

1. (Roland Barthes) In his story *Sarrasine*, Balzac, speaking of a castrato disguised as a woman, writes this sentence: "It was Woman, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling" Who is speaking in this way? Is it the story's hero, concerned to ignore the castrato concealed beneath the woman? Is it the man Balzac, endowed by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it the author Balzac, professing certain "literary" ideas of femininity? Is it universal wisdom? or romantic psychology? It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes....

2. (Barthes) The absence of the Author (with Brecht, we might speak here of a real "alienation: the Author diminishing like a tiny figure at the far end of the literary stage) is not only a historical fact or an act of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text (or — what is the same thing — the text is henceforth written and read so that in it, on every level, the Author absents himself). Time, first of all, is no longer the same. The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book: the book and the author take their places of their own accord on the same line, cast as a before and an after: the Author is supposed to feed the book — that is, he pre-exists it, thinks, suffers, lives for it; he maintains with his work the same relation of antecedence a father maintains with his child. Quite the contrary, the modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now. This is because (or: it follows that) to write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing, of "painting" (as the Classic writers put it), but rather what the

linguisticians, following the vocabulary of the Oxford school, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given to the first person and to the present), in which utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered: something like the / Command of kings or the I Sing of the early bards; the modern writer, having buried the Author, can therefore no longer believe, according to the “pathos” of his predecessors, that his hand is too slow for his thought or his passion, and that in consequence, making a law out of necessity, he must accentuate this gap and endlessly “elaborate” his form; for him, on the contrary, his hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin — or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, that is, the very thing which ceaselessly questions any origin....

3. (Barthes) In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. This is why it is absurd to hear the new writing condemned in the name of a humanism which hypocritically appoints itself the champion of the reader's rights. The reader has never been the concern of classical criticism; for it, there is no other man in literature but the one who writes. We are now beginning to be the dupes no longer of such antiphrases, by which our society proudly champions precisely what it dismisses, ignores, smothers or destroys; we know that to restore to writing its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author. (“The Death of the Author,” Roland Barthes)

4. (Megil on Foucault) While it would be a mistake to attribute to orthodox historiography a paradigmatic unity of the sort that T. S. Kuhn has pointed to in the natural sciences, it is nevertheless true that orthodox historians do adhere to what J. H. Hexter has called the "reality rule," the rule that historians cannot tell just any story about the past but must rather tell "the best and most likely story that can be sustained by the relevant extrinsic evidence." The historian seeks, in short, to render "the best account he can of the past as it really was... In short, orthodox historians adhere to a "discovery" view of the past, holding that the past is there, a field of real entities and forces waiting for the historian to find; and they reject the opposing "construction" view of the past, which holds that, far from discovering and reporting the past, historians must be regarded as constructing or creating it. In accepting an irreducible interpretative element in history, orthodox historians recognize that the historical account is in part an invention of the historian, but they see it as an invention that, solidly grounded in the facts of history, rightly aspires to portray the past "as it actually was." ...

5. (Megil on Foucault) The orthodox historian is strongly committed, furthermore, to the view that there is a clear distinction between getting things right and getting things wrong. In his elementary concern with getting things right, the orthodox historian signals his adherence to a view that has dominated the historical profession since its birth in the nineteenth century namely, the view that history is at bottom a science, capable of realistically apprehending the world and of discovering a truth that is more than relative. Admittedly, historians are today less confident about the scientific status of history than they were at the end of the nineteenth century, but there still remains a basic commitment to the ideal of scientific history... For the orthodox historian, the evidence that he has so laboriously discovered and assessed has a reality of its own reflecting the reality of the past itself, and he sees his task as the construction of a historical account that will explain and interpret this actual past. Foucault

does not conform to the rough consensus on the nature of historical investigation that I have just sketched out. On the contrary, he stands in radical opposition to it.

Allan Megil, "Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Sep., 1979), pp. 456-58.

6. Charles Mills "Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race") and a commentary on Beyonce.

7. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (*Partisan Review*, 1939)

The avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of [their] art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relatives and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point...subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like the plague...It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at "abstract" or "non-objective" art...The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms...Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.

But the absolute is absolute and the poet or artist, being what [they are], cherishes certain relative values more than others...And so [they turn] out to be imitating, not God...but the disciplines and processes of art and literature themselves. This is the genesis of the "abstract." In turning [their] attention away from subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of...craft. The nonrepresentational or "abstract," if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary and accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extraverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former.

When there is an avant-garde, generally we also find a rear-guard. True

enough – simultaneously with the entrance of the avant-garde, a second new cultural phenomenon appeared in the industrial West...Kitsch: popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc...Kitsch is a product of the industrial revolution...the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of a new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide.

If the avant-garde imitates the processes of art, kitsch...imitates its effects...There has always been on one side the minority of the powerful – and therefore the cultivated – and on the other the great mass of the exploited and poor – and therefore the ignorant. Formal culture has always belonged to the first, while the last have had to content themselves with folk or rudimentary culture, or kitsch.

Where today a political regime establishes an official cultural policy, it is for the sake of demagogy. If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy, and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else. The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects...they will flatter the masses by bringing all culture down to their level. It is for this reason that the avant-garde is outlawed...