentioned "work hygiene" comes into play, requiring hypotheses to be verified. Art history does this by viewing the individual artwork in "genealogical perspective", which for Pächt means situating it within a development. "If we can manage to locate the work within a genealogical sequence – that is to say, if the properties that we discover in it turn out to follow logically from something outside it – then we can safely regard our findings as verified." (61) This frees the individual work from its isolation, thus "eliminat[ing] the open-endedness that lays it wide open to subjective interpretation" (30). For readers today, it may seem strange that the artwork is to be stripped of so much open-endedness (elsewhere, Pächt writes that "artistic phenomena are notoriously open to multiple interpretations" (73)). After all, it has since been widely agreed that the artwork is something "open" and polysemic,[3] a consensus based primarily on contributions from the field of semiotics. But for Panofsky, Gombrich and Pächt, this would not fulfil the conditions for scholarly rigour that prevailed when they were writing. The way Pächt deals with

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3   This refers, of course, to Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, 1962 (*The Open Work*, Cambridge MA 1989).

this, however, is remarkable: he sets the bar for objectivity pragmatically low; subjective interpretations undergo thorough scrutiny via comparisons with earlier, later and contemporary works, and via the conclusions drawn – but not within the framework of a metahistorical interpretative model.

Pächt describes the process of seeing in diverse, eloquent terms, for example with the colloquialism "getting one's eye in" (87), sometimes with metaphors drawn from work with texts, with pictures also being "read" (23). For Pächt, interpretation involves both "seeing-with-understanding", which he also calls "adapting our vision" (100), and "enunciating the vision once correctly seen" (100), by which he means description. He demonstrates this using examples of painting, sculpture and architecture from the medieval and early modern periods, each of which highlights one basic problem of "getting one's eye in". Two miniatures from the *Admont Giant Bible* with Moses receiving the laws on Mount Sinai (31-40) show how an "unfamiliar conception of space" (41) is translated into two dimensions; the *Holy Sepulchre* in the Minster at Freiburg im Breisgau shows how "an unfamiliar attitude to time" creates an "obstacle to access" (41-45); unlike the initial unfamiliarity of medieval renderings, Donatello's *Judith und Holofernes* initially appears easily comprehensible on account of its naturalistic "visual logic" (46), but on closer inspection it becomes increasingly puzzling (46-52); at first glance, the Pazzi Chapel by Filippo Brunelleschi (53-61) seems to be accessible via a purely factual description, but this impression is short-lived.

In his introduction, Christopher Wood focuses primarily on Pächt's treatment of the miniatures from the *Admont Giant Bible*, doing so for reasons that are interesting in terms of a history of reception: Pächt describes the miniatures not as deviations from the standards of illusionist rendering of space, but via the formal peculiarities of a system of representation that must appear unfamiliar to our eyes accustomed to naturalism. He describes a layering of zones separated by bands of colour; there is a "definite indication of behind and before, and therefore a rudimentary space; but everything constantly reverts to the picture plane" (36). The logic here is not one of space but of the picture plane, causing this system of representation to resemble ornament. To enable himself to see this, Pächt begins by suppressing his prior knowledge on the subject and avoids an object-based reading: "Of course, such an inhibition is rather artificial. In practice, our eyes react quite differently. Led on by our own prior knowledge, they see what they expect to see: [...] For this very reason, it is often a useful corrective to experiment with an object-blind vision." (32) According to Wood, Pächt rewrites the story of Moses receiving

the laws as a "formal narrative. He flattens the representation into a pulsat-
ing, mesmerizing pattern of interlacing bands of colour. By the end he has
in effect created a new work that looks more like one of Kandinsky's *Compo-
sitions* from the early 1910s." He describes Pächt's approach as the "extraction
of formal dramas out of non-classical ... or even ugly pictures" (16-18).

By identifying formal structures in their specific and unique character,
Pächt can interpret modes of portrayal and systems of representation from
different periods and styles in a way that is free from the allegiances and
preferences of someone like Gombrich (illusionism) or Panofsky (renaissance
humanism). In this phase of analysis, forms are viewed neither in terms of
their references to reality nor in terms of their correspondence with an iden-
tifiable object, but in relative autonomy as a formal event, before they are
historicized by means of comparison; for, as mentioned above, the individual
work of art must be "released" from its isolation (60) and embedded within a
genealogical perspective. The aim of such a perspective is "a new attribution
– to period, place or artist" in order to establish "whether or not the work fits
organically into a particular slot in a particular historical context" (62).

One possible product of this approach is the bringing together of artworks
that have previously resisted attribution, creating a consistent œuvre whose
supposed author is then given a name. This search for an author-subject is
particularly characteristic of research into the late Middle Ages as practised
from the late 19th century. For this practice, too, Pächt offers a prominent ex-
ample, the Master of Flémalle, discussing the ways this "case" bears on the
history of science (63-65). What is at stake here is not merely attribution,
as that depends on the existence of a reliably identified œuvre with which
the authorless works might be compared; here, by contrast, the comparabil-
ity of the "formal opportunities" for the authorless works is what makes it
possible to deduce and create an author. At the end of the 19th century, the
"Flémalle question" (64) was still dominated by the "idea of personal styles",
a parameter that was later replaced by the concept of a period style. Pächt
describes the historical development of research into "the Master of Flémalle"
as an increasing differentiation of seeing: "The process of seeing – of visu-
ally grasping the identity of a work of art or of an artist – is a process of
growing differentiation. When we first encounter a work of art, what we per-
ceive is not its specificity but its analogies with what we already know. ... In
a gradual process of visual differentiation, the specific crystallises out of the
general. This is a fact that has still to be properly faced. Indeed, it stands in
blatant contradiction to everything in the literature of the subject. Far from

being abstracted from many individual cases, the generalised impression is the primary experience that affects us when we confront the individual work of art." (65) What does this mean? Pächt offers a very basic explanation of his view of seeing as a research activity. This implies a constant switching between individual observation and reference to a more general position. The one feeds the other as possibility: we see individual works by Rogier van der Weyden and other works from his period and milieu, among them those later grouped together into the œuvre of a newly identified master. Out of this singular seeing of individual works arises a background of visual knowledge that leads to new results when the individual works are looked at again. This seeing is "primary" not in the sense of purely optical registering; it is a seeing-with-thinking for which the "dismissal of normative aesthetics" (70), the relativization of aesthetic standards, is of crucial heuristic importance.[4] In this model, it is only once aesthetics is relativized that art-historical seeing can be rendered objective. This makes it clear that Pächt is interested not in recognizing the situatedness of seeing, but in overcoming it. Although the art historian sees subjectively, using Pächt's method of seeing s/he is able to check his/her insights, to generalize them, and thus to objectivize them.

I return now to the generalised impression of seeing an artwork for the first time. With this approach, Pächt opposes another method of seeing that aims to isolate small details with the smallest possible meaning as a way of obtaining objectivizable results when attributing artworks: the so-called "Morellian method", developed in the late 19th century by the medic and art connoisseur Giovanni Morelli. For Pächt, the matching of small details like the shape of earlobes or fingernails "affords no valid evidence unless they [the details] can be made to harmonise with the overall design principle of the work in question" (66-67).

We recall: this "overall design principle" can only be seen by first acknowledging the unfamiliarity of what is to be looked at, rather than judging it by an aesthetic norm. In practice, this means that the viewer must overcome his/her visual "prejudices", such as the influence of the fashions of the moment. This in turn happens, secondly, by "getting one's eye in" with the unfamiliar, learning the visual language that brought forth this work. The fact that this learning process might itself be effected by fashions and the viewer's own

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4   Pächt considers this problem of normative seeing (such as Burckhardt's dismissal of the Baroque as a "Renaissance gone to seed") to have been overcome by Riegl; see Pächt, *The Practice of Art History*, 69-70.

preferences (as Wood suspects is the case with Pächt's analysis of the *Admont Bible*, in my opinion correctly) is clearly of no importance to Pächt, as this can be neutralized by the verification techniques of comparative art history. In any case, this temporal fixedness of the viewer can offer new perspectives on historically "unfamiliar" aesthetics, although this is something Pächt himself does not discuss; in his view, the changing fortunes of specific styles and periods can only be identified retrospectively by studying reception history.

Only by overcoming a normative way of seeing the art of past eras does it become possible to use the interplay between artwork and seeing and to turn art-historical seeing into a heuristic tool. Pächt describes this process using metaphors from optics: "The instructions that works of art give us are like an invitation to try out different lenses. Initially, many aspects of the object may seem to make no sense. ... Through one lens, much is clear, but some things are distorted or blurred; through another, this may be reversed. Clearly we want a lens through which as much as possible, and indeed everything, is clearly in focus."[5] It is a matter, then, of finding the right approach, one that "succeeds in eliminating all contradictions, anomalies and inconsistencies: an approach that makes a thing that might be otherwise into a thing that has to be just the way it is. That is an approach that turns chaos into order ... an approach that allows as many details as possible to be understood in terms of a small number of design ideas or principles; an approach that reveals a maximum of referentiality" (69). The artwork should be assessed "not by inappropriate, alien criteria" but by "its own, inherent criteria" (69). The problem Pächt tries to solve here in a series of formulations recalls more recent debates, in fields including ethnology, on how to deal with the Other and the challenge of understanding it without annexing it, thus rendering it newly unrecognizable. Pächt's concern here is to avoid absolutizing ways of thinking that result in dichotomies, like those he finds in Sedlmayr – whose approach of *gestaltetes Sehen* (configured seeing) he otherwise approves of (67-68).

What later generations would refer to as function, Pächt calls a "formal opportunity" (52). Discussing the wellhead for which Donatello made *Judith and Holofernes*, he makes a significant distinction with regard to the concept of function: "The sculpture or the painted image must subordinate itself to an overall structure: a structure with an artistic organisation with its own, infinitely variable but always tied to function. The sculpture or painting thus

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5   Published translation (from page 69) altered for meaning.

becomes part of a whole – which means that it will possess a number of characteristics that cannot be deduced from its essential nature as art." (52) In this way, Pächt insists specifically on the historically immanent relativity of the forms as we see them, and he does so in a way that describes form and function within a tension between aesthetic autonomy and functional dependence, but without submitting to the temptation to resolve this tension. This strikes me as a very typical example of Pächt's thinking.[6]

Pächt's system does have a centre: the artwork in its historicity. But in the process of art-historical seeing, he tries to (re-)activate the relations embedded in and accreted to this centre without bringing a meta-history or other totalizing model into play that would isolate one of these elements (artistic genius, the autonomy of form, meaning, etc.) and allow it to prevail over the "uncertainties of the visual dimension" (73).

Let us once again inquire into Pächt's aims of inquiry: according to what we have described so far, one might gain the impression that Pächt adhered to the conventional "ways of art historians" (65) with their focus on attribution and dating. He was clearly aware of this, and he asked himself and his reader: "Why do we take such a burning interest in the attribution of works of art, the determination of date and authorship? Is there not something obsessive about the way in which … art historians, when they see an object, know no peace until they think they have found the right pigeonhole for it?" Could they not be interested solely in the content of an artwork, leaving aside the "historical classification that leads to a museum label"? His answer: "a correct attribution defines the view that alone reveals the true essence of the work … Attribution is … ultimately … a matter of content." (65-66) Pächt does not state the exact nature of this content. The key basis for all that follows involves

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6   Though I will not reproduce it in all its complexity and incisiveness here, Pächt's critique of iconology is similar. He criticizes its monopoly on the interpretation of art, instead assigning it a clearly circumscribed task: "What was once a living visual experience may well have vanished long since – or, where the civilisation concerned is an alien one, it may never have belonged to our store of notions at all. Here, then, some artificial help is required. And this is where iconography comes in. I would define its primary task as that of teaching us what knowledge we need to have in our minds when we look at historic works of art. We need iconography to reactivate whatever was spontaneously known at the relevant historical moment." (81) Iconography should thus help to reconstruct the historical act of seeing in its spontaneity, but it should not reduce the artwork to a pictograph or hieroglyph. See especially Pächt, *The Practice of Art History*, 77-83.

ascertaining the historical peculiarity of the object under study. Art-historical seeing involves finding out the situatedness of the object in historical terms by taking into account the situatedness of the art historian's gaze. This gives the relationship between the situatedness of the object and its viewer, the relationship present in the act of seeing and interpreting, a specific weight. This relationship between the art historian and his/her "Other", the art object, is built on the recognition of the (historical) otherness or "unfamiliarity" of the object. Pächt is the only scholar in art history to thoroughly investigate this relationship and to reflect on the methodological consequences of it. The recognition and acceptance of the object's otherness is of central concern also for the discussion of the modes of seeing in visual culture studies later in this book.

Focus on reception – Wolfgang Kemp's *Der Anteil des Betrachters*[7]

Wolfgang Kemp's contribution to art history's engagement with hitherto underexposed elements of the triad "artist – artwork – audience",[8] differs from that proposed by Baxandall and Alpers. Kemp's approach is via literary theory, from which he borrows the concept of *reception aesthetics* for his project of finding a theory and method for the share of art that is addressed to the viewer. With the concept of reception aesthetics, Kemp situates his approach in the field of theory, more precisely in the sub-discipline of philosophy dealing with art: Aesthetics. At the same time, he also wishes to develop a method and apply it in practice. A third important point is typical for art history as a discipline: its focus on objects. Kemp's reception aesthetics sticks close to the artwork.[9] In order to get from this to a theory and model of reception, he

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7   Wolfgang Kemp, *Der Anteil des Betrachters. Rezeptionsästhetische Studien zur Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich 1983). Not published in English; all quotations here translated by NG. The title refers to Gombrich's concept of "the beholder's share", see Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Section 3.

8   Wolfgang Kemp (ed.), *Der Betrachter ist im Bild. Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionsästhetik* (1985), new edition (Berlin 1992), 9.

9   By referring to the object as *art*, I make clear that here, unlike in visual culture studies, it is not (yet) about abolishing the special status of art with regard to other artefacts. The context of art, which in the work of Alpers, for example, is central to reconstructing the visual culture of the viewer, is only taken into account by Kemp to the extent that it determines structures within the picture. This also sets his approach apart from Baxandall's model of the "period eye" that reconstructs the culturally and historically deter-

looks to literary theory where he finds an approach dealing with the reading of literature and adopts it for the viewing of art. Kemp's viewer is an implied viewer, he is quite literally in the picture.

As with Alpers, it is worth taking a look at the specific object of Kemp's analysis. What 17th-century Dutch painting was for Alpers, the painting of the 19th century is for Kemp in *Der Anteil des Betrachters*. While Alpers focuses on the "immediacy" of descriptive non-narrative, Kemp deals with painting that is narrative in the broadest sense: the 19th century offers him an animated field between the tradition of history painting, as it continued to be celebrated in the Paris Salons, and the emergence of modernist painting that paid less and less heed to conventions of pictorial narrative like perspective and framing. The roots of his approach actually lie in the 18th century, in the "picture of the crowd"[10] of the French Revolution, whose programmatic pictures "demanded participation" (7), and in Diderot's ideas on the relationship between viewer and picture.

Participation is a good keyword for Diderot's aesthetics, whose driving paradox Kemp sums up in his opening sentence: "The viewer enters the sphere of art theory in the 18th century only to be told he is not to enter the sphere of art." (10) Strictly speaking, Diderot's ideas aim not to keep the viewer out of the sphere of art, but to keep art from intervening in the realm of the viewer, as this would disturb the viewer's communication with the picture. For his model of how a painting should be in order to allow viewers to connect with its contents, Diderot turned to the theatre. Contrary to the then common practice of actors addressing the audience directly, Diderot thought that the action on stage should be presented as if the viewer were not there: "When speeches are directly addressed to the audience, then the playwright has departed from his subject, and the actor has stepped out of his role. To me it is as if they had both left the stage and come down into the audience. As long as the monologue continues, the action is suspended for me and the stage is empty."[11] The stage and the auditorium should remain strictly separate spaces; only then does the "action" acquire the unity and plausibility that allows the

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mined preconditions for seeing on the part of both artist and viewer as a "medium" for the painting of the Quattrocento.

10   See Wolfgang Kemp, *Das Bild der Menge (1789-1830)*, in *Städel-Jahrbuch* 4 (1973), 249ff.

11   Denis Diderot, "Conversations on *The Natural Son*" (1757) in *Sources of Dramatic Theory, Vol. 2, Voltaire to Hugo* (Cambridge 1991), 44.

viewer to project him-/herself into it; only an intact fourth wall makes identi-
fication with the protagonist possible. Modern narrative cinema is based on
the same conditions. Both resemble a (moving) painting.

   In narrative painting, too, it had been common practice into the 18th cen-
tury to make figures in the picture communicate with the viewer via glances
and gestures. Around 1760, Diderot still experienced this technique as pleas-
ant, as long as the figures did not "step out of the scene",[12] but he later rejected
it on the grounds that "the canvas encloses the whole space and there is no
one beyond it."[13] Only when the action portrayed in the picture "knows noth-
ing" of the viewer can s/he become wholly absorbed in these events. Kemp
describes this as follows: the "picture should make an impact, but if it is to
make an impact, it must do so via the stringency of its inner action and all
of the strength of the figures and all of the artistic means must be invested
in this procedure, any reference to the outside would weaken the unity of ac-
tion." (11) Kemp, too, is referring to theatre when he speaks of the "unity of
action".

   There is an element in Kemp's take on Diderot that modifies the exclu-
sive anchoring of a painting's impact in the picture by making the viewer not
only implicit but also active: Diderot does not allow his absorption in a pic-
ture to be disturbed by small formats and heavy frames of a kind that would
prevent a viewer accustomed to today's standards of immersive visual expe-
rience from forgetting that s/he is looking at a picture rather than a reality.
What is important is the viewer's imagination, enabled by the picture's in-
ner dramaturgy to experience the painted scene as something happening in
time and space, even with sound – as in a small painting of a shipwreck by
Vernet described by Diderot in *The Salon of 1767*: "I saw or believed I saw, as
you prefer, a vast expanse of sea opening before me. I was distraught in the
shore, having discerned a burning ship ... I saw the unfortunates ... run along
the deck, start screaming."[14] Vernet had clearly done a good job, then, even

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12   Diderot, "Salon de 1761" in *Œuvres Complètes X* (Paris 1876), 143. "J'aime assez dans un
      tableau un personnage qui parle au spectateur sans sortir du sujet."
13   Diderot, "Pensées détachées sur la peinture" (1776). in *Œuvres Complètes XII* (Paris 1876),
      101. "La toile renferme tout l'espace, et il n'y a personne au delà."
14   Diderot, "The Salon of 1767", in *Diderot On Art II* (New Haven, London 1995), 124. See al-
      so Susanne von Falkenhausen, *Kugelbauvisionen. Kulturgeschichte einer Bauform von der
      Französischen Revolution bis zum Medienzeitalter* (Bielefeld 2008), 150f. In this book, I
      address the dynamic of immersion and viewer distance in connection with new tech-
      nologies of visual immersion.

though the figures are so small as to make facial expressions, for example, all but indistinguishable. Diderot's "I saw or believed I saw" refers to a factor of his reception that Kemp does not discuss: the imagination that is the driving force behind the viewer's absorption in the painted action. Immersive experience of a picture depends on an obliging, willing viewer with an active imagination.

Kemp takes Diderot's paradox of the independence of the action in the painting from the viewer and makes it the precondition for reception, establishing it as the basis for his question about the "share of the beholder". In so doing, he also solves a key methodological problem of historical reception studies: it may be hard to research the reception behaviour of today's audiences, but for a historical audience it is more or less impossible, since there are few historical sources documenting responses to paintings (apart from texts by professional critics, who follow the laws of their literary genre and thus barely qualify as "authentic" sources of visual experience). From what I call Diderot's paradox – the picture's autonomy from the viewer as a precondition for the viewer's communication with that picture – it follows that reception can be deduced from the picture's *inner* structure.

Before discussing the consequences Kemp draws from this, I want to take a brief look at his historical review of reception aesthetics, whose roots he traces from Diderot to the end of the 19th century in the work of John Stuart Mill, Hegel, Ruskin and Riegl. For the 20th century, on the other hand, he notes a limited interest in the question of the relationship between viewer and work. "The already flimsy and vulnerable tradition running from Diderot via Hegel to Riegl breaks off with [Riegl's] *The Group Portraiture of Holland*," the reason being art history's now dominant interest in "questions of formal and stylistic analysis, in the analysis of content and structure" (24). We might add that the 20th century also saw a golden age of "autonomous art": the self-referential painting of abstraction that refuses any kind of "legibility" (in the sense of structures of reference to anything outside the painting) in order to achieve the kind of pure being and pure presence that Michael Fried, for example, had in mind. Concerning the decision in favour of an exclusively immanent meaning of the aesthetic object, art history and art occupied the same discursive field, especially in the early post-war decades.

According to Kemp, it was literary theory that caused the aesthetics of reception to regain currency in the 1970s. From literary theory he borrows the model of an aesthetics of reception and applies it to art history. We might add that here, too, art was a precursor: new practices of the neo-avant-gardes

since the late 1950s, such as happenings, and their new media, such as closed circuit television and video,[15] aimed to address the audience directly, to encourage audience participation, and to break out of the isolating "autonomy" of modernist art. Artists often referred to theories and academic disciplines beyond art, above all phenomenology, cybernetics, sociology and psychology, in order to develop and explain their approaches. At the time, especially in the German-speaking world, as well as having no answer to this, art history actively excluded contemporary art from its remit, leaving it to art criticism. Kemp's project of applying the model of reception aesthetics to art history can thus also be understood as a contribution to overcoming this methodological stagnation.

Let us briefly follow Kemp's systematic account of this approach: "An aesthetics of reception aims to take into the account the simple fact that a text is read, a picture looked at, a piece of music listened to. That every work is part of a process of communication that cannot be broken down into the active and passive roles of transmitter and receiver, but which instead can only be understood as a dialogical process. The work is made to be received, it possesses certain means of creating, shaping and maintaining a relationship with the recipient. And rather than being a pure medium in which the intentions of the artwork are fully realized, the recipient is configured for reception by aesthetic and non-aesthetic norms and forms of behaviour." (28) In the light of our previous readings, links, analogies and differences emerge. We start with the activity of the recipient, in this case the act of viewing; this act meets with a work that is already "waiting" to be viewed. This resembles the positions of Baxandall and Alpers. Both work and viewer actively participate in a dialogue, meaning that there can be no "pure" or passive seeing. This, too, matches Baxandall and Alpers, as well as Gombrich. The last sentence of the passage quoted implicitly brings an interesting factor into play: if no identity is established between the intention and the reception of the artwork because the viewer is not a pure medium, shaped instead by norms and behaviours, this can only mean that the factors shaping the viewer are different to those shaping the artwork (Baxandall would have spoken here of factors shaping the artist). Kemp does not go into the implications of this difference here. Only later does it become clear what he might mean by it: the historical difference between artwork and today's viewer that is not discussed by Alpers or Baxandall, but is seriously addressed by Pächt. While in the studies of Alpers

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15   Exemplified by the work of Nam June Paik, Dan Graham and Vito Acconci.

and Baxandall the historical context is identical for viewer and art (17th-century Holland and 15th-century Florence respectively) Pächt is interested in overcoming the hermeneutic divide between the historically unfamiliar and today's viewer – the art *historian*.

Kemp's motivation is hermeneutic: the artwork is to be interpreted. This contrasts significantly with Alpers and Baxandall, but not with Panofsky or Pächt.[16] One fundamental problem addressed by Kemp in connection with interpreting art is already familiar from our readings of Gombrich and Pächt: the conflict between a totalizing impetus and a limitation of the claim to validity of method and interpretation/cognition. Here, Kemp relates this problem only to method. He insists that reception theory makes no claim "to be able to interpret the artwork in all its referential complexity" (28) and in this he follows Hans Robert Jauss who described it as "a methodical reflection that is partial, extendable and dependent on collaboration".[17] In spite of this, Kemp seems reluctant to relinquish his method's claim to a broader competence: "*Admitting* the 'partiality' of an aesthetics of reception [my italics] does not free oneself from the task of maintaining an open view of the whole." One must thus examine "the extent to which reception aesthetics, *as a perspective* at least, represents the whole" – only this seems to ensure the hermeneutic value of the procedure. "Perspective" here refers to the interpretative horizon; it should not be too narrow, thus remaining immanent, as Kemp observes in formal analysis, and it should not be too broad, thus "losing itself in the non-aesthetic", as in the case of iconology. Instead, the "reception structure of the artwork brings a sufficiently immanent and a sufficiently externally defined category of the aesthetic into the focus of attention ...: in the image of the

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16   This feeds suspicions that precisely this motivation, regardless of which method is used, is specific to the German-speaking tradition in art history, and that it is so self-evident in that context that the notion that there might be other motivations for the discipline and for dealing with art is not even raised. By analogy with psychoanalysis, the need for meaning and interpretation could thus be situated on the level of the discipline's unconscious. In this light, it comes as no surprise that until 1992, when Oskar Bätschmann published his *Einführung in die kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik* (Introduction to Art-Historical Hermeneutics), a theoretical approach to hermeneutics was found in philosophy and literary criticism, but not in art history.

17   Hans Robert Jauss, "Racines und Goethes Iphigenie. Mit einem Nachwort über die Partialität der rezeptionsästhetischen Methode," in *Neue Hefte für Philologie* 4 (1973), 1ff., quoted from Kemp, *Anteil des Betrachters*, 28.

dialogue between viewer and work, we grasp the tense balance between art and society." (29)

It is interesting how Kemp tries here to overcome the problem of tension between "inside" (artwork) and "outside" (viewer): he uses the image of a dialogue in which the duality of work and viewer remains present, the two sides relating to one another. But this figure of relation does not seem to be enough: he needs a figure of unity – the picture as which this relation is grasped. In other words, when thinking of reception, we are always dealing with a relation – between the recipient and what is being received. So far, so simple. As with desire for meaning and interpretation, however, the desire for *unity* seems to belong to the unconscious of the practice of art history; in Freudian terms this desire produces considerable repressive energy when it comes to thinking in relational terms. If we now view meaning/interpretation and unity as mutually dependent figures of thought (meaning/interpretation must be true, which is why there can only be one, and it is true because it refers to a unity) then we soon arrive at claims to truth as a tradition of German idealism, which in turn "encodes" the claim to objectivity made by reception aesthetics. In methodological terms, this manifests itself, though not uniquely, in the need to establish a priority in the work/recipient relationship. "For centuries, the premise has been upheld that in the relationship between work and recipient, the work was the most influential, its intentions merely being fulfilled by the viewer. This was certainly wrong, but it would be just as wrong to assert the opposite by attributing all *authority* to the recipient." (my italics) Here Kemp now proposes the model of a dialogue as a solution, but this, too, is clearly not enough: "Furthermore, it seems not unreasonable to call for the initiator of an interaction – and this is and remains the work – to be granted a certain methodological precedence." In this model, too, then, the work retains its authority, as it is "recognizably involved in shaping the reception procedure". This argument brings to a close Kemp's explanation of "reception aesthetics applied to the artwork" (31).

My questions are: where in this model is it possible to situate seeing or visuality more broadly? How is it conceived of: as a process, as an activity, as a relationship? As his point of departure, Kemp borrows the figure of the "implied reader" from the literary theory of Wolfgang Iser, replacing the reader with a viewer but otherwise following Iser's definition word-for-word. This makes it possible to reintroduce the recipient into the work as "the way the work relates to the reader" (29): the implied viewer "embodies all those predispositions that a work offers to its potential viewers as conditions of reception.

The implied viewer is thus anchored not in an empirical outside reality, but in the structure of the work itself. ... Assuming that works take on their reality by being seen, works must already contain certain conditions of actualization that will allow their meaning to be assembled in the responsive mind of the recipient. The concept of the implied viewer is therefore a structure within the work anticipating the presence of a recipient, and this holds true even when works deliberately appear to ignore their possible recipient or use strategies to actively exclude him."[18] The last sentence of this quotation can be directly linked back to Kemp's discussion of Diderot's notions of pictorial and theatrical dramaturgy. After all, it would be hard to imagine a better explanation of the viewer *implicit within the picture* than his/her exclusion from the events portrayed.

Kemp distinguishes a picture's immanent "response-inviting structures" from the external "conditions of access" (33), what is now usually referred to as context. Among the latter he names material conditions of access such as location, sociological factors such as ritual, liturgy and art contemplation, and human factors by which he means the viewer's "individual and social predispositions" (34). Kemp's interest, however, focuses not on this context but on the picture's immanent response-inviting structures, because "everything that 'happens' here [in the artwork] has meaning for a viewer, it also happens as a fulfilment of being viewed" (36). He quotes Gadamer: "The way the spectator belongs to it [art] makes it apparent why it is *meaningful* to figure art as play."[19] (my italics) In other words: the viewer is prefigured in the manifest form of the picture, which Kemp also calls presentation and which he sets apart from representation as its subject. The presentation "involves the viewer in the work by drawing him into a second communicative procedure in which he himself is not involved: representation" (35). Unlike the voyeur, then, who looks at events that are not performed for him, that do not reckon with him, the artwork reckons with its viewer. Art is always already there for the viewer.

The heuristic status of reception aesthetics is now clearer: it is a tool, a method of interpreting instances of meaningfulness. Its genesis can thus be traced back not only to Diderot (who was interested less in interpretation than in visual empathy in the form of imagined immersion in a scene),

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18   Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore 1978), 34, quoted here as rewritten by Kemp, *Anteil des Betrachters*, 32.

19   Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1965) (London, New York, 2013), 131.

but also, within more recent academic history, to hermeneutics in the spirit of Gadamer, to whom Jauss, too, refers. We are thus far removed from the Anglo-American positions of Baxandall and Alpers who stand for a pragmatic approach to visual culture oriented towards a history of experience, an approach that can be traced back, among others, to Gombrich's scientist study of perception.

Let us return to the prefigured, implied viewer: In *Der Anteil des Betrachters* Kemp deals above all with perspective, frames and framing in 19th-century painting. In his final chapter on "Art Reception and Reception Art" he discusses the reasons for this choice, and it is the conditions of external reception of art in the 19th century that explain his focus on the work's internal conditions of reception: the pictures can no longer rely on a fixed place of reception as they could in churches or at court; artists must reckon with an unpredictable mobility of pictures and thus with unforeseeable visual exchanges between the actual viewers and the painting. At the annual Paris Salon, thousands of paintings were hung close together and with no logic in terms of format or composition. Kemp recounts Géricault's outrage over the hanging of his monumental *Raft of the Medusa* in the Salon of 1819. He successfully insisted on a rehang, but only once the picture had been moved did he realize that this solution made the reception situation worse still (104) – in other words, even the artist, having made the work himself, was not able to know where and how it should hang. The problem is that even "a painting measuring 4.90 x 7.16 metres … is conceived without a concrete notion of its future purpose" (106). The work becomes "placeless" (106), resulting in considerable uncertainty: "If a picture's first appearance, and thus its future existence, were unpredictable, then one could just as well paint to be viewed from close-up or far away, one could emphasize the foreground or treat it vaguely (which was then happening for the first time, in the work of Turner), one's composition could be closed or open." (111) Artists must devise their pictures for an unknown reception situation and this brings into play Diderot's call for a pictorial dramaturgy that seems to be independent of the viewer, which anticipates him without addressing him, behaving instead as if he didn't exist. The painting on which Kemp bases his theory of reception aesthetics thus features historically determined predispositions that support this theory: the autonomy of events within these pictures constitutes the implicit viewer.

In 1989, in the third edition of an introduction to art history,[20] Kemp was given the opportunity to add reception aesthetics to the discipline's canon of methods. In a section on the precepts for reception, he lists the principal "means of structuring" the "inner orientations" by which the viewer becomes "the function of the work": firstly, the connections between objects and people in the picture, their distribution in the pictorial space, "the position that they take toward one another and toward the beholder, their gestures and visual contact"; secondly, the so-called "personal perspective" by which he means those figures who orient the viewer towards the action in the picture; thirdly and fourthly the way the scene is framed, and perspective "in all of its manifestations";[21] and, fifthly, as a new addition, *blanks*, a term from literary theory coined by Wolfgang Iser.[22] Blanks are areas where the picture is incomplete, to be completed within the viewer. Such blanks are intentional, constituting a narrative strategy. By signalling "the absence of a connection"[23] they make space for the viewer's imagination to fill this absence and establish the connection. According to Iser, blanks are "an elementary matrix for the interaction between text and reader",[24] in this case between painting and viewer. In 1985, Kemp applied this model to the example of 19th-century painting.[25]

Let us take a brief look at this case study to see how the transfer works in practice. His approach here is based on the premise "that every work of art is left incomplete, in a precisely focused manner by its maker, in order that it might be brought to completion in and through the beholder." The emphasis here lies on the work's incompleteness being "precisely focused, programmatic or constructive" in character, for only when it is intentional can the blank acquire heuristic significance, meaning in turn that great importance is attached to artistic intention, assuming a causal connection between the

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20   Hans Belting, Heinrich Dilly, Wolfgang Kemp, Willibald Sauerländer, Martin Warnke(eds.), *Kunstgeschichte. Eine Einführung* (1985), third revised and expanded edition (Berlin 1989).

21   Wolfgang Kemp, "Kunstwerk und Betrachter: Der rezeptionsästhetische Ansatz" in: ibid., 240-257: 246-247. Published in English as "The Work of Art and Its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception" in Mark A. Cheetham (ed.), *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge 1998), 180-196: 187-188.

22   See Iser, *Act of Reading*.

23   Ibid., 183.

24   Ibid.

25   Wolfgang Kemp: "Death at Work: A Case Study on Constitutive Blanks in Nineteenth-Century Painting", in *Representations* 10 (Spring 1985), 102-123.

understanding of artistic intention and the truth of interpretation resulting from the recipient's analysis of the blank. Kemp conducts such an analysis of a history painting that is extraordinarily untypical in character: *The Death of Marshall Ney* by Léon Gérôme from 1868. It shows a dead man in dark civilian clothing, lying on his stomach, his head turned towards the viewer, his top hat next to him on a street that runs diagonally from the foreground at the right into the background on the left, lined by a high wall. A group of soldiers is moving away to the left, the officer looks back towards the dead man; between the soldiers disappearing off towards the left-hand edge and the corpse in the foreground to the right lies an unusually wide empty space showing only the street and the raw surface of the wall with its crumbling plaster and graffiti – an area within the picture plane which, against the conventions of history painting at the time, contains no persons involved in the events depicted. The centre of the picture, then, usually the figurative focus of a pictorial narrative, remains empty. Kemp defines this area as a blank that signals the absence of a connection, as Iser defines it, thus obliging the viewer to make the link. In this way, the blank complicates the establishment of a narrative continuum in the picture, thus also making it harder to understand the scene as a whole. The empty area is the blank; from here, our gaze slides "into the picture's depth, or down to the prostrate dead man, and from him onward ... into the perspectival depth of the composition, where a squad of uniformed soldiers is leaving the scene of the action and the picture. Our regard is not, however, pulled into the picture's depth and lost there. Instead it is halted and redirected by the figure of a backward-looking man clothed in black, presumably the adjutant in command of the execution."[26] After a first consideration of the painting, Kemp finds "a compositional schema consisting of three elements presented as ideal types: a blank [the wall]; a participant in the action, more accurately an object of the action [the dead man]; and an element helping to create the picture's perspective and that is the representative of the group of participants in the action [the man looking back]". In the German version of the essay, Kemp refers to the man looking back as a *Perspektivträger* (bearer of perspective), denoting his function of redirecting the viewer's gaze; the man looking back is "an aid to the reception of the picture that has taken the form of a person; he confirms and helps us to grasp the significance of two large blanks."[27] These blanks, the empty space of the wall in the picture and the

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26   Kemp, "Death at Work", 110.
27   Ibid., 112.

space occupied by the viewer in front of the picture, are closely linked via the picture's diagonal axis.

Kemp analyses the construction of this pictorial narrative, whose blank paradoxically brings the action to a standstill. The above-mentioned elements of Gérôme's picture connect "space and time, the area before the picture and the area shown in the picture, the beholder and the depicted scene, blank and intelligible facts".[28] As a precondition for interpretation, Kemp's analysis, which I have only outlined here, follows the movements of the viewer's gaze that are unavoidably directed by aspects of the picture – blank, figures, perspective. These movements do not compare existing reality with the picture as in Gombrich, nor do they primarily register formal structures as in Pächt, and the focus is also not on sociocultural influences as in Baxandall. In Kemp's model, the movements of the viewer's gaze correspond to reading: as they scan the visual data in the painting, they make narrative links and establish plausibilities, just as reading generates coherent sentences and narrative logic.

The way Kemp looks at *The Death of Marshall Ney* is grounded in his visual experience with other contemporary painting; only in this way is he able to identify the peculiarities of this "case" and to decide how to classify the elements of the picture, such as defining the painted wall as a blank. He then uses these specific qualities to arrive at a more general qualification that sees this blank as a symptom of a historical process: for Kemp, the wall, rendered in great detail, is not just a blank in the sense of reception aesthetics, but also "a large fragment of pure painting".[29] It anticipates modernism: "The extensive and effective utilization of blanks by nineteenth-century realism can reach a point where these acquire an autonomy and can thus lead over into modernist art, which interrupts or misdirects communications both within and with the work."[30] This calls for more work than the kind of history painting that puts all of the narrative facts on the table without gaps; here the viewer must "bring together what is unconnected; endure the tensions; determine what is indeterminate".[31]

This added work is measured against the yardstick of a plausible narrative logic. As well as recalling the legacy of Diderot, this begs the question of

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28   Ibid.
29   Ibid., 110.
30   Ibid., 116.
31   Ibid., 117.

whether the method of the implied viewer might be restricted in its applica-
tion to precisely the kind of narrative painting on which its definition is based
– a type of painting which, significantly, is already in crisis as a narrative
genre. The blank as one of the models of immanent structuring of reception
is a symptom of this crisis. One indication of this is the outlook with which
Kemp concludes his analysis in 1988: moving away from painting, he finishes
with the art that perpetuates the tradition of identificatory narrative in the
twentieth century: cinema.

So much for the state of affairs in 1988. By 1994, the situation *in* art history
had already changed. This is made clear by Kemp's review of John Shearman's
Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance.[32] Here, Kemp re-
acts to the shift from artwork to viewer widely seen in the practice of Anglo-
American art history since the 1980s. The review focuses primarily on recep-
tion studies – both on Shearman's practice and on Kemp's own approach,
which he aggressively tries to position within Anglo-American discourse via
this critique.

What, for Kemp, had changed since 1983, 1985 or 1988? With the spread
of viewer-oriented studies, the nature of the conflict had shifted. From for-
malism and iconography, the old rivals within German art history, the focus
had switched to the figure of the viewer – in other words, the dispute was
now taking place *within* reception studies as a methodologically differentiated
sub-discipline. In his review, Kemp argues against Shearman's proposal of the
viewer as *external* to the picture. Shearman's viewer is the "more engaged spec-
tator", referring to a growing involvement of the Renaissance viewer with the
picture's subject and narrative, and to the "complicity of the spectator in the
very function of the work of art" on which the artist could count. This sounds

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32   Wolfgang Kemp, "*Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* by John
     Shearman" in *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (1994), 364-367. Shearman offers a version of
     this practice that is applied pragmatically to a central field of the discipline, the art
     of the Italian Renaissance, clearly setting itself apart from the more recent influences
     from social history, feminism, psychoanalysis and semiotics, which Shearman refers to
     as "pseudo-iconography". This distinction is interesting insofar as it turns against the
     very influences that laid the ground within art history for a rapprochement with visual
     culture studies. Surprisingly these influences are associated with the discipline's "en-
     emy within" against which Shearman's viewer focus is directed, i.e. iconography; this is
     interesting because visual culture studies, that was in the process of establishing itself
     as an academic discipline when the book was published, was by definition oriented
     towards visuality and against iconography as an outdated approach of art history.

like an extension of Baxandall's concept of visual skills shared by artist and viewer and which are considered as the medium of the picture. Shearman's aim is to particularize this viewer, leading to a clear shift within the reception situation (as modelled by Kemp) towards the external viewer and the subjective factors shaping her reception.

Kemp accuses Shearman of failing to distinguish between the two strands of reception theory, i.e. the implied viewer on the one hand and, on the other, the external viewer and the external conditions of reception within which artwork and viewer face each other (although it remains unclear whether this distinction is also valid in the Anglo-American context). Kemp makes it clear that for him, the problem lies in the shift to the external viewer. His reasoning is revelatory concerning the subsequent relationship between German art historians and visual culture studies: the external viewer is the "new" subject of art history. Or rather, the many new subjects of art history and above all of visual culture studies, as they had emerged from the critical and political discourses of difference in the 1970s and '80s.[33] Or, in Kemp's more polemical version: "... the recipient as woman, as man, as child, as native, as alien". With this last item on his list, he refers to the then high-profile "ethnically other" subjects, doing so discretely and with no racist implications; gay-lesbian subjects are also treated discretely, not being mentioned at all. Here, I cannot but voice my suspicion that, faced with the growing diversity of viewer subjects and subjectivities, Kemp pre-emptively advanced (or retreated, depending on one's position and viewpoint) into the picture, where the implied viewer is supposed to be at home and where his reception aesthetics, guided by the European Enlightenment model of Diderot, has its source.

In this way, Kemp also links the issue of the gender of the "more engaged spectator" back to the implied viewer, helped by the semiotic model of Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson who classify the relationship between viewer and

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33   In the years 1994-1997, *The Art Bulletin* hosted a broad debate on the fundamentals of the discipline under the series title *A Range of Critical Perspectives*. These texts on the new subjects of art history included: Lowery Stokes Sims, "Subject/Subjectivity and Agency in the Art of African Americans" in *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (1994), 587-590, and Ikem Stanley Okoye, "Tribe and Art History" in *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 4 (1996), 610-615. On this discussion, see also: Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (ed.), *The Subjects of Art History. Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective* (Cambridge 1998).

work in terms of "degrees of access to codes"[34] – which can also be read as a version of the implied viewer, since the "codes" in question are found by the viewer in the work. Kemp deploys this model against the two conventional approaches commonly used in art-historical gender studies, both of which he considers inadequate: one seeks gender in the content (his example here: the female nude), the other in the addressee (his example here: a convent).

Kemp also criticizes Shearman's treatment of the external conditions of access to art as too undifferentiated, before finding a way of linking these, too, with the immanence of the artwork: works were conceived with a mind to these conditions. Ultimately, then, the work provides information about all external conditions of reception, both viewer and context, by, I would say, "incorporating" them. What Kemp doesn't mention here is what Bal and Bryson call the institutionalized "narratives"[35] of art history. These narratives also form the basis of Kemp's reception aesthetics: the insistence with which he repeatedly links the art/viewer relationship back to the artwork itself may avoid the fiction of an "ideal viewer", but it does lead to a figure that nonetheless ontologizes the artwork by incorporating the viewer into the work. This is made clear by another "symptom" in Kemp's model of the implied viewer, as mentioned above, namely its omission of the situatedness of the viewer herself. At this key point, then, the hermeneutic circle (and Kemp bases his approach not only on Diderot's model of the theatre but also on Gadamer's hermeneutics) is broken.

The way Kemp positions it, this reception aesthetics is part of (and sometimes the only instrument in) the toolkit of art history as interpretative apparatus.[36] Its roots in Diderot's aesthetics of narrative imagination and in the literary theory of narratology also point to a significant limitation of its field of application: fine art as narrative in the broadest sense. Anyone dealing with the art of the 20th century, on the other hand, will often find this toolkit unfit for use. And, as Svetlana Alpers has shown, the same is true of the art of the 17th century, whenever the focus is not on a picture's narrative structures. Finally, the implied reader/viewer remains a deictic function

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34   Here Kemp quotes Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History" in *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (1991), 174-208: 186; under the heading "Receivers", Bal and Bryson also devote a section to Kemp's reception aesthetics (184f.).

35   For example, the "totalized narrative of the-man-and-his-work", ibid., 182.

36   In *Der Anteil des Betrachters* (1983) and *Der Betrachter ist im Bild* (1985), Kemp systematically demonstrates its reach with a Hegelian totalising claim, while his own specific interests remain strangely unarticulated.

pointing to narrative and thus to the creation of a narrative continuum, but not to breaking/interrupting it, or to any of the other strategies of irony, montage or tautology encountered in the arts of the 20th century. Paradoxically, reception aesthetics emerged at the same time as these artistic practices, in fact only becoming possible as a result of their reflexive turn. But this art in particular, especially that of the 1960s and '70s, reflects its own reception, integrating it conceptually into its practice; and this is what leads to radical strategies of breaking with narrative continuum and of anti-narrative tautology. One can thus ask whether Kemp would still uphold his own verdict that the art of modernism interrupts communication in and with the work. For this verdict implies that communication is synonymous with narrative coherence within the object – a very narrow definition of communicability. In addition, it ignores the field of association within the viewer's imagination which is capable of linking each detail of perception with a story.