

"T" – TAKEN FOR GRANTED

The art world is *taken for granted*, *T*. The art world makes some kind of sense, maybe a lot of sense; there is order, development, continuity. It is *T*. that time factoring in modern circumstances is more discontinuous and interrupted, but that, nevertheless, history is linear and art follows art in relatively logical sequence. Ordered views in repeated doses becomes assumed, a kind of tacit but frozen configured authority. Bland, art-world acknowledgment of *T*. situations can be mind-boggling.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND CONSENSUS

What is given is *T*. We are startled when a challenge is mounted, but we ordinarily, after some early misgivings, accept the claims, maybe with feeble reservations, but rarely are the larger patterns of acceptance questioned. Artists frequently champion systems and beliefs, *T.*, that do nothing for them! That may even block or thwart them, mostly because acquiescence is *T.*

The *T*. situation becomes naturalized, habitual expectancy appears natural and inevitable, not to be doubted. Status sufficiently assured can become near-universally *T*. Hopefully, no immediate challenges or coups will occur, or if they spring up will be rebuffed. It is hard to displace *T*. positions, although erosion and catastrophes occur. To prevent this a host of support networks (dealers, critics, museum personnel, etc.) bulwark or prop up (or discard!) endangered situations.

The trick in the art world is to control innovation, guarantee protected *T*. values, and avoid unexpected or disruptive situations unless these can be managed, handled through the taming assimilating process of being *T*. The "system" usually works to protect the assumptions and prerogatives of staked out positions – enough dealers, collectors, museum people, etc. would be sufficiently involved, their status (or investments) at stake, to keep the thing going after the artist has reached a certain stature. Note that the tax system is of major value in maintaining *T*. positions. Critics are influential in setting the contexts and contents of the art dialogue, what is going on, how the future is predicated. Perhaps critics fight too relentlessly among themselves because of the modernist demand to locate the new terrains of what is to be (subsequently) *T*.

THE EFFECTS OF T.

Artists who are *T.* sometimes like to forget that they were once not *T.* Nevertheless, one is advised to take precautionary means to keep the thing going! Artists are frequently justifiably nervous, fearful of being displaced or *T.* in such a manner that their role is largely nominal (ignored) or ceremonial. Individuals basking in being *T.*, taking themselves for granted, frequently in the earlier stages of success get better and better! – a not unexpected result of ego enhancement. Taking oneself for granted, however, can have further depressing consequences. After some years of being *T.*, artists can so take themselves for granted that they run out of steam and ignominiously repeat themselves, thereby boring themselves and everyone else. But because they are *T.*, we almost never notice! Those who point this out are spoilers or failures or young artists who have no doubt that a similar process couldn't happen to them. Anyway, one can worry about it when one gets to that point, that is, when one is *T.*

Speaking personally, I am not exempted from the strictures this article specifies. I have probably been a blight on the Chicago scene, occupying too much space, *T.*! (It can be a big ego trip to think one is important enough to be *T.*!) Leaving one location may or may not effect being *T.* everywhere in varying degrees. Local *T.*'s don't necessarily get much mileage in New York and local *T.*'s often strenuously ignore the big *T.* Currently, there are big German and Italian pushes in New York. The threat: share being *T.* in New York or watch out for the international consequences. A French push is on its way, scheduled to arrive in New York in early 1982.

LOSING IT!

Disaster strikes: being *T.* is no longer *T.*! Being not *T.* forces reappraisal of one's art-world assumptions. The ego-enhancing world of being *T.* is suddenly fraught with economic and prestige withdrawals, problems of survival, downgraded, kicked aside! *T.* near-universality, through its very matter-of-fact being *T.* can become an anxiety-provoking circumstance. The artist (and dealer, etc.) become concerned that being *T.* will slip into a casual stereotyping that approximates a living death of being *T.* and no one paying heed. Thus the near-hysteria, fear, and precautionary tactics so common in the art world. It is necessary to stay *T.* in such a charged presence that the art world is continuously being reminded conspicuously and often exhibitionistically that one is markedly *T.*

Art world types will on occasion pause in sucking up to *T.* success stories to negligently kick (in passing – no sustained attention deserved) someone who's downward trajectory is *T.* Mostly those gifted with lack of success are *T.* with no one needing to notice

they are *T*. Their position is so *T*. that it doesn't call for comment! Artists should, however, take it for granted that fear of making a mistake often inhibits attention in such instances.

COMMODIFICATION

The artist's position under what is *T*. to be modern, advanced, industrial society (we better take this one for granted), its reiterated excitements and spectacle is *T*. The "truest" picture of what is *T*. is provided by the market, particularly auctions, those manipulated "free" markets that protect *T*. reputations while inciting investment. Investment reinforces *T*. which reinforces investment.

Artists may suck but it is *T*. that they retain authenticity. Perhaps they do! Late modernist culture processes a *T*. split consciousness, a false consciousness, or blanked-out consciousness. It is *T*. that there is a non-compliant self-consciousness that is the mirror image of the grinning, compliant self. The artist may have to suck, but the artist must also avoid being made into an object, packaged. The artist often grants a *T*. helplessness in late capitalist society and whatever that may signify, while asserting a *T*. free will and the purity of art.

The packaging of the artist, a late industrial commodification of art and artist, is the extreme condition of being *T*., the *T*. aspect of a modernism that has turned even the self-critical stance of the artist (art criticizing art, the artist criticizing the artist's role) into a commodity to be *T*. by an avid and adulatory audience. The artist is *T*. by the audience to put on the fun and games, the thrills, by which the audience can enjoy a self-congratulatory lubricity. This is part of the *T*. big spectacle. The artist acknowledges, it is *T*., that he can't change art-world circumstances. The artist's final reflexive resort (and the original first resort!) is the insistence of autonomy. Package, my eye! I am the same old modernist whatever, no restraints! But in a commodity civilization, can art be anything but a commodity? As art objects rise on the commodity scales of scarcity and investment, commodification becomes their primary identification. Art objects are *T*. as commodities and their very high status is almost precisely their commodity status.

Speakeasy, "Taken for Granted, *T*," *New Art Examiner*, Chicago, October 1981, pp. 3-4