Communications and Culture

Communications has been defined as the conveying or exchanging of information and ideas. This wide definition is taken as the starting-point for this series of books, which are not bound by conventional academic divisions. The series aims to document or analyse a broad range of cultural forms and ideas.

It encompasses works from areas as esoteric as linguistics and as exoteric as television. The language of communication may be the written word or the moving picture, the static icon or the living gesture. These means of communicating can at their best blossom into and form an essential part of the other mysterious concept, *culture*.

There is no sharp or intended split in the series between communication and culture. On one definition, culture refers to the organisation of experience shared by members of a community, a process which includes the standards and values for judging or perceiving, for predicting and acting. In this sense, creative communication can make for a better and livelier culture.

The series reaches towards the widest possible audience. Some of the works concern themselves with activities as general as play and games; others offer a narrower focus, such as the ways of understanding the visual image. It is hoped that some moves in the transformation of the artful and the scientific can be achieved, and that both can begin to be understood by a wider and more comprehending community. Some of these books are written by practitioners – broadcasters, journalists and artists; others come from critics, scholars, scientists and historians.

The series has an ancient and laudable, though perhaps untenable, aim – an aim as old as the Greeks and as new as holography; it aspires to help heal the split between cultures, between the practitioners and the thinkers, between science and art, between the academy and life.

PAUL WALTON

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The End of Art Theory

Criticism and Postmodernity

VICTOR BURGIN

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Preface

The essays collected here were written between 1976 and 1985; some have been published previously, two appear in print for the first time. The nature of these writings, the form of my production as an 'essay writer', is determined by my other main forms of work: as an artist, exhibiting work in galleries and museums; and as a lecturer, teaching 'theory' to, mainly, undergraduates. Issuing from a position which faces onto both academy and gallery, these essays are simultaneously polemical, practical, and pedagogical in intent: one of their functions has been to intervene in ongoing cultural-political debates; another has been to allow me to work out the historical and theoretical framework of my own art practice; finally, the essays are intended to be useful to students and teachers in the field of 'visual representations' in general, and the 'visual arts' in particular. It is this intention which has dictated a procedure of writing which 'interrupts itself' to provide thumb-nail sketches of basic theoretical concepts, and examples of their application.

At the end of the first essay in this book I remark that the division of labour between 'theorists' and 'practitioners' is problematical for a truly *critical* cultural initiative, and I touch on this again towards the end of the final essay. In recent years post-structuralism's deconstruction of metalinguistic hierarchies has in effect gone further, to result, particularly in the field of literary criticism, in a form of writing which abandons all

pretence to theoretical distance from its objects, revelling in its own inescapable condition as *writing*. I have not, for the most part, adopted this strategy of writing in my essays as I doubt that (undergraduate) students would find it helpful; it is in the gallery, through the use of the 'mixed system' of photograph and text, that I have tried to articulate the concerns of theory *otherwise*.

'Modernism in the *Work of Art*' was first given as a paper at the 1976 Edinburgh Film Festival 'Avant-garde Event'. It was first published, in expanded form, in *20th Century Studies*, 15–16 December 1976.

'The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Post-modernisms' was written for the exhibition catalogue, *1965 to 1972 – when attitudes became form*, Kettle's Yard Gallery, Cambridge University, 1984. It is based on a talk given at the John Hansard Gallery, Southampton University, 1982.

'Seeing Sense' was written for *Artforum*, New York, February 1980.

'Re-reading *Camera Lucida*' was published in *Creative Camera*, 215, November 1982. It was first given as a lecture at the Polytechnic of Central London.

'Tea with Madeleine' is from *Wedge*, 6, New York, Winter 1984. The 'left-hand' discourse was first presented as a talk at a seminar on *Desire* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, November 1983, and subsequently published (as 'Man-Desire-Image') in *Desire*, ICA documents series, 1984. I consider the absent 'third column' here to be my gallery work from around this period (see *Between*, ICA and the Camden Press, 1986).

'Diderot, Barthes, *Vertigo*' was first presented, in a shorter version, at the symposium *Film and Photography* – organised jointly by the Department of English, Department of Art History, and the Film Studies Program – at the University of California, Santa Barbara, May 1984.

'The End of Art Theory' is based on various informal talks given, during 1984–5, to art students at: California Institute of the Arts, Valencia; University of California, Los Angeles; Cranbrook Academy, Detroit; Cooper Union, New York; Goldsmiths' College, London; Camberwell School of Art, London.

I have not revised the essays for publication here. On occasions I repeat myself. As the *contexts* differ, however, I hope this may be excused. The inconsistent spelling of 'fantasy' (*phantasy*, in the earlier essays) may be disregarded. I once felt it necessary to signal a psychoanalytic framework for the concept by adopting the spelling in the *Standard Edition* of Freud. I later conformed to common practice (see Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Hogarth, 1973, pp. 314–15, 318,n.β).

VICTOR BURGIN