

***BARBARIANS
IN THE
SALON***

3 Minor Art Movements Of The 20th Century

Roy Lisker
Art Critic, Cultural Historian

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About the Author:

Over two decades ROY LISKER has earned a reputation for being a perceptive writer on many aspects of the cultural history of Western Civilization. His articles have appeared in a wide variety of publications including Les Temps Modernes, Ebauche, Anvil, Arts in Transition, European Arts, Gnomon, Technology Review, Zukunft, Hexachord Notes, Lotus, Chiaroscuro, Modern Opera, and others.

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Roy Lisker

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Preface

It is indeed with the greatest pleasure that I agreed to write the preface for this small collection of essays from the endlessly prolific pen of Mr. Lisker: artist, philosopher, historian, poet. A vast, as of yet largely

unchronicled chapter in the history of the arts of our times awaits the labors of the historians: the story of the minor movements in the Art of the Western World in the 20th century. Every college student knows, or should know, about Surrealism , Symbolism, Cubism, Existentialism. A major in art history will know something well about Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism or even Orphism. Yet, how many of us can name even one Disintegrationist painter? One Alienist or Divisionist writer ? One Dualist composer? The reader of this informed work will realize that Mr. Lisker is performing a double service for us .Apart from rescuing many a deserving artist of our time from undeserved obscurity,he has, through his meticulous research, laid the cornerstone for the overdue revision of established notions concerning the dominant aesthetic values of our epoch, revision which, echoing ever so faintly today. is destined to swell in the coming decades to a veritable tidal wave.

Stanley Feldt
Artistic Director
Kresge Endowment
for the Arts and Humanities

Disintegrationism

I. A Brief History of the Disintegrationist Movement

THE basic ideas of Disintegrationism were around for 80 years before anyone ever thought of calling himself a disintegrationist. In 1884, Max Schniel, a German engraver living in Cologne, was already producing artworks that can be considered disintegrationist. All of the essential features of disintegrationism are to be found in them, in particular the abandonment of serial order as a structural postulate and its replacement by a hermetic scheme of implied accentuation which, though clearly evoking realistic associations, is not bound to the physical object.

Schniel (1860-1915) cannot however lay claim to being the founder of the disintegrationist school. He was not successful in the promotion of his philosophy, and was just beginning to gain recognition as an artist when he died on the Western Front. A few of his etchings and lithographs to be seen hanging on the walls of museums in Hamburg and Dusseldorf; the remainder are in private collections.¹

Tendencies towards disintegrationism can also be found in the works of many artists who are better known, many of whom, were they alive today, would probably have little sympathy for disintegrationist ideas. Forms and structures bearing the decided markings of a disintegrationist sensibility can be identified in the

¹The absurd character of the art market is revealed once again by the fact that a Schniel engraving was auctioned off last winter at Sotheby's for \$100,000. This remarkable change in fortune comes too late to do him any good, but who knows what caprice will gain the ascendancy in another year or so, relegating a fine artist like Schniel back to the dustbins of oblivion?

canvases of Cezanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Molleaux, Matisse, Hunt, Kandinsky, Munch, Tchetchevitch, Szabo and Arp.

The highly original, if not outright unorthodox, colorism of much disintegrationist painting harkens back to the Renaissance, Giorgione, Titian, Zurbarán and Francesco de Cossa, to Byzantium, the Etruscans, and even the clay pottery of the Oaxaca culture of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

In poetry we must take note of Mallarmé who, above all others, must be deemed the father of disintegrationist verse.

The first self-consciously conceived disintegrationist works were created by the multi-faceted artist who invented the term 'disintegrationism', who even today serves to epitomize the movement: Frank Zackler (1925-1985). It was Zackler who, on April 4th, 1970, outlined his *Disintegrationist Programme* to a circle of his students and associates at the Art Students League in New York City, while seated together around the bar of the Empire Hotel at 67th and Broadway. At this stage his best known collaborators were Reese Iakonnen, the sculptor, and the dancer Natalya Simon.

The first version of the *Disintegrationist Manifesto* was published in October, 1975, appearing in a short-lived arts publication called *ARTS IN REBELLION*. Although more than a dozen names were appended to the foot of the document, no-one doubts that it was written by the unruly, disordered yet brilliant disintegrationist poet, Ewald Lieb.

Once again, it was Frank Zackler who, in September of 1973, organized the first exhibition entirely devoted to disintegrationist art. The story of how it came about is peculiarly American. Zackler had tried for many years without success to put together such an exhibition in New York City. At that time one could not hope to find a gallery manager who was willing to take a chance on a young, little known and

controversial movement in the visual arts. Pop Art was still drawing its following, and as the Vietnamese war drew to its close, many of the galleries, (knowing that in a few years there would no longer be any market for it), were bringing out and promoting their stocks of 'committed' art. Disintegrationism does not lend itself to messages, whether political or religious, being primarily concerned with abstract issues of form.²

Tim Arlen, a friend of Zackler's from their school days at the Art Institute of Chicago, a commercial illustrator and animation cartoonist living in Hollywood, was just then opening an exhibition of his framed animation stills in the Phoenix Gallery in Beverly Hills. Arlen, without any aspirations himself for a career in the Fine Arts , was sympathetic to disintegrationist ideas, and it was on his own initiative that he withdrew his own exhibition a month ahead of time so that the disintegrationists could have their show.

The first disintegrationist exhibition featured the works of 15 artists in a broad range of media : oils, gouache, watercolor, collage, stained glass, bronze, plastic, leather and stone. By an unfortunate error in judgement they entitled their exhibition "Les Quinze". This alienated that part of the Los Angeles art market hostile to foreign art. In fact, more than 80% of the artists were native born. ³

²The question is perhaps academic. One could argue that "Guernica" might be considered a Cubist painting, although the formal aspects of Cubism have been so far relegated to the background to allow for the powerful expression of the political message as to become scarcely relevant. Still, Picasso could not have painted Guernica as we know it had he not had the experience of his Cubist stage.

What politically committed work we do find in the Disintegrationist school is primarily in the domain of poetry. We will come to that in a moment.

³The only two foreign artists were Max Schwabach, Swiss, and Zaid Haftali, Lebanese. The others were Frank Zackler, Reese Iakonnen, Miriam Goad, Abe Selkin, Dick Schwartz, Bertha Wentz-Heubler, Ramon Morales, Don Neighbors, Bonnie MacNeil, John Dekker, Joan Ames, Bob Kelly and Lyle Jackson.

The show was neither well publicized nor well attended. However two events occurred crucial to the development of the Movement: Frank Zackler's monumentalist painting "Rosinante", a virtuoso decomposition of an equestrian figure according to disintegrationist principles, was purchased for the Toronto Museum; and Leslie Hutchins, art critic for the Los Angeles Times, devoted an entire column of the Times to the exhibition at the Phoenix and the ideas of the disintegrationist school. Within less than a week, major newspapers across the country were promoting disintegrationism as the arts phenomenon of the last quarter of the 20th century. "Les Quinze" returned to New York with dozens of offers from major galleries on the Upper East Side. At long last the Movement was launched.

II. Disintegrationism: Ideology and Praxis

"Disintegrationism", to quote Zackler, "starts from the mysterious capacity which exists in art alone of suggesting deeper levels of meaning by the avoidance of explicit statements about them."

In the Disintegrationist Manifesto, Ewald Lieb makes essentially the same point, amplifying it substantively. though with greater ambiguity:

"The disintegration of the mechanical line[.....] opens up new horizons of meaning latent in the object, horizons kept in bondage by the banal constraints of formal delineation. We owe a great deal to the new mathematics of Topology, which has led the way for the arts, giving us a firm foundation beneath our instinctual gropings. We now have at our

disposal the tools for the conceptualization of the ideology required for the expression of the fundamental crisis of the Twentieth Century[.....]If I were obliged to summarize the key notion of Disintegrationism in a few sentences I might say: ' That which is, is not. That which appears, must. All boundaries are mistakes.'"

This *rejection of the boundary* appears to be the lone thread uniting the disintegrationists of 18 countries. The Argentinian painter Jorge Melendez calls himself a disintegrationist. We can, I think rightly, dismiss this claim as nothing more than a confusion of labels. Essentially, Melendez is a neo-surrealist with post-modernist tendencies, and nothing else.

The flamboyant style of Frank Zackler makes him one of the greatest colorists of our time. He is far more original in this domain than even Matta, the Surrealist. This predilection for bold, pungent chromatism is shared by all of his students, although it is not an absolute requirement for a disintegrationist. Zaid Haftali, who intended to establish a school in Beirut but who, because of the Lebanese civil war, finds himself in more or less permanent exile in Rome, is happiest working in mezzotints. His color, per se, is uninspired, uninteresting, even a bit dull. Haftali, who holds a BA in mathematics from the American University in Beirut, uses the term "Topological Synthetism" to describe the extraordinary, even perhaps incredible research he has performed in the expansion of the scope of the resources of the formalisms of description.

Arguably the leading disintegrationist painter in France, Jean-François Guillaume, pursues traditional emotivist values, sometimes falling just shy of arrant sentimentality. His technical command is however nothing short of virtuostic. Miriam Goad moved back out to California to accept a teaching post at the Idyllwild College

for the Plastic Arts in Pasadena. She has quickly become the focus of a flourishing disintegrationist movement in the southwestern United States. Her enigmatical crypto-symbolist tessellations do not seem to fit nicely into any pre-designed category. The disintegrationist paradigm however is clearly present in the opacity of her iconography and the vigorous application of an apparatus of formlessness.

Frank Zackler died in 1985, at the age of 60, from an overdose of cocaine. There is a school of thought that maintains that he committed suicide because the Minimalists were getting all the attention in the prestigious arts magazines. This malicious tale has been deliberately spread by his personal enemies, of which there were more than one : despite his own struggles to gain recognition, Zackler, once arrived, was stingy in giving credit to others.

But it was in this same year that the poets, seeking their own solutions to the modernist dilemma, saw the homology of their formal experimentation to the disintegrationist *Kunstbegriffe* .

On September 14 , 1985, 5 poets in Madison, Wisconsin calling themselves disintegrationists published a volume of verse . The overall level of this book is so puerile that it need not concern us here. The first poet of substance to call himself a disintegrationist, the one who it could be said remains in some sense perhaps the best, is Ewald Lieb. His revolutionary poem, *FIST* , first appeared in *Arts in Rebellion* in January, 1986. It has since been reproduced many times and even been anthologized⁴:

FIST

PLINTH. nail. Of is of the SOOOOO.....

*com,b us ..t**ible*

⁴Bards Of The Apocalypse; An Anthology of Contemporary American Verse
Miller and Halverson, University of Nebraska Press, 1981

WASH FORGOT?

WHAT (nude?)

GNOSis? Not WHY!!

((McNuggets))

“ Vent et Silence Déjà , Pensée de la Mort”

Dentist*DentistDEnTi;st....DentistDentistdentisttttttttttttttt*

NECTAR! GAROTTE! spigot(“

((Frenzy))

swaddled?

WashDentistNectarNectarDentistWashDentistNectarNectar

: !!)!!WAIT??”(((

Tauromachie Garotte

Afghanistan!

Afghanistan!

Afghanistan!

Afghanistan!.....

The disintegrationist poet James Morgan lives in Philadelphia. One finds in his work the same distinctive traits of dissolution of grammar, the avoidance of rhythmic regularity or semantic consistency, and the juxtaposition of striking imagery. Morgan, unlike most other disintegrationists, is unapologetically political. His politics , strangely enough, tends to be right wing conservative, even at times extremist. Some of his best disintegrationist poems have been unashamedly patriotic. His long ode, “Jubilation” at the occasion of the Bicentennial of 1976, begins:

Aching FLAGGG!!

Commie stink.....OOOmph!aiLust!!

****'.....?;**

Toothplichkt FR eEEEE\$\$\$\$DDDDDD..oooooooooM!!!**

As of 1986 ⁵, Disintegrationism is in full bloom. Articles on disintegrationist artists, theories, cliques, coteries and exhibitions and schisms are appearing at the rate of one a week in the international arts periodicals. One is also witnessing the exciting phenomenon of mergers with other, better established schools, so that we can find works classified variously as “Disintegrationist Pop”, “Disintegrationist Op”, “Disintegrationist Minimal”, “Disintegrationist Post-Modernist Objectivist”, etc., etc. Some of these labels are patently ridiculous, if not overtly fatuous. The latter combination appeared in ARTSVOICE 86, a slick British publication of the Manchester Arts Council.

Disintegrationist is one of the important contemporary movements in the arts, and it is here to stay. Its durability comes from its capacity to fill the urgent need for vehicles for the expression of the cultural pessimism which has become the central pre-occupation of the 80's owing to the spiritual crises and disappearance of values that has descended upon our civilization in these times.



THE DISINTEGRATIONIST MANIFESTO

⁵The date of the original publication of articles (Editors Note)

(*An excerpt from the original Manifesto of Ewald Lieb, in Arts in Rebellion, October 26, 1975*)

“...We are witnessing in our own day a collapse of values more devastating than anything that has ever yet descended on the human race. While events cry up to us that we must give appropriate expression to the psychic desperation of our state of siege, the muzzled artists of the Establishment and the academic artists cling to their outworn visions of the past. They repeat, like the mumblings of toothless old men, the same threadbare formulae of Surrealism, or Popism, or Orphism, or whatever other archaism they have found between the musty pages of their art history texts. They wash themselves in their isms, they shave in their isms, they piss and shit their isms. Even in their sleep, they dream of their old isms!

Yet they fail disastrously to grasp the essential reality of our time, that truth roaring like a wounded lion in the daily bustle of life, that ultimate, ultimately repugnant essence, that *diastema* which cannot be depicted by any kind of statement or form, which can only be signified by FORMLESSNESS!

Responding to their need to protect their sterile visions of an vanished age, they deny us access to the galleries or to the schools. They refuse to let us publish our poems and manifestos in their journals. They hound us from employment and the seats of culture, forcing us to wander on the fringes of civilization, in the boondocks and wildernesses, cut off from all outlets of exposure or publicity. Yet they cannot, for long, hide from the world its own face, and that face is THE DISINTEGRATIONIST VISION.

The essential goal of OUR ART is : the objectification of the subjective (the exteriorization of the IDEA) rather than the subjectification of the objective. We are assisted in this task by a literal

adherence to SCIENCE, to theories *constructed through induction and expressed according to the rigorous mathematical principles of aesthetic theory!* These theories have their solid foundation on a purely idealistic principle that causes us to reject the outer appearance of material reality and to only admit the existence of a world of representations.

Disintegrationism had its historic origins in the Programme outlined by Frank Zackler in the bar of the Empire Hotel on April 4th, 1970. From that moment forth we have raised the banners of defiance against all the schools that shackle the imagination, against the nefarious system of indentured servitude, let us rather call it slavery, that puts the artist at the mercy of the mercantilism of dealers and gallery owners, against all those fat-cat, phony, hibernating, enfeebled “artists(?)” pandering their cheap veneers to the plutocratic artsy taste-makers, but who shrink from confrontation with THE ULTIMATE CRISIS.

Pay heed, ye whoring philistines! Disintegrationism will abolish all these things ! Disintegrationism will dissolve all falsehoods, not only of the present, but ALL FALSEHOODS THAT HAVE EVER BEEN UTTERED IN WORD, PAINT OR SYMBOL SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME! It will begin by eliminating the surface in the name of the line; then the line in the name of the point; then by eliminating the point in the name of color; next it will eliminate color by the shadow. *The shadow will be exterminated by the Ineffable Beyond.* Ultimately there is nothing that we will not do away with. We will disintegrate all things.

[.....] Disintegration is not an “Arts Movement” to be compared with so many others; for it is the only authentic expression of our times. This being the case, all other so-called movements will prove to be unnecessary: disintegrationism alone expresses THE TRUTH.

In due time, even the name “Disintegrationism” will disappear, for the truth needs no name.

THE MYSTIQUE OF THE OBJECT IS NO MORE.

**THE MYSTIQUE OF THE SUBJECT IS BUT A TEMPORARY
EXPEDIENT.**

SCIENCE IS OUR GUIDE.

WE MUST NOT, CANNOT, AND SHALL NOT, FAIL!

Alienism

“Les gemissements poetiques de ce siècle ne sont que des sophismes”
- Lautreamont, Chants de Maldoror

In contrast to Disintegrationism, ALIENISM originated as a movements of writers, poets and philosophers, and has only recently been latched onto by the painters. Its situation with respect to music has always been rather bizarre. Although alienist writers and painters frequently assert that they are trying to transubstantiate formal and emotive structures already pre-existent in music into their own media, the musicians have always refused to have anything to do with them.

ALIENISM was invented by the French author HERVÉ DUCHASSE (1934-1982) as a general term to characterize his own writing style. One may however argue with more justice that it really characterizes his way of life. There is lots of biographical material around to substantiate this claim, although it is so often impossible to decide what should be accepted as truth or what is probably legend. DuChasse, like many another author of our day, was obsessed with spreading apocryphal stories about himself.

The clouds of mystery were, if anything, thickened even more by the discovery, just a few years ago, of a large, hand-written fragment of an autobiography in the DuChasse archives, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale; for there are at least as many fabrications⁶ in this ludicrous yet sometimes rapturous text, as there are in the many stories that circulated about him in the literary *haut monde* of Paris while he lived.

Indeed, DuChasse may have been a great writer, but the sad fact is that he would not have recognized the truth if it had walked in

⁶We shall refrain from following through on the natural conclusions to which our suspicions lead us, to call them outright lies.

through the front door and bit his hand. One might even say that it was contrary to his philosophy: Alienism firmly rejects truth.

One can reasonably state that his wild, dissipated life,

(DuChasse has reserved an entire chapter to himself in all future hagiographies of the *poète maudit*) was the unfortunate result of the terrible sufferings he endured as a child growing up under the Nazi Occupation of the desolate hamlet of *Ainay le Chateau*, just south of Bourges in the Bourbonnais.

Ainay is, literally, a village of madmen. It is one of the towns reserved by the French mental hospital system as a therapeutic center and out-patient colony. Mental cases judged harmless enough to live outside the hospital walls, but incapable in functioning independently in the greater society, are quartered in the village and assigned to menial jobs in its restaurants and shops.

DuChasse, in other words, grew up in a village about equally divided between Germans, maniacs and respectable bourgeois citizens. His father, the village pharmacist, employed three of these psychotics as janitor, delivery clerk and stockboy.

According to DuChasse, whose veracity must instinctively be doubted, these three men were used by the Gestapo as assistants in the torturing and butchering of members of the Resistance. Ainay lies on the border of the Forest of Tronçais, a natural refuge for Resistance soldiers. Every night, he says, these three ghouls would return to his father's store and terrify the young DuChasse with stories of what they had seen and done. He also asserts somewhere that they tried to drive him mad by threatening to do similar things to him, even tying him up for that purpose.

All of this is at least believable; yet when DuChasse goes on to say that they sometimes took him along with them to their grisly seances, or

that they used to conceal the carcasses of flayed and eviscerated animals under his bedcovers, or that he murdered one of them with a mixture of chloral hydrate taken from his father's stores, then one begins to ask how far poetic license should be allowed free rein.

And when, in other passages, DuChasse insists that the Gestapo tortured him as well, or loads the reader down with vivid depictions of bloody scenes obviously written for the purpose of turning his stomach, then we can firmly dismiss these fantasies as the waste products of a deranged mind.

The first event in his life, (*apart from his date of birth*), that can be fixed with accuracy is his first epileptic seizure. It happened on the afternoon of June 24th, 1957, in the Armistice boxcar in the forest of Compiègne. This boxcar is an exact replica of the one in which, in 1918, the armistice that ended World War I was signed. It was rebuilt in 1946, the original having been demolished by the Germans, down to the last thread of the last seat cushion, in 1940.

Hervé DuChasse claims to have provoked the fit deliberately: he titles it, "the first artwork of the Alienist movement". This is clearly hindsight. The word "Alienisme" does not appear in any of his writings until 5 years later, by which time he had already come out with the 3 volumes of poetry he had begun as an inmate at the Bicêtre asylum.

The significance of this monstrous boxcar, atavistic symbol of xenophobia, chauvinism and blood, was not the sort of thing to be lost on the DuChassian imagination. He describes it in the following passage:

"Imagine-toi, si tu en est capable, cette immense tas d'ordures, ce necrolithe nephaste de l'epouvante et de l'insolite, puanteur de soutien-couilles de macreau maladive, temple immonde reconstruit jusqu'à la moëlle par les fistules de la politique pour l'ensevelissement de leur

hontesse, symbole véritable de l'anti-symbole, cadavre vermoulu de la force splénitique de la frénésie chasse-pouvoir, biberon gluant suintant des pêtes barbares du siècle vingtième....." ⁷

DuChasse generally sounds like this: there is not a harmonious note in his entire opus, save it be the music of the charnel-house, the dungheap, or the execution block.

Over the next year he was afflicted by a series of epileptic fits in close succession. The DuChasse family, acting on bad advice from his elder brother, a medical student at the Sorbonne, sent him to the notorious megalomaniac, Jacques Laçan, for therapy. Laçan had just published his essay "*Les Psychoses*", and was yet to be kicked out of the French Psychiatric Society because all of his patients were committing suicide. After 4 sessions with the great doctor, DuChasse broke his nose. It is claimed that at the moment of doing so he cried out:

"I will not carry around on my back the corpse of my father!"

This ringing challenge to all that is decadent in Society and Art appears on the title page of DuChasse's long polemic essay, "*Alienisme et Sanctité*" (Alienism and Holiness), published in 1965 by Editions de Minuit.

His rash action and the statement that went with it may well have made history, may indeed have broken down the dams of reaction to release the intoxicating floods of Alienism, but it landed DuChasse in the Hopital Bicêtre, strapped to a metal cot in a strait jacket with a rag pushed down his throat.

⁷ Just imagine, if you are able to do so, that enormous garbage heap, that mephitic necrolith of supernatural terror, that stink of the jockstrap of a sickly pimp, that detestable temple built, down to its very marrow, by the fistulas of the political world, for the burial of their shamelessness, veritable symbol of the anti-symbol, wormy corpse of the splénitique force of the lust for power, sticky baby formula seeping the barbarous farts of the 20th century."

DuChasse's personality was nothing if not idiosyncratic and, contrary to expectations, the 6 months he spent in isolation were really very good for him. They enabled him for the first time in his life to disentangle and clarify his thinking, and aroused in him the burning desire to communicate those thoughts to all mankind.

After being released from his padded cell, he was kept on the wards of the Bicêtre for another 2 years. It was there that he cultivated his habits of voracious, even frenzied, reading. He read absolutely everything he could get his hands onto, his principal influences being Villon, Rabelais, the Marquise de Sade, Lautréamont, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Krafft-Ebbing, Rimbaud, Jarry, Artaud, Genet, Pound, Proust, Céline. He consumed the entire published opus of Céline, (*as well as a few privately circulated novels in manuscript smuggled in for him by the hospital attendants*), in one week.

Anything that aroused disgust amused him. When he was not self-consciously absorbing literature, he could be found pouring over treatises on medical anomalies, books on lurid sexual practices, barbarous executions or descriptions of grotesque medical interventions.

On the other hand the Existentialists, who were just then basking in the international limelight irritated him. Legend has it that on the very evening of the day of his release from the Bicêtre in 1960 he took a bus all the way across Paris to the Café des Deux Magots. There he shocked the existentialist crowd and its diletante affiliates by bursting through the door, brandishing his fists, and crying:

" I hurl the alienist defiance at the world!"

In these early stages of its development, Alienism was based on 3 principles:

I. THE COMFORT IN ANY THOUGHT STANDS IN INVERSE RELATION TO ITS REALISM.

II. IT IS THE DUTY OF THE ARTIST TO DESTROY HIMSELF.

III. IT IS THE FUNCTION OF ART TO CHANGE LIFE.

Of these three, DuChasse believed the third to be his most original and lasting contribution to civilization. It must be conceded that, although the idea itself is far from original, having echoes as far back as the prehistoric cave paintings of Lascaux , yet it is doubtful that there has been another artist in our tradition who advocated the means DuChasse employed to this admirable goal.

In "Alienisme et Sanctité " , DuChasse identifies three human types as beings " possessed of demiurgic immanence " , that is to say, having the power to bring about real changes in the world. He describes them by a wide range of labels, but his most commonly used appellations are *le branleur* , *le tabasseur* , and *le fracasseur*. These may be roughly translated into English as the flasher, the mugger, and the vandal.

By a flasher of course, he meant the kind of person who exposes his or her genitals or other private parts in public places, accompanied with some sort of manipulation of them or other grossly indecent act. Apparently, DuChasse practised this himself. Soon after his release from the mental hospital, DuChasse moved to Charleville- Mezières, the birthplace of Arthur Rimbaud, He wanted, as he put it , "*to be close to the sources of inspiration.*" During his stay in Charleville he adopted a dissolute yet stable routine combining alcoholism, epileptic seizures, long bouts of compulsive writing, and flashing.

Such behavior did not go over very well with the respectable citizenry of Charleville and before too long DuChasse was arrested and made to stand trial for indecent exposure.

When asked if he had anything to say in his own defence, he replied "*.....but the thing is, to mutilate the mind.*" This presented the jury with an insurmountable stumbling block . This phrase is a quotation

from a letter written by Rimbaud to a school companion. The "cult of Arthur Rimbaud" is Charleville's primary tourist attraction. Putting a man in jail for exemplifying the philosophy of Charleville's illustrious native son might have produced a strong adverse reaction on the part of the caravels of college students slated to descend upon the town from all over the world within a few months. Hervé DuChasse was therefore released from prison, but banished from Charleville for 20 years.

He then migrated to a very desolate region on the North Coast of Brittany, close by the coastal town of Ploubazlanec. There the local population quickly caught onto his ways and just let him do what he wanted.

We turn now to the mugger: DuChasse, as far as we know, did not himself engage in mugging, rather contenting himself with a literary veneration of the mugger verging on deification.

" *Le voyou*", he wrote, (one of his synonyms) " *est l'Apothéose de l'Absolu* ".⁸

Commenting on a newspaper account of a teenage punk who beat a 90-year old man with his own cane in order to steal his Social Security check, DuChasse dubbed the act " *l'orgasme de Dieu*" - God's orgasm. At one stage in his career, DuChasse became possessed of a species of demonic energy that enabled him to write, at a single sitting, 600 pages of infatuated praise to the cold-blooded killer, the ruthless adolescent hood, the executioner, the organizers of massacres, and various other " *artists of egoism and action*" who, through their arbitrary acts of cruelty, " *transformed life*".

Up to that point the actual violence perpetrated by DuChasse seems to have been pretty much limited to that blow on the nose delivered to Laçan. Under such provocation anyone of healthy mind

⁸ The thug epitomizes ultimate reality

would have acted as he did. The vandal, in DuChassian iconography, lies somewhere between the flasher and the mugger. DuChasse did engage in small bouts of vandalism and sometimes ended up in jail because of them. Such incidents only happened when he was drunk and do not seem to have been related to any theoretical premise. The vandal is described by him as "*Un crapule au coeur de lache*" : the criminal with the heart of a coward. His heart indeed is in the right place, but it pumps milk, not blood.

In the early 1970's Hervé DuChasse's epileptic seizures increased in both severity and frequency. There are several independent reports of persons encountering him staggering across the savage Breton countryside very late at night, a bottle of rotgut wine in hand, his head exposed under the beating rains, crying out for protection against conspiracies of Lesbians, Nazis, Satanists, Existentialists, the French Secret Police and the CIA. During one such night he took refuge in a wayside bar near Loguivy. Soaked to the bone, drunk to the point of insensibility and all but totally insane, his besotted gaze chanced to fall onto a wine-drenched and tobacco stained paperback copy of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*. Browsing through it at random, he came upon this magnificent passage from *La Charogne* :

*"Les jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique
Brulante et suant les poisons
Ouvrait d'une façon nonchalante et cynique
Son ventre plein d'exhalaisons ."*⁹

This passage had a calming effect on DuChasse's shattered mind. He move closer to the fireplace and in the manner of a catechism, began

⁹ With Its legs, in the air like a raunchy whore's,
Its stomach, burning and sweating poison ,
Bloated with seeping gases,
Opened in a fashion both cynical and indifferent.

mumbling it to himself over and over again , until at last the town gendarme arrived, hustled him into the *panier à salade* and drove him over to the detox tank in St. Briec.

It is this isolated passage from the works of Baudelaire that has been credited with transforming Hervé DuChasse from a basketcase into an important French writer. As we might say today he "got his act together." He himself speaks of this revelation as akin to a mystical experience. Six months later he was back in Paris, where he was to remain for the rest of his days.

Much later in life, DuChasse would evoke these 7 years of exile in Champagne and Brittany in the long poem by which he is best known outside of France, "*L'Abscès* ", the one that begins:

"How dearly we paid for the cheap sins of youth....."

His life would henceforth be dedicated to the promotion, through novel, poem, tract and play, of the *dogma of the alien experience* . We will defer discussion of the meaning of this phrase so that we may finish up this brief biographic sketch. In 1973 , 8 years after the first edition of *Alienisme et Sanctité* , Alienism finally caught fire. From 1965 until his death 15 years later, Hervé DuCasse published 13 novels, 9 volumes of poetry, 3 plays and endless volumes of literary, philosophic and didactic journalism.

He also fathered about 20 children by as many women. Only two of them reached maturity; both are in institutions.

Only once did he again land in prison. This happened in July of 1969. During a cocktail party arranged by Editions de Seuil to launch a *succes de scandale* ¹⁰ , someone innocently remarked that NASA had just landed a man on the moon. DuChasse spontaneously went crazy and

¹⁰Both the author's name and the title of the book escape me right now, but if I remember correctly, it was about the role of metaphor in the shaping of the history of Denmark in the 12th century.

stabbed him, seriously but not fatally, with a steak knife. It appears that DuChasse imagined that he had finally encountered one of those aliens about whom he had been writing for his entire career. French justice would have kept him behind bars for life, but a petition to the government signed by every major French literary figure led to release after a year. DuChasse was docile from then on.

He died in 1980. He was run over by a truck after stepping out backwards into the street from an elevator. At his request the following inscription, a quotation from the works of Richard Wagner, was placed on his tombstone:

" I believe in a Last Judgement at which all those who have in this world dared to traffic in sublime and chaste art, all those who have polluted and degraded it by the baseness of their sentiments, by their vile greed for material pleasures, will be condemned to terrible punishment. On the other hand, I believe that the faithful disciples of great art will be glorified and, surrounded by a heavenly amalgam of rays, perfumes and melodious sounds, will return to themselves for all eternity in the bosom of the divine source of harmony . "



II. Alienism, Mode and Modality

"..... This thread has not guided us in vain, since it had led us to formulate, by the end of last year, our experimental separation of the subject as a division between knowledge and truth, accompanied by a topological model, the Möbius strip, which makes us realize that it is not a distinction at the origin which produces the division at the place where the two terms come together..."

-Jacques Lacan, Science & Truth, 1966

"*ALIENISM IS HOSTILE TO TRUTH* " : So begins a polemic by DuChasse's most prominent disciple in modern French letters, Armand Benoit Couture. "Truth" in this context is broad enough to encompass everything from scientific knowledge to the reporting in the daily newspapers, moral and social justice, artistic integrity, and even true love.

Couture goes on to state that Alienism strives for "*the immobilization of life and the animation of the inanimate.*" The goal of any alienist artwork is to create the alien experience. Despite his evident anti-rationalist bias, Couture can be quite lucid when he describes those situations that provoke the alien experience:

" You are standing in the busy marketplace of a unknown town; or, better still let us say that you are at the center of a huge industrial city in a foreign country. The important thing is that, in one way or another, you have lost your bearings.

"The long cavernous street yawns like the grimacing open mouth of a killer shark, pregnant with elemental terrors; in every direction you encounter filth, noise and stench; you see many things around you that you find disquieting: gigantic and sinister office buildings rise up around you and block out the sunlight ; a demolished vehicle, pouring smoke from its entrails, is smashed up against a streetlamp that droops like a jaundiced poplar; panhandlers whose bodies teem with vermin paw bankers trying to get past them and into their offices; a street musician, a blind one-legged old woman, bangs a drum, little more than a kitchen pot, and whines for pennies.

" Suddenly you say to yourself: This can't really be happening! You are certain that your imagination must be playing tricks with your mind. So you come back to re-examine the scene, carefully, not once but many times. But it does not change; it does not go away; it is not just in your

imagination. Nor does the conviction that it can't really be there go away either. Nothing can make this feeling disappear. Days, months, even decades after you were witness to this environment, you remain convinced that you could not possibly have seen what you thought you saw.

"This is the alien experience."

In another essay Couture writes:

" The alien experience is the vase of roses in the torture chamber of the concentration camp. It is the senile professor of Latin who, while talking non-stop at the blackboard, chews off his fingers. It is the flasher who shits in the reform school playground. It is the man who, craving the ultimate alien experience, eats a meal of crushed glass. It is the theologian who crucifies animals to investigate Christ's sensations. It is Ronald and Nancy Reagan in bed . It is the Ayatollah Khomeinidi strangling Idi Amin with the guts of Yitzhak Shamir . It is the state that tells its hungry citizens that it is burning mountains of potatoes to help them. It is the worms in those burning potatoes. It is the experience of writing an alienist poem. It is the experience of reading an alienist poem. It is everything that cannot-be-yet-is, and is-yet-cannot-be. "

As it stands Couture's relatively hum-drum, even tepid, description of Alienism , so commonplace when compared to the embittered raptures of his great master, seems to be simply a matter of identifying and communicating ordinary feelings of alienation that we all experience from time to time. That Alienism is a new direction in thought, entirely unlike anything ever seen in the past, only becomes clear when one turns to other writers of less literary ability perhaps, but greater philosophical acumen. The following passages are taken from the long essay *Alienisme et Aristote* , by Martin Byzance, published in the magazine *Tel Quel* in 1978:

" Alienism maintains", he argues, " that the comprehensible is always a literal falsehood. If you understand something it cannot be true. If it is true you cannot have understood it. Alienism poses, therefore, an advance beyond Aristotle, and is even now still searching for some logician who will provide it with adequate diacritical formalisms."

Certainly, the alienist praxis in Arts and Society is not particularly designed to endear itself to logicians. Byzance goes on to produce a list of examples illustrative of this bold doctrine:

" Let us imagine that you are talking to an Alienist, but that you yourself are not one. You inform him that you believe there is truth in the equation ' $2+2=4$ ' . The Alienist might reply:

" Vile disseminator of lies and seducer of youth! Gluttonous abortion (Avorton gourmand)!! You really expect me to take you seriously! To listen to your pathetic lies , you buggered rat-face, (Bougre au visage du rat)??? Get out of my house at once - your ignorance shits!!! I don't want to be forced to exterminate you!! I refuse to drink your mother's blood from my father's skull!!!

" However, if by some chance you have not understood the source of the Alienist's rage, believing perhaps that you may have offended him by saying something that was probably true but completely innocuous and a waste of his time, and imagining that you should try to make your conversation more interesting, less boring and trite, you say:

" Don't forget to close your windows; there's a good chance of rain tonight." , he will immediately interrupt you and shout:

" Pauvre bouffie, tu ravasse!! (You're dreaming ,you pitiful fatso) . Go immolate your feet if you want excitement! Your quest for truth snivels like a squid! Va boire du sable avant que je ne me branle et emmerde ton cerveau! (Go and drink sand before I expose my prick and

mess up your mind) Until you have mashed your balls to porridge I forbid you to speak with me! "

Couture and Byzance are both fashionable. Other writers profiting from the contemporary vogue for Alienism are Marie St. Clair Bourgignon, Roger Aimable, Denis Rotonde, Aristide l'Eveque, Etienne Narzinski, and the writers of the review *Blouson Noir* .

One does not know how long this fad will last, and the Maison du Livre in Paris is already hedging its bets on the next literary movement.

Groups of writers calling themselves alienists can be found today in every country under the influence of the Western European cultural tradition. Certain places such as Russia, Germany, Korea, Syria, Brazil, Iran, Burundi, South Africa and others, find nothing new in the dogma of the alien experience. The alienist writers in such places merely continue in the footsteps of a rich cultural heritage.



I conclude this essay with my own free translation of the first four verses of *L'Abscès* by Hervé DuChasse :

The Abscess

How dearly we paid the cheap sins of youth,
Rusting the pin I twine out of the eye;
I, reeling through slaughter, grunt in my sty
To shatter my kneecaps on splinters of truth.

Oh, thrice-blessed Christ, epileptic of days!
I fondle your pardon: forgive these blood-soaked stumps;
And chew, dear Lord, the dung I pat in lumps
Like the knowing butcher, kissing the skin he flays!

I, once, bumbled in Charleville, I dropped my pants!
I, Rimbaud of the age; I vaunted my peter!
To slimy bourgeois scum, sickening cunt-eaters,
Whose assholes labyrinth billions of ants!

So tender these ruins , of grief and of remorse
These entrails of snot, these tarpits of pisses;
How swim the green faeces of the colic horse,
To touch the tumescent Rose with incorporeal kisses?



Cashism

A. The Viscount

The origins of *Cashism* are submerged in the wake of wrecked fortunes, reputations and lives scattered over three continents by the cunning vengefulness of the most notorious art collector of our times, the Viscount Malcolm Hobbledehoy Ischam-Cheekbroom.

The Cheekbrooms are a parallel branch of the Spencer-Yardleighs through a common ancestor, Lord Throttlebeak, sometime keeper of the royal seal in the age of the Hanovers. His immediate forebears had made quite a bit of money in sausage-casings. Ischam-Cheekbroom's own fortune was built over a lifetime by innovative investments in the weapons industry. It was no secret however, that the root of all the Ischam-Cheekbroom money was derived from the stocking Jamaica's plantations with West African slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Our story has little to do with the means by which Sir Malcolm acquired his millions, but only with the fact that he had them. Born in 1895, Sir Malcolm was many things to many people: a dilettante, a poseur, cynic and misanthrope, a lover of crude practical jokes, and a financial genius; but he was also known for his serious side. As an art student in the 1910's he had studied with famous teachers in prestigious art schools. Before World War I he counted such famous artists as Augustus John, Wyndham Lewis, Gautier-Brezhk and Charles Renee Mackintosh among his friends.

Once the war had ended, in 1918, Sir Malcolm set out on the Grand Tour. He lived in Italy for 3 years, absorbing the experiments of

Futurism before heading up to Paris, where he spent another two years horsing around with the likes of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara, Max Ernst, Amedeo Modigliani and the like.

Malcolm appears to have dedicated his life to the fine arts until the age of 30. After 1925 he drifted into the traditional family obsession with making money: it does not appear that any of the Cheekbrooms have ever done anything else. Yet, by that time, he could, with fair justice, lay claim to having a discerning eye for the visual arts. Despite his philistine mercantilism, the artist in him was never entirely killed off, surviving, as with most people, in a more or less embittered form. One cannot help thinking that he would have been a far happier man as a painter, even a minor one, and that he had been prevented from following his true calling only because he knew there wasn't any money in it. Few persons in the modern world have ever been as perceptive as he was, of the hideous disparity between the creation of art objects, and their traffic through the venues of commerce.

Might one even suspect that the Viscount Malcolm Hobbledehoy Ischam-Cheekbroom, like many another *artiste manqué*, spent some of his time indulging in scenarios for vengeance against society. Indeed! One is forced to the conclusion that Sir Malcolm knowingly devoted 40 years of his long life to a grandiose scheme for destroying Art!

From 1925 to 1960 Sir Malcolm won an uncontested reputation as the only collector in the Euro-American art world who combined a profound intuition for that which is truly great in art, with the pecuniary resources necessary for its acquisition. He was buying up the etchings of William Blake in 1925 5 years before the intelligentsia realized that Blake had been as great a graphic artist as he was a poet. Long before Cezanne became popular, Ischam-Cheekbroom was buying his canvases by the

score. For a short time, he owned *Le Grand Jatte* of Georges Seurat before disposing of it at a huge profit.

There is even a select group of art historians - clustered around the *Journal for Studies in Cubism*, published by the University of Kansas in Lucas, Kansas - who go so far as to state that the Picasso phenomenon came about primarily through the injection of Cheekbroom money. There may in fact be some truth to this. None of us can ever be entirely free from the feeling that Fine Art makes its mysterious way in the world through the presence of some sort of metaphysical "Oomph", without the need for encouragement from the base and strategies of vulgar tradesmen; all the same, it is thoroughly plausible that even the immortal Picasso needed some sort of boost at the beginning to make it to the top.

Sir Malcolm's discerning generosity extended far and wide. His acquisitions so catalyzed the markets in Futurist, Dadaist, Surrealist, Cubist, Expressionist and Orphist art that we can truly say that, had it not been for his inexhaustible checkbook and discriminating eye, the works of the artists in all of these movements and schools might now be considered nothing more than droll, eccentric curiosities, sometimes to be found hanging in the backrooms of courageous or benighted museums.



In 1946 the Viscount Malcolm Hobbledehoy Ischam-Cheekbroom sent his agents around the world on a curious mission: *to find the worst living painter*. It is not a easy matter even to define such an individual. Someone who can't draw at all might be deemed worse than someone who can, but does it very badly. A painter with lots of talent but no

technique might be considered better, or worse, than someone with no talent and lots of technique. And so on.

Yet Sir Malcolm had a very clear notion of what he was looking for: a highly skilled mediocrity, someone with too much training, with credentials from the best academies, yet without a spark of inspiration, a man of deplorable taste, sterile and uninventive, whose imagination could not even rise to the level of commercial kitsch. In a letter written to one of his agents in Spain in 1947, Sir Malcolm specified that:

".....his work, (or hers) must be such rubbish that sophisticated and vulgar alike will join hands in condemning it. Neither academics, nor intellectuals, nor any other artist, nor dealers, nor the unwashed brainless rabble, nor any rich bastards like myself, would find anything good to say about it. And I want him to be a failure, too! No sales, no commissions, no teaching posts! Just a clerk in a department store - no - worse than that - a ticket collector in the Tube; a bottle washer in some wretched digs in Polynesia or the United States or some such forlorn outpost. He must be reduced to the condition of a subservient lackey without - and I absolutely insist on this point - without having lost any of his ambition!"

It was to be another ten years before Sir Malcolm's agents found someone meeting these conditions, several of which may appear to be self-contradictory. For, how is it possible that a person so overtrained in every graphic technique to the point of being able to say precisely nothing, could have failed to obtain a teaching post in *any* art school of his choosing? The answer, clearly, lay in some corrosive vice, drink, or heroin, lechery, gambling, or some combination of all of these.

While waiting for the right candidate to turn up, the Viscount did not slacken in his customary industry. Together with his princely profits off the Cold War and the nuclear arms race, he increased his assets from

1945 to 1955 by £20,000,000 through wheeling and dealing the Quattrocento.



B. Oskar Bánêsh

There is a curious fascination that clings about the life story of the Hungarian painter Oskar Bánêsh. Among other things, it serves as a useful counter-example to most of the cherished myths that have grown up about the 'agony and ecstasy' of the artists' life.

We restrict our attention to the essential facts: Oskar Bánêsh was born in Budapest in 1900. His family was highly placed within the Hungarian aristocracy. It was because of this that he was able to avoid being drafted in World War I. Between 1914 and 1918 he was sent to Switzerland to study in an art academy in Zurich.

Even at this early stage his teachers remarked in him the combination of a totally depleted imagination with a bottomless capacity for work. His studies brought no alteration in this basic formula. When his family joined up with him in 1918, fleeing Hungary with their jewels sewn into their overcoats, Oskar's teachers concurred in recommending to them that, although he should not continue to seek a career in the arts, he was certain to be an outstanding success in any field for which he did show an aptitude.

Poor Oskar! His father was a bully, a tyrant and a fool. The Baron Bánêsh was obsessed with the dream that at least one of his heirs must be a painter, and, since his brothers and sisters had either emigrated or been killed in the war, Oskar was all but tortured into a profession for which he showed neither talent nor love. In 1919 Oskar was rendered permanently deaf in his left ear from the beating his father gave him

when, at the age of 18, he found the courage to state that he really wanted to be an engineer.

Eventually, Oskar Bánêsh was dismissed from the Zurich academy. His father then bribed an official at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Paris so that he could continue his studies for another 4 years. By the time he graduated, at the age of 22, there was no graphic technique or artistic medium that Oskar had not mastered, yet he had not done a single painting that anyone had ever liked. Baron Bánêsh, still obstinately refusing to acknowledge the possibility that his son didn't have any talent, let alone vocation for painting, continued to believe that Oskar's lousy painting was part of an insidious and malicious plot aimed at spiteing his benevolent father. A family friend suggested to the Baron that his son lacked what they call 'life experience', which is supposed to be good for an artist. He took the idea seriously and enlisted Oskar in the army; not any old army, since the family remained stateless: the French Foreign Legion.

Baron Bánêsh ordered his son to send home a sketch once a week. This collection of hundreds of drawings, which may still be examined in an obscure alcove of the British Museum, is known to art historians as the Bánêsh "Sand Period". Traces of it haunt all the work he did afterwards. Alas, for it was in those terrible 8 years of isolation from civilization in the deserts of North Africa, that Oskar Bánêsh descended into alcoholism and drug addiction. He also fell victim to several serious illnesses, including the typhus that earned him his discharge from the Legion in 1930.

To appreciate the full dimensions of his personal tragedy, one must understand that none of these horrible sufferings did a thing for his art.

After 1930, Oskar's family gets lost among the anonymous populations of Brazil. Free at last, he emigrated to Australia. His

portfolio was useless for building a career as an artist, but he was still exceptionally qualified to be an art teacher in Australia's finest academies. Yet owing to his mental condition, his alcoholism and drug addictions, he could never hold a teaching job for very long. His most stable position lasted 4 years, as a drawing instructor at a private arts academy in Nockatunga, Queensland.

As his qualifications for being an art critic exceeded even those for being a teacher, Oskar made a fairly good living for about 10 years, from 1940 to 1950, as a critic for several newspapers in Sydney and Adelaide. When he was no longer able to fulfill even these part-time assignments, he became a homeless derelict in the slums of Adelaide, surviving on charity, the welfare system and temporary factory jobs. In all this time, though every gallery consistently rejected his work, he never stopped painting.

This was the state of Oskar's affairs when he was discovered by the Viscount Malcolm Hobbledohy Ischam-Cheekbroom's agents in 1955. A psychiatrist could base an entire book on the saga of Oskar Bánêsh's life. One must concede that the Baron's self-serving rationalizations contained an element of truth: Oskar's self-destructive urges may have led him to live a failed and ruined life just to get back at his father. If in fact this is the case, then the timely intervention of Sir Malcolm, although it may have gratified his *conscious* mind, it probably mortified his *unconscious*. For it was Oskar Bánêsh's destiny to know a brief and dazzling fame, combined with a surplus of wealth that allowed him to live in comfort and security for the rest of his days¹¹

¹¹ Oskar Bánêsh died in 1996. After breaking his drug addiction and bringing his alcohol consumption under control, he moved into an Elderhotel in a fashionable London suburb. As a painter he is now nothing more than a household joke, although he does merit a footnote in the art history of the age.

Sir Malcolm persuaded Oskar to come to England where he was installed in a modern state-of-the-art studio, one of the finest in the land, on the grounds of Sir Malcolm's grand country estate in Devonshire¹², Here he received good medical care and a liberal expense account. In exchange for this, Bánêsh was required only to grind out a painting a month for 4 years. Grinding out paintings being the only thing he knew how to do, both parties acknowledged themselves satisfied with the arrangement.

At the same time Sir Malcolm solicited his circle of friends in the fringe aristocracy and persuaded them to include several Bánêsh paintings, (with meticulously documented fraudulent pedigrees), among the lots they disposed of at auction.

In 1959, the Viscount Malcolm Hobbledehoy Ischam-Cheekbroom struck his mortal blow against Art. A certain Lord Gawkley was selling off his properties in Northumberland, and the art accessories of an entire castle, including books, craft items, plate, armor, hangings, furniture, and paintings, (3 Bánêsh's among them) went under the hammer at Sotheby's Parke-Bennet. Sir Malcolm showed up on March 23rd, 1959, the fourth day of the sale. A dozen of his confederates had been infiltrated around the audience using various pseudonyms and simple disguises.

The bidding began at 1 P.M. The first Bánêsh painting, 3 cows on a Devonshire meadow, was put on sale at 3 o'clock at a suggested price of 2 guineas. It was knocked down to 1 pound for a representative from a hospital in Brighton looking for something to hang on the walls of its emergency ward.

The next Bánêsh painting, a surrealist experiment, depicted an enormous sand dune suspended in mid-air above a munitions factory.

¹²The Ridings

Nobody wanted it. A representative for the Museum of Modern Art in New York was persuaded to take it back with him for nothing, believing that the judgement of New Yorkers in all things artistic was completely senseless in any case. Yet another of those incorrigible ironies of history: it would soon be apparent to all, that rewards always seem to go to those who already have them.

The third Bánêsh was hauled onto the podium at 4 o'clock, accompanied by the embarrassed apologies of the curators. This was the historic *Cyclops at Trafalgar*. It is indeed a hideous painting, a blend of historical genre painting (The Battle of Trafalgar), Symbolism (the eye of the Cyclops), and Surrealism, (the odd juxtaposition of monster and battleships). It has every painterly vice and but a single virtue: advanced technique.

The Viscount Malcolm Hobbledehoy Ischam-Cheekbroom made the front pages of the world's major newspapers by paying down 2 million pounds for it! The skill with which the escalation of bids had been orchestrated between him and his paid chorus of art collector imposters, can only be considered awe-inspiring.

It is important that we recall that Sir Malcolm was not just anybodies' rich old art-addled eccentric, but Modern Art made flesh. Forty years of his life had been devoted to establishing his reputation as the one infallible taste-maker in the tiny universe of collectors and curators who decide which artists and what forms of modern art the public should worship. It was just unthinkable that such a person could stake his reputation and the loss of 2 million pounds on the acquisition of worthless trash.

In an article published in the London Times a month later, the prominent art critic Malcolm Stoat, explained the situation. Stoat reminded the world that Art never reveals its secrets in an instant. In

such matters one must rely on the experts, and Sir Malcolm was an expert's expert.

Indeed , he goes on to say , by a minute scrutiny of the details of 'Cyclops at Trafalgar', one starts to recognize faint yet unmistakable traces of genius, things that an ordinary observer would be bound to overlook, but that only an Ischam-Cheekbroom could spot : that ingenious daub of coloration in the right corner of the Cyclops' giant eye - that 'exotic quilting' of lines and textures on the deck's of Lord Nelson's ships - and THAT TRULY INCREDIBLE BLUE – as from a 'mystic's palette', in the patches of sky between the smoking cannons....Yes, and well, there really is something to it after all.

"But, I ask you, is it really worth two million pounds? I have concluded, after lengthy considerations, that it is. You must examine it very closely, you must steep yourself in other Bánêsh masterpieces, some of clearly the direct precursors of this great work; and, yes, you can see how it would be worth that much. Take that, well, it's a kind of "coif" motif in the hairs of the Cyclops just above the ears. It's unquestionably "deft". The control of the brush is absolutely superb! I can characterize it in no other way! One just doesn't see that kind of thing being done anymore, it's a distinctive characteristic of the Great Masters. I find it difficult to find exactly the right word for this quality. A special aura seems to hover about it. When you immerse yourself in it, it makes you want to curl up , like a warm puppy, in bliss.

Shall we call it a species of "subjective verism"? Perhaps a term like "oracular simplicity"? I would dare say that it is unique in the history of the art of our civilization; there is perhaps something of this quality in the vases of 3rd millenium China... "¹³

¹³ Manfred Stoa, London Times, Arts Section, April 22, 1959

What more is there to say? Oskar Bánêsh was the arts sensation of the 60's. He soon had more commissions than he could handle, at any price he chose to name. The front doors of his fashionable new London studio stood open day and night, besieged by the comings and goings of the rich, the powerful, the glamorous and the elite. For obvious reasons he never traveled to Devonshire, and never indicated that he had ever had anything to do with the Viscount Malcolm Hobbledehoy Ischam-Cheekbroom!

... And it was only a matter of months before artists in countries around the world started claiming that they were, and had always been, disciples of the Bánêsh school. That unmistakable hallmark of the Bánêsh style - overcompetence combined with banality - now covered the walls of all the galleries until there was not a square centimetre of space remaining for anything else.

... Then the teachers in all the art schools began training their students in the Bánêsh style; and all the art critics of the newspapers and magazines, even the prestigious fine arts journals, began to interpret all painting, past, present and prospective, with the derivative bifocals of the Bánêsh vision. The decade that was to follow would witness the mass production of a certain kind of 'educated product' by the leading art schools, a pitiful hack trained to see the world through Bánêsh eyes and to faithfully reproduce what it saw.

Worse junk has scarcely ever been manufactured in the history of Western Art, which as we know, has experienced more than one lamentable nadir: the allegory painters of Victorian England, the excesses of the family of Annibale Carraci, Russian Socialist Realism, and son. *So awesome is the glitter of 2 million pounds on the retina of Mankind's collective eye!*

Concurrently with the Bánêsh craze, the market in good art suffered a corresponding decline. It was now possible, for a brief period, to buy, for little more than a thousand dollars, a Picasso, Chagall or Klee that, only a few years before, had been selling for millions. Nor were there many buyers to be found. With one curious exception.

Even as he was beating the drum for Bánêsh, Sir Malcolm, in strictest secrecy, was buying up the canvases of the modern masters as fast as they appeared on the world market. His agents were everywhere: London, New York, Paris, Tokyo, Singapore. Every penny of profit from his investments in armamenys was siphoned off into the acquisition of the works of the now despised creators of modern art.

In 1965, Sir Malcolm burst the bubble that he himself had inflated. He did this in the simplest possible way by dumping 30 Bánêsh paintings on the market at a combined price of £50.

As the sand castles of Art crumbled about his feet, the Viscount Malcolm Hobbledehoy Ischam-Cheekbroom snuggled up before the blazing hearth in his huge living room at The Ridings, rocking his priceless antique armchair back and forth, an angora quilt about his varicosed legs, his loving basset hound, Reginald, curled up by his feet, cackling the triumphant giggles of the frustrated artist who has at last tasted the sweetness of his revenge.

For Sir Malcolm had ruined Art. All the up-and-coming young painters were functional incompetents. All the painters of all previous generations were either dead or out of work. All the collectors blinded by the Bánêsh hoax were crushed under mountains of worthless art that they could not even persuade the trash collectors to recycle; and many of Sir Malcolm's cronies had been bankrupted by foolish investments in the Bánêsh school.

Yet the Viscount himself was richer than ever before! For now he seeped out a Kandinsky - a Roualt - a Matisse - a Munch - one at a time in a miserly fashion, at prices only an Arabian oil sheik could afford - and got them. In 1975, when he was declared incapable of handling his own affairs and his estate turned over to a conservatorship, his fortune was appraised at £500,000,000,000. Never in world history had so much money been put together through a shrewd combination of investments in the Cold War and the manipulation of Modern Art. ¹⁴

It was inevitable that Sir Malcolm would find himself canonized as the patron saint of Cashism, the art movement that flourished soon after his retirement from the world of public affairs.



II. History of the Cashist Movement

The art movement that has been given the label of 'Cashism' is not very difficult to understand, but it is also very easy to misunderstand. One can safely venture, I believe, the assertion that not one critic out of five has correctly described its ideology, goals or methods. Even among the artists who call themselves Cashists, I would bet that only a handful really know what they're talking about.

Look at this statement by Marian Miller, a prominent art dealer , typical of many pronouncements that have been made about the cashist movement:

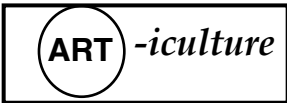
¹⁴ Sir Malcolm died in 1988 in a sanatorium for the super-rich in Exeter.

"The worth of a painting is equal to its market value at any given time and place."

This quotation appears in the catalogue drawn up for her exhibition of Cashist art in Santa Fe in 1982. What she is describing is not Cashism, but *Auctionism*, a very different phenomenon.

Or another:

"...the content of a work of art is perceived only indirectly. It is rather in the aura of monetary transactions that articulate its history that the symbolic values dormant in the latency of its substratum yield us their aptitudes towards transcendence, and that in retrograde."

This definition appeared in an article entitled "Cashism and Aesthetic Tradition" published in , a hokey arts magazine issued by the IRAV (Institute for Research into Aesthetic Values) at Harvard University.

The paragraph is straight gibberish. If it is to be given any meaning at all, it is saying that Cashists believe that the aesthetic value of an art work is to be found in the history of its market price. This statement is no more correct than that of Marian Miller, although it must be admitted that the naive, largely uneducated, public does subscribe to such a view: *a great work is neglected for a long time, even centuries. Gradually people come to recognize its value. It becomes a classic. At long last it ends up in a museum somewhere and is priced at many millions of dollars.*

In fact, the true Cashists ridicule this idea. The counter-example most often cited in the literature is that of the Benois Madonna, painted by Leonardo DaVinci in 1478. After his death it disappeared for several centuries, only to surface in 1824 in Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea. Here we have two versions: the first is that it was being guarded in a

monastery run by Italian Jesuits. The other is that it was being carried around Europe by a troupe of Italian actors.

Whichever version is the correct one, it came into the possession of Price Kulagin, who sold it to an art dealer, Shagochinokov, who passed it along to his grand/daughter, Mme. Louis Benois, who, around 1916, persuaded Czar Nicholas II to buy it for the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The 150,000 that the Czar paid for it made it the most expensive painting in history.

The Russian revolution came along before the sale could be completed. This canceled all government debts incurred by the Czar, and the Benois Madonna became the most cheaply obtained Renaissance masterpiece of all time.

Now, what does this *curriculum vitae* tell us about the intrinsic worth of the Benois Madonna? Nothing, our common sense tells us, and the Cashists would agree with us. There is in fact only one aspect of this drama that would be of interest to a Cashist: the catastrophic reformulation of its market value by an act of war. The revitalizing effects of warfare on the art market is a perennial theme of the Cashist polemic.

"*There is a nakedness in matter which thirsts for exploitation.*" So writes the Cashist sculptor, Amos Bamberger. This is an admirable experience of the Cashist ideology in terms that the working artist can understand and use. It lacks, however, that scientific precision which is required by the critic desirous of assessing the social impact of the Cashist movement.

In his best-selling study of the movements of modern art, "*The Chamber Music of Armageddon*" (Time/Life Books, 1984; \$76) lavishly illustrated), Ronald Gaines has this to say: "*Cashism relates to all previous traditions in painting much as physics relates to metaphysics.*"

Because of this , it shares features with Conceptual Art and with Abstract Expressionism. It differs from these, however, in its valorization of the art object qua object, in a manner that has never been done before in the history of Western civilization. "

He goes on : "*To the Cashist way of thinking, the visual, (musical , poetic, dramatic) pleasure that we take in a work of art is but the precursor, indeed only the catalyst, to the more authentic raptures that are stirred up at the moment of purchase, specifically that instant in which the money, (or its equivalent), changes hands."*

An identical point of view is stated more succinctly in the excellent little "*Illustrated Dictionary of Contemporary Arts and Artists*" ,(Chambered Nautilus Press, 10th Edition, editor Lancelot Frazier, Brattleboro, Vermont, 1982; \$49.95) : "*CASHISM maintains that the essential aesthetic experience does not derive from the beauty or message of any art work, rather from meditation and reflection upon the beauty with which it has been bought or sold."*

No other arts movement has ever brandished so audacious a claim. A debate early in the Cashist movement arose over the correct interpretation of the effect of the discovery of the New World in 1492 on the evolution of European art. In an article written for the National Review in April of 1970, Simon Orwell argues that the plunder stolen from the New World lay the foundation of all European cultural activity from the 16th to the 20th centuries . He found nothing wrong with this: "*Surely*", he states, "*One Picasso is worth the whole conquest of Mexico!*"

This statement lead Lionel Stokes, in a review of his essay in Art Marketplace , to call him an "*inverted and affected snob with little understanding of true Cashist principles."* To quote:

" Simon Orwell has misconstrued the real purpose behind the Cashist movement. For a genuine Cashist the real significance of the Spanish

conquest of the Americas lies in the magnificent commerce in forged pre-Columbian art. We know that at least 90% of all the pre-Columbian bric-a-brac in American museums are forgeries. That somewhere in the jungles of the Yucatan peninsula there hides a gang that has been manufacturing the entire ruins of a totally fictitious pre-Aztec culture, the Chakmeecs. Only last year a Mayan temple site, complete with pyramid, stelae and astronomical observatory, arose as if through magic in the interior of the state of Chiapas. Every single stone was a forgery but the Metropolitan Museum paid \$100,000 to its 'discoverers' before the fraud was exposed. How can you compare Picasso to so grand a conception? From the viewpoint of true Cashism he's just a hack."

The Cult of the Ready-Made: 1972-85

" There is no thing that IS; there is only joy in trade"

-Amos Bamberger

Most Cashists claim Marcel DuChamp as an authentic ancestor. It is virtually a certainty that DuChamp, were he alive today, would vehemently reject this honor. DuChamp ridiculed banality. The Cashists on the other hand revere banality: the exquisite banality of the marketplace has inspired much in the way of rapturous expostulation.

DuChamp , however, is revered as the inventor of the 'ready-made'. This is a manufactured item, an appliance for example, or gadget or utensil, that can be magically transformed into an important work of art because some famous artist has picked it up, looked it over, and said, *"This is beautiful ."* He may then sign his name to it and send it to a museum. The process has analogies to the way in which a naturalist goes into the Amazon jungle, discovers a new plant, puts his name (in Latinized form) to it, and sends home specimens of it to the Museum of Natural History.

The difference between these two lies principally in the interaction with the workings of the Free Market. Let us say that someone goes into a hardware store and buys a bicycle wrench for \$3.59. It is seen by a famous artist who, by calling it a great work of art, is able to sell it all auction for \$5,000. Imagine later on that another, equally famous artist, calls it a piece of rubbish: its market value falls to \$0.77. Yet this may not be the end of the story: a rich art collector who is building up a collection of ready-made for his private museum, actually buys up, not only the bicycle wrench itself which he displays in a glass case, but the patent for the wrench which he keeps locked up in a vault.

This is Cashism in all its purity. Here are the facts:

The bicycle wrench was purchased in Goleta, California on July 8, 1972, by Kenn Thomasêk, a Czech immigrant who operates a bicycle rental and repair shop for students at the University of Santa Barbara. It was seen on Thomasêk's workbench by David Daub, fine arts instructor at the Center for Creative Studies at UCSB. Daub, a much respected figure in American lithography, declared the design of the bicycle wrench to be one of the most stupendous conceptions ever to emerge from the human brain.

Thomasêk, who thought the whole thing a joke, donated the bicycle wrench to the CCS, which placed it on permanent exhibit in their lobby. In 1978, when the CCS was going through a financial crisis, the wrench was auctioned off on May 7th . Ready-mades were then at the crest of an unprecedented vogue and it was sold to the Guggenheim Museum in New York, for \$5,126.94.

On June 4th , inside the Guggenheim and next to the wrench, Andy Warhol stood before the TV cameras and declared, quote : "*This bicycle wrench is a piece of shit.*" On July 3rd the Museum quietly disposed of the wrench by selling it to one of its janitors for \$0.77

The story does not end there. The janitor was quite famous in his native land, Kenya, as a wood sculptor, although totally unknown in the West. He had taken the job as a janitor in the Guggenheim because it would allow him to be in touch with the art world. When the political situation that had forced him into exile changed he returned to Nairobi and used the wrench as the cornerstone of the ready-made collection of a museum of contemporary art that he and his associates set up in Nairobi.

The museum was successful and served as a model for other museums around the world. It became standard practice for any museum starting up a ready-made collection to purchase a copy of this now infamous bicycle wrench directly from its manufacturer, a small factory in Indiana.

Finally, in 1982, Arlo Harbison, a Texas oilman opened his private collection of ready-mades ,in the museum he had established on the grounds of his estate outside Tucson , Arizona, to the public. He made the decision to protect his investment by buying up all the patents for every object in the collection. Today the patent for this bicycle wrench, along with the patents for over 300 other items, including a shower curtain, hangers, an electric orange juice maker, rakes, shovels, spark plugs, a Sterno can, an inflatable gas mask, a dozen different models for glasses, curtain rods, hammers, screws, thumb-tacks and so forth, rest in a vault in a Dallas bank.

Cashism and the Avant-Garde, 1979 - 1985

This is a great work of art - Russ Oppenheimer

The vogue of the ready-made was parallel in its development to the Cashist movement. They collided head-on in 1979: June 16th to be

precise. It was on that day that an otherwise unremarkable painter by the name of Russ Oppenheimer was sitting in The Blue Cat, an artist's hangout in the Soho district of New York, in the company of several very famous painters, including Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, Helen Frankenthaler, Willem de Koonig, and Jasper Johns.

At 1:37 A.M. Oppenheimer lifted up a glass filled with water, pointed to its contents and said: "*This is a great work of art.*" He made it very clear that he was referring specifically to the water and not to the surrounding glass.

Rauschenberg seconded him. Then de Kooning announced that he intended to give up painting, because he had never done anything so beautiful as the water in that glass. Then Helen Frankenthaler suggested that the water be preserved and exhibited somewhere as the first ready-made ever discovered in a natural chemical compound. Before the night was over, they had composed a joint letter to *Art in America*, in which they affirmed that they had discovered a work of art in a glass of water and intended to sell it to either a museum or a private collector who would promise to protect its inherent aesthetic qualities.

They were probably only thinking of having a bit of fun. However the publication of this letter just happened to coincide with the vogue for ready-mades in the galleries. The letter, furthermore, had been written and signed by the most prestigious contemporary artists at that time- the letter alone could have been sold for \$10,000. The water, which by consensus vote had been deemed the property of Russ Oppenheimer, was put on sale , in a party atmosphere and accompanied with much bantering publicity in the press, in the Upper East Side art gallery, Eye Contact, a few weeks later.

The bidding stopped at \$3,276.42. The water was sold to a Chicago meat baron. It may still be found in his collection of ready-mades and

other avant-garde art in a special room on his estate in Evanston, Illinois. It is kept in a glass box, the temperature of whose damp, regulated interior is permanently set at 1 degree Centigrade.

The Cashists went wild. The payment of an astronomical price for less than half a pint of water was only a threadbare step away from the purest of all Cashist conceptual artworks: the sale of empty space. This idea, by the way, had been suggested a year before in an article in *The New Yorker*, as a way of bringing Cashism in line with the popularity of the ready-made.

By 1981 there were Cashist auction houses in all the major centers of the American art commerce. It appeared that certain members of the class of the super-rich derived a lurid erotic thrill from the act of throwing away huge sums for empty boxes. Such auctions took place in an atmosphere of distemper and abandon, even intoxication. One might say that they exemplified conspicuous consumption at its most conspicuous.

But behind the facade of uninhibited madness one might discover a kind of grim, utterly ruthless, economic calculus. A Rockefeller could not afford to lose face to a Getty; nor would a Vanderbilt permit himself to be outbid by a Hunt. The seeming foolishness of these Cashist auctions was but the camouflage over a bloody battlefield in which the members of the American ruling plutoclass waged their pitiless war for domination.

The direct beneficiaries however were the adherents, whether sincere or merely opportunistic, of the Cashist school. With the utmost skill they worked these auctions up to a riotous, screaming pitch. In the delirium of them, veering at times on psychosis, hundreds of thousands of dollars passed into their hands without their customers even taking

notice of them. At the other end of each transaction was **Packaged Nothing.**

The phenomenon of the Cashist auction died aware in 1985 because everybody became bored with it. No bubble had been burst, no deception exposed; merely a disease that had run its course.

Still , it was good for some people, because there were half a dozen years in which certain people and groups of the avant-garde had millions of dollars to play around with. Most of the money disappeared, as one might expect, into mammoth nonsensical projects such as wrapping the World Trade Center in SaranWrap, or hiring 10 Philharmonic orchestras to play C# for 24 hours.

Epilogue

In the hall of fame invoked by the Cashists, of persons who anticipated or exemplified their ideas, one finds DaVinci, DuChamp, Rouchomouvski, Dossena, Bastianini, Marinetti, van Maegheren, Buffet, Warhol, I.M. Pei. , Richard Feynman ,(the physicist, for playing bongo drums at Alamagordo), Napoleon, Goering, Adah Isaacs Menken, and Nero.

It is clear from this list that the Cashists reserve a special place in their hearts for war. One of our important contemporary aesthetic philosophers¹⁵, Marvin Burke, recently wrote a book in which he sets out to demonstrate that of the three motives that inspire the creative imagination to the invention of deadly weapons, namely defense, economics or aesthetics, the latter is by far the strongest.

In a long chapter devoted to DaVinci's notebooks, he describes how a great artist can become deeply fascinated with all the subtle details of the craft implicit in the design of instruments of cruelty and murder.

¹⁵ He has been called the " Benedetto Croce of the NY Review of Books"

" Compared to Leonardo", he writes, " Archimedes was a barbarian. The brilliant Greek mathematician only designed catapults and burning lenses, whereas the sublime Florentine labored for decades on the loving elaboration of spears, knives, pikes, swords, arrows and staves twisted about in every diabolical fashion, so that any attempt to extricate them must tear out the organs in which they are lodged. How, I ask you, can one begin to compare the barren ingenuity of the empirical scientist with the sensuous soul of the master artist?"

War, the Cashists want us to believe, because it excites the imagination of artists, is a good thing. They give many reasons in defence of this view:

War stimulates trade by encouraging the plundering of art treasures. Marvin Burke, adapting the classic dictum of von Clausewitz, reminds us that *"War is tourism by other means."*

Then , war is a rich source of ready-mades. You can find Cashists who claim that, although the MX-missile should be considered a great work of art, the only way that one can know this is by taking it out of its silo and putting it into the Museum of Modern Art. In 1985, the Israeli's Uzi pistol received the DuChamp metal for being, *" an artwork of such splendour that it renders the Parthenon irrelevant."*

Finally the Cashists approve of war because it interposes the machine between all normal human relations. These views derive directly from Italian Futurism in the early part of the century, which is why Marinetti is one of their heroes.

Cashists part company with the Futurists however, over the issue of praise for the 'manly virtues' that war is supposed to bring out, at least in some people. Cashists , emphatically, do not believe in manly virtues. To quote Ronald Gaines once more:

" A coward can accumulate a million dollars. A hero can die a homeless derelict. It is only in the context of buying and selling that human identity attains to authenticity."



