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Art and Criticism

“Art” and “criticism” will here serve as launch pads for a discussion about art criticism and as an object for analysis of its historical roots and cultural presence, and will also provide social and political context for their meaning. As such, these brief opening sentences cannot do more than point out some observations of a general nature and make a few critical (and affirmative) remarks as regards their present situation. In the seventies and eighties of the previous century, journals such as *Art in America* and *Flash Art* presented and discussed the most recent and most relevant art of the epoch. Even more: it could be claimed that the art discussed and presented in such periodicals most often formed the very backbone of the current art and through it, of art criticism. In many respects, they can still serve as examples of criticism at its best. Such cases could also be supplemented by the somewhat different *American Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, *The Scandinavian Journal of Aesthetics*, and the more general (socially involved and radical) *New Left Review*, with this last journal being perceived in the eyes of many as not critical at all (or at least not related to art criticism). Of course, this is but one part of criticism of Anglo-American art, the other part consisting of a myriad of journals, reviews, and other periodicals in which occasional or regular views on art are presented and which can be long or short and of a theoretical or more quotidian nature. Art criticism is part and parcel of what is simultaneously general and particular criticism.

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In the 1970s and 1980s art criticism was a fairly marginal phenomenon, as the very discourse from which it arose and which it used was essentially adverse to traditional criticism and was turned against traditional criticism such as that of Baudelaire. If Baudelaire’s art criticism stood for one type, i.e. the traditional kind of art critical discourse, then the other was the one that dominated the new type of theoretical discourse (“the French” style). Yet another cross-section emerged, namely between politically partisan criticism, on the one hand, and culturally or artistically involved criticism, on the other. One was avant-garde

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(such as that of Hans-Magnus Enzensberger) and the other traditional (such as numerous writings by various reviewers across the European continent).

It was in Great Britain and the United States that the most influential forms of artistic reflection emerged, with France and Germany following suit. Soon, such critical spirit spread to other parts of the globe, while Continental criticism lost much of its cultural identity: it was simply swallowed up by the newly emergent theory of structuralism and Critical Theory – a position that, to some extent, it still occupies today.

For a long time, criticism in general and art criticism as a major part of cultural criticism retained more of their “marginality” than when compared with criticism and art criticism in the political and social sense. Georges Gusdorf even claimed that romanticism only existed in England, France, and Italy, with its other instances being merely late offshoots of the central movement.¹

Let us return to art criticism. Both European and American art critics today form the central segment of the structure of the global network or the edifice of contemporary art. Today too, art criticism is an important if not always also an essential constituent of the edifice of art as such, or – more precisely – it acts as (or forms) an unavoidable and omnipresent segment of art, where its various surroundings can be more or less important for our understanding, impression, and expression of art. By making such claims I am universalising British and American criticism (with Terry Smith being another author and curator worth mentioning) and its multifarious endeavours, turning them into the essence of art criticism as such, and implying that we are mostly still referring primarily to British and American criticism of art as the prevalent contemporary forms of criticism. The same would be true of criticism in French, German, and other cultures – even though their dealings with art were to a substantial extent determined by the Anglo-American influence. There exists another reason for such choice and limitation as to the lack of Continental criticism (or even art): there is very little contemporary art criticism that would today focus on the national or regional from these two perspectives. Since this volume assigns an important place to contemporary Chinese art criticism, it is worth noting already here that contemporary criticism in China in essence does not differ much from its West-

¹ See Georges Gusdorf, *Fondements du savoir romantique*, Payot, Paris 1982.

ern simile. Let me close these paragraphs by reiterating that at least today art criticism forms an extended integral realm of political criticism as such, and it retroactively shapes art's past and therefore its future.

As Terry Eagleton points out in his study on *The Function of Criticism* (1984), "modern criticism was born out of a struggle against the absolutist state."² It represented a part of the "bourgeois public sphere."³ In this sense, the early criticism carried a more central social and political function and by far exceeded the contemporary social ineffectiveness of the plethora of critical discourses that, contrary to their beginnings, shared random topics and methods.

In European history the early criticism was cultural.⁴ In the words of Eagleton,

the examination of literary texts is one relatively marginal moment of a broader enterprise which explores attitudes to servants and the rules of gallantry, the status of women and familial affections, the purity of the English language, the character of conjugal love, the psychology of the sentiments and the laws of the toilet.⁵

Today (also due to its general character), criticism concerns everything, including art but most certainly not only art: "Everyone is called upon to participate in criticism."⁶ Therefore a critic "is merely a speaker from the general audience and formulates ideas that could be thought by anyone."⁷ In the late eighteenth century criticism becomes explicitly political. "Criticism, then, has become a locus of political contention rather than a terrain of cultural consensus."⁸ At approximately this time the central term used to designate a cultural critic is a "man of letters." (In the middle of the nineteenth century he stands in the place of the Continental "intellectual.") Yet another step was made in the direction of the unity of social thought and of language when the latter became a "discipline" in the universities.⁹ The founding "of English as a university 'discipline'"

² Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, Verso, London 1996, 2005, p. 107.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

also entailed the professionalisation of literary studies, which was quite alien to the amateur outlook. Critics wrote for very different publications and for very different reasons. The same could be said in past decades of criticism whose focus was on new media, namely radio and television, not to mention even more recent means of audiovisual communication and production.

Until the 1960s a constant characteristic of art criticism was that it ignored aesthetics, “theory”, and philosophy. The situation changed approximately at the time of Arthur Danto’s writings on Andy Warhol and the Brillo boxes in the 1960s: as Danto observed, in the early 1960s artists discovered philosophy while philosophy slowly discovered art. Michael Fried, the well-known pre-Danto American art critic from the 1960s, admitted that among the philosophers or aestheticians in the 1960s he only read Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Lukács, thereby demonstrating that philosophy was not really very important for either art or for art criticism – philosophical truth was but truth and knowledge to be ignored without a loss – it was there to be disregarded, it was a false, an inessential and a borrowed ingredient of art criticism. Baudelaire’s writings *Critique d’art* from the middle of the eighteenth century were very much similar.¹⁰ More recent twentieth-century criticism of art relied on notions such as “literalism” and “objecthood”, while Clement Greenberg referred to “opticality”.

In Fried’s view, the real change and challenge in theory relating to criticism took place with the arrival of French theory – structuralism and post-structuralism – in the United States and United Kingdom. Then theory became a “must” also in art criticism. At the same time, this change signified a massive change in the nature of art and in its relation to, and dependence on, theory. “Reflection” in the sense of theoretical reflection (and as opposed to phenomenology) became the catchword of the day (and this is the way it is used by structuralism and post-structuralism). An illustrative example of such personally-involved criticism (very much resembling contemporary impressionistic criticism) was not only the art criticism of Charles Baudelaire but also that of Guillaume Apollinaire. A critic of such type would have digested hundreds and hundreds works and knew how to create opinions and judgments even on the basis of scant and meagre facts; often they revealed their creativity by recreating lacunae and un-

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¹⁰ See Charles Baudelaire, *Critique d’art. Suivi de Critique musicale*, Gallimard, Paris 1992.

noticeable creations that just were there although they could not be sensed and noted without their author being a *connoisseur* in every way.

While the early Roland Barthes – the one from the fifties – still referred to “criticism” and “critique”, with reference to Racine and similar authors, with the rise of structuralism criticism lost its importance, and drifted into irrelevance where criticism’s subjective note mirrored the related experiential feature of criticism, which therefore lost its personal stamp, to be replaced by the objectivity offered by the “science” of literature and of discourse. The experiential type of criticism found its incomparable example in the mentioned Baudelaire – whose criticism was involved in everything from painting to “*dandysme*” – a topic (and method) picked up later by Walter Benjamin, whose discourse, too, resembled the “phenomenological approach,” as Michel Foucault disdainfully characterised such method in the English edition of *The Order of Things* (1970). This specificity determined the “phenomenological approach” as distinguished from the “theory of discursive practice” as promoted by Foucault. It was such Foucauldian discourse that Michael Fried saw as overcoming the discourse of the type he shared with traditional art criticism.

In the recent past – in the last hundred years – different artists, authors, and art critics have defined the purpose of art criticism in different ways. Hal Foster for example, claimed that the central category was and remained “the criterion”:

Not long ago “criticality” became a value in its own right (a fetish, if you like), which is another reason why it became a bad object for many artists and critics. This criterion should be seen in the contexts of others that preceded it. In the early 1940s critics such as Clement Greenberg advanced “quality” as the key value in modernist art: to be so judged, a work in the present had to stand the test of comparison to the best work of the past. As Greenberg averred more than once, this criterion did not promote a break with tradition; on the contrary, it was an attempt to preserve such continuity. Then in the early 1960s artists like Donald Judd claimed “interest” as a criterion. As an avant-gardist value, it moved to challenge other criteria, such as “quality,” that preceded it, and it did not necessarily aim to preserve tradition or even to refer to it; often just the opposite. Next, in the early 1980s a group of artists and critics asserted “criticality” as the central value;

“quality” seemed elitist, an “interest” not political enough. One could argue that the value of “self-criticism” connected all these criteria.¹¹

From its very beginnings in England, art criticism was an important segment of the public sphere: “When the figure of the critic emerged in the Paris Salons of the early eighteenth century, he not only assumed ‘the point of view of the public visitor,’ but also created, in writing about the art on view, a representation that helped different groups to become self-aware as a public.”¹² This thesis – developed by Jürgen Habermas in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) and then applied in the art criticism of both Habermas and Hal Foster – found a fervent supporter in Terry Eagleton. According to Eagleton, the public sphere developed in the Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was poised between state and civil society. It comprised a “realm of social institutions – clubs, journals, coffee houses, periodicals – in which private individuals assemble for the free, equal interchange of reasonable discourse, thus welding themselves into a relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the form of powerful political force.”¹³

It would be erroneous to expect criticism of art to remain unchanged from its first modern appearance to our times. Instead, criticism of art has undergone enormous transformations, most of which have had to do with changes in its subject matter, namely art. We have to underline this last statement, for while possessing a life of its own, art criticism is nonetheless essentially linked to its subject – art – and it is the transformations of the latter that affect its meta-narrative – which art criticism in essence is.

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Furthermore, we should not expect art criticism to remain the same when regarded from a synchronic perspective. This means that at the same time and sometimes even in the same culture or on the same territory one kind of art criticism differs from another kind of art criticism in another community. We have in mind cases where age, social position, ethnic background, education, and language skill (such as in émigré and immigrant cultures) determine specific characteristics of the art and consequently of the art criticism. An important

¹¹ Hal Foster, *Bad New Days. Art, Criticism, Emergency*, Verso, London 2015, pp. 173–74.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 122–23.

¹³ Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 8.

aspect of the art criticism of art is its link to the “cultural empires” (as Richard Shusterman has called them, such as those of the French, British, Americans, or Germans), with the smaller cultures and criticism of art therein forming relatively independent and self-enclosed wholes.

The development of art criticism was accompanied by the appearance of an art market, a situation in which art critics served as experts advising rich bourgeois which works to buy. Literary criticism preceded art criticism – mainly because the public or private exhibition of works of art emerged later than the publication of books, articles, or poems.

But, finally, what is art criticism? According to Wikipedia it is the “discussion or evaluation of visual art.”¹⁴ We see how visual art took over the whole realm of art criticism.

In extraordinary circumstances – such as those of a social and political revolution, for instance the October Revolution – other priorities were ascribed to art than those that were of importance in countries with a parliamentary democracy where art was related to issues of taste, the essence of the sensuous, the beautiful and the sublime, etc., and not to politics, ideology, etc. Also, what was at stake was not the financial success of a work or an artist, nor his or her originality within the extant and generally accepted system of art, but the propaganda or political message of a picture, its socially critical or glorifying capacity, and its power to change people’s minds. Even if Jean-Paul Sartre claimed that, contrary to literature, no picture has ever changed people’s political persuasion, this is not entirely true, starting with Picasso’s “Guernica”.

A succinct description of the role of art in conflictual times was offered by Mao Zedong in 1943: “In the world today, all culture or literature and art belongs to a definite class and party and has a definite political line.”¹⁵ In this statement Mao closely followed Lenin, who in the essay “What Is to Be Done?” (1902) claimed that there is no “third way” or “middle ground” when it comes to ideology:

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_criticism.

¹⁵ Mao Zedong, in: *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art.” A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1980, p. 75.

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses, the *only* choice is this: either the bourgeois or the socialist ideology, with the latter being developed by the Party as the collective subject of history. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a “third” ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence “to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way*, means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.”¹⁶

It is therefore understandable that the two political systems – socialism and capitalism – differed also when it came to art criticism. Today when we speak of art criticism or the art market we usually have in mind Western art and its market, as well as its networks, value systems, and the ways in which these function. The only well-known exceptions to this rule may have been Russian Formalism and similar movements (and which later became the basis for structuralism and post-structuralism).

Art criticism is only a segment of the whole range of activities that appeared for the first time in history in these past two or three centuries. We are here referring to educational programs in various schools, universities, art schools and academies of fine art, visual culture, design, etc., as well as galleries, museums, collections, art magazines and other specialised publications such as books on art history, even the activity of auction houses – and so on.

Let us look at art criticism from the standpoint of an art critic: this is usually someone who has not planned such a career but who became an art critic by coincidence, by being an art lover, which also means that he or she must have had an affinity for the art and artists.

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In fact, such a feature may be the essential characteristic of someone devoted to art: he or she is in love with the subject. This banal but important point was recently made by the Cuban-Spanish art critic Gerardo Mosquera in 2018, who in 2018 wore a sentence to this effect on his T-shirt.

¹⁶ Lenin, *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1973, p. 48.

Today, art critics may appear to be uninfluential people, with most of cultural power finding its place among curators, government officials, etc. This was not always true: if we look at some of the past American art critics, such as Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, or Arthur Danto, then one discerns the enormous power, influence, and finally, responsibility each of them had. Such critics shaped public taste and indirectly or directly determined the trends, interpretations, contents, techniques, and styles of artworks. In recent decades, when art criticism started to border on art theory, and, also, when art was no longer representational, the art theorist was to some extent replaced by the art critic. This signals a diminution of the role of the critic, and the entry of the theorist into various art worlds, and reminds us again of Michael Fried's observation about French theory. "Literary theory, in the forms in which we now know it, is a child of the social and political convulsions of the 1960s."¹⁷ The same statement also applies to art criticism.

In this regard, Elizabeth Bruss makes an insightful observation (which should not be necessarily limited to literature): "An increase of theoretical activity [...] arises whenever the function of criticism is itself in doubt. Theory, that is, does not emerge at just any historical moment; it comes into being when it is both possible and necessary."¹⁸

In the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth, art criticism was an important segment of the edifice called "art". At the turn of the previous century, Viennese art history developed; in the 1920s and 1930s aesthetics and a whole spectrum of various theories emerged or were strengthened (including psychoanalysis and Marxism). This process was accelerated in the post-World War II period (from the 1950s to the 1970s), giving rise to unusual and unexpected combinations of various disciplines: psychoanalysis (Jacques Lacan), structural linguistics (Ferdinand de Saussure, Algirdas Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov), various kinds of Marxism (or "historical materialism"), anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss), ethnography, deconstruction, New History (Michel Foucault, Hayden White), New Art History (Norman Bryson), etc., etc. These new methodologies and disciplines brought together very disparate theories, epistemologies, and authors. At that time, one other activity was slowly drifting into obliv-

¹⁷ Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

ion, namely aesthetics. At its best and at its worst, this discipline was typical of the time, as it was: generalising, universalising, with limited knowledge of contemporary art, and determined not to descend into the uncertain waters of qualitative evaluation and obviously very academic, to a large extent referring to the “Paris School” and what has often also been called “Modernism”. One reason for such behaviour was the “positivist,” “scientific” (*wissenschaftlich*), and “objective” approach, which most certainly made writing less subjective (for it was written from a temporal distance). The other reason was the methodology of the then dominant kind of art history, namely the Vienna School of Art History (1847–1918), which around 1900 established a normative framework with which to gauge the quality of artworks. The guiding developmental criterion was style: the art historical style that was retained from one period to another was considered a sign of qualitative development. Contrariwise, art that died off and had no continuation in the ensuing history was regarded as irrelevant for the further development of art. In the history of literature this criterion did not exist. A problem associated with this art history was that the method it used ceased to be valid after the Renaissance. While this was a big problem in past decades, in recent years it has been overcome by a more eclectic application of various art histories. Also, as we have mentioned, some two decades ago there also emerged the “new art history”, which attempted to bridge the gap between the Vienna School and contemporary theories, as well as between art and its context.

Traditionally, firm barriers existed between art history and other disciplines. Thus presentation, description, evaluation, and comparison with other artworks occurred between two extremes, neither of which offered judgments of taste: that of art criticism and that of aesthetics (interpreted as philosophy of art), with art history being limited to a recent or somewhat more distant past (i.e. a few decades, perhaps a century ago). What has happened in the last few decades is that “art theory” has stepped between artworks and the public, with this art theory encompassing both aesthetics and so-called “contemporary” art history. Since these two types of theoretic discourse intervened, they have to an important extent taken the place and function of art criticism. Today they both function as descriptive and analytical tools but not as evaluative means: art criticism no longer evaluates art, nor do aesthetics and art history, for they too have limited their discourse to analytic descriptions with the help of which they situate an artwork, the *oeuvre* of an artist, or a trend within a broader framework, be it temporal or cultural, in its context.

As mentioned, after World War II all kinds of art criticism were strongly influenced by various strands of the social sciences and humanities, these ranging from deconstruction, Marxism, formalism, and psychoanalysis, to Critical Theory. The result was a strong ingredient of theory in any kind of criticism. Criticism became divided into two competing currents: (a) the theoretical and philosophical one and (b) criticism resting on empirical knowledge and even on the conscious and intentional ignorance of theory. Although this bifurcation is still present, it is fair to conclude that today the “theoretical” and philosophical strand of criticism (whether in literature or art) has gained the upper hand and that the more empirically oriented criticism has moved to the background, except perhaps in cases of popular media. Today, as in the past, both art and literary criticism also serve educational and commercial purposes.

In the art and literary criticism from some decades ago we could still distinguish a few different approaches. The main ones were: (1) autobiographical, (2) ideological, (3) deconstructive, (4) psychoanalytic, etc. Biographical criticism attempted to explain a work of art or literature on the basis of the artist’s biography. I am referring here partly to facts from the artist’s life and to the “atmosphere,” favourite motifs, the general subject matter, and the like. Furthermore, if a seventeenth-century Dutch painter depicted the Dutch countryside with a windmill, this could tell us something about the environment that he or she grew up in – or it could simply tell us something about the taste of his clients.

Ideological and political criticism is today mostly a thing of the past but it flourished in the first half of the twentieth century, when its roots lay in the tradition of critical realism. In the most banal way, the question usually raised in the face of such criticism was: “What did the artist want to say?” If the critic was standing in front of a Chinese painting with lots of red colour he could guess that the painting was supposed to express or evoke communism and happiness. The other answer to the question of what an artist wanted to say with his or her picture would be that which struck us as its subject matter. Here we were bound to gather some contextual knowledge. As Mark Twain remarked a long time ago, a picture of a woman on a hay wagon could be interpreted as “Mary on her way to the country fair” or as “Queen Marie-Antoinette being taken to the guillotine.”

Deconstructive criticism “deletes” all external knowledge about an artwork. This means deleting autobiographical, contextual, historical, and other infor-

mation and focusing only on the work as a closed work from which all data has been erased. In this case, the critic approached a work as if it were undergoing a phenomenological reduction.

Many other kinds of art criticism could be mentioned, but let us limit ourselves to the ones just pointed out. Usually art criticism combines different approaches or methods, a procedure that is today much more common than it was some decades ago when the border between various critical approaches was almost insurmountable.

So far we have mostly made use of two contemporary or recent authors involved in art criticism – Terry Eagleton and Hal Foster. The former is based on British Marxism while the latter focuses on radical (or “leftist”) viewpoints that find their support in the Continental theoretical and philosophical tradition, starting with the French one. This, then, is another division of criticism of art – one that overcomes the early division illustrated by Eagleton and Foster.

To us today the problem of art criticism appears to be twofold:

(1) In much of contemporary art classical value judgments are no longer applicable. Since this is one of the paramount topics of criticism (if not also *the* main one), its marginalisation has caused a profound questioning of the *raison d'être* of criticism as such. Since evaluation has ceased to be a key critical criterion when confronted with an artwork, new, although less persuasive, criteria have emerged: reading, for example, was recently proclaimed to be a novel form of criticism. We thus find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: criticism whose aim was originally to express value judgments – to separate art from non-art – has been stripped of this criterion, which today is often not even mentioned. Also, the extra-artistic criteria (political and those erected on originality) are today often the central ones.

(2) The other problem with artistic, literary, and other criticism is that philosophy has made previous tasks of criticism irrelevant or marginal, thereby bringing into question the very essence of criticism. The described situation is today characteristic of Western countries and culture. When we say “philosophy”, we most often mean aesthetics interpreted as philosophy of art.

Criticism is strongly dependent on the situation in various realms of the humanities and social sciences. Thus the development of deconstruction in literary criticism (Paul de Man, for example) or in architecture (Bernard Tschumi & Jacques Derrida) has been dependent upon the developments in prose, poetry, architecture, etc. The same applies to the phenomenological tradition (its presence having diminished since the 1960s). In the less central humanities some traditional forms of criticism live on. Fine and visual art criticism is today most often a combination of theoretical positions and empirical knowledge. What this means becomes clear when we consider that Arthur Danto was simultaneously considered to be the most important American aesthician (meaning “philosopher of art”) and the most influential art critic.

In recent decades the “pictorial turn” has invested visual arts with a relevance and position without equal in any other genre.¹⁹

It is quite obvious that in China, too, an enormous visual turn has been occurring since the 1990s. For this reason, other genres have become secondary and sometimes also marginalised. With the pictorial turn, literature and the written word have drifted into the background, causing the image to come to the foreground. It could be claimed that the first half of the previous century was a time of literary culture that assigned an important place also to literary criticism. In the 1980s the so-called pictorial turn caused literature to lose significance within the framework of art and for it to be replaced, as the artistic paradigm, by visual art.

This volume brings together essays that mostly concern European and Chinese criticism of art and visual culture, showing their common features – these latter being revealed if in no other manner than by the bridge between the nationality and the national identity of the artist, on the one hand, and the theoretical tradition of the critic, on the other. Some of the other essays focus on general issues of art criticism – on Chinese cinema for example, which has become, just like the Chinese fine arts and avant-garde art of the 1980s and 1990s, an outstanding instance of new poetics and a novel way of expressing reality and fiction. In this

¹⁹ The described situation is characteristic of the First World. In many other countries (China included), the importance ascribed to literature has been retained. It remains to be seen whether this is a passing phenomenon or part of an unavoidable global trend.

respect, the combination of Slovenian and Chinese art critics and theorists and their frequent subject matter in this collection relate to another topic, namely Slovenian and European cinema proper, for in both cultures it was the “visual” and the “pictorial” turn that represented the first step out of the communist universe and into the postmodern period of the 1990s.

I have mentioned that art criticism from different cultures and countries relates mostly to the cultural and artistic artefacts of a certain country or culture rather than to art criticism as detached from the former. Such is also the developed stage of the relationship between various developed, interactive French and British cultures of criticism. Already criticism and art (literature) such as that of Baudelaire and E. A. Poe today reveal the proximity and shared cultural ingredients of the two groups of art critics in these two language-based communities.

The early distance between the recent French and the more distant British criticism of the twentieth century can hardly be imagined today: while the themes, issues, and characters may continue to be similar today, the whole series of events, objects, and phenomena on each side of the American/British cultural/linguistic divide retains the irreducible difference between the two, thereby leading to the permanent resurrection of the difference that turns Poe’s earlier homogenous stain of the Poe/Baudelaire sameness into an increasingly broad designation as being an entity covered by the term “art”. In the nineteenth century critics such as Baudelaire followed what a century later turned into the abyss called individual artistic genres, but one that did not erase the separation of traditional art and criticism from the newly arisen “French” tradition in painting and art criticism. The division into the traditional art and criticism and the newly introduced “French” tradition in criticism reproduced the now strongly entrenched separation into “science”, language, and the avant-garde. In this sense, contemporary art criticism has turned a decisive page in the art historical book of the twentieth-century tradition. It remains to be seen whether the “French” discourse and style will turn out to have a pivotal influence on the global change from the previous tradition, or whether it will reveal its “sameness” and essential continuity with what appeared to be a clear break, thereby remaining within the boundaries of tradition.