

Philip Fisher

Intellektuelle Technologien



Geboren 1941 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Studium der Philosophie und der Literatur an der University of Pittsburgh (B. A. 1963), der englischen Literatur an der Harvard University (Ph. D. 1971). Bis 1985 Professor an der Brandeis University, seit 1986 Professor of English an der Harvard University. Bücher: *Hard Facts*, 1985; *Making up Society*, 1981. Adresse: Harvard University, Department of English, Warren House 23, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.

The projects that I had underway and on which I planned to work in Berlin were all concerned with features of European cultural modernity and the institutions or intellectual technologies that made possible or expressed those features. I had long been interested, to take one example, in the institution of the museum as a social institution that shapes the production of works of art in certain directions once the primary destination of works of art within culture is not private ownership but public display within the collections or special exhibitions of public museums. The civic museum is, to that extent, both a feature of cultural modernity, especially of 19th century Nationalism and, at the same time, a technology for the use and valuation of art within which the nature of art itself is defined within the modern period.

Another such technology is the narrative technology of the printed book, the novel. One of my projects concerned the moment of the rise of the novel or, more essentially, the transfer of cultural priority from the drama to the novel, from the social experience of gathering at a pre-set time and place to watch, along with others, the spectacle of a play, to the selfchosen, domestic experience of silent reading. The novel required the solitude of the reading act, the existence of leisure time across a wide range of society and the printing press itself for the production of inexpensive copies of narratives.

An associated project concerned one of the psychological or anthropological questions that can be posed around the rise of the novel, the question of the adaptation of traditional psychological descriptions of the self to the new requirements of privacy, middle-class stability, and individu-

alism. This was the question of the philosophical history of the passions and the alteration within the philosophical or literary use of the passions that we find occurring in Europe contemporary with the rise of the novel. My concern in this project is with episodes in the history of the passions in which we can see a close link between a literature structured around the passions, such as Shakespearean Tragedy, and a corresponding philosophical concern in, for example, Descartes, Spinoza, and Hobbes, with such passions as anger and wonder. Because of the traditional link between a passion like anger and unmistakable physical signs of anger that can be seen by everyone, the passions make impossible a domain of privacy and private experience. They make it difficult to withhold experience selectively and it is by means of the selective withholding of experience that we discriminate a sphere of privacy, a sphere of intimacy, and a public sphere within modern social life.

At the same time, in so far as the play of the passions within everyday life is seen as essential, the regularity and predictability of social or economic life become impossible because everyday life is subject to interruption and redirection by the impulses of anger, fear, mourning, enthusiasm or melancholy. One link between these two projects lay in the relation of both the passions and the technology of silent reading that accompanied the novel to such issues as privacy and the constitution of modern individualism around a notion of private experience.

Although these three projects seem quite different, they each involve the search for a structural relation among a variety of changes within cultural modernity. Silent reading within the tradition of verbal art, the museum within the tradition of painting and sculpture, the passions and their alteration within accounts of the self are each devices to summarize and display the selective, constructive pressure of modernity on narrative, on the work of art, and on the historical anthropology of human nature.

Naturally, during my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg my work shaped itself in part in reaction to the projects that I found around me and to the many themes that the year's discussions brought to the center of our shared attention. In my case the unexpected configuration of greatest value lay in the relation of my work to the Culture of Science group headed by Tim Lenoir. Within this group that eventually housed almost a third of the fellows there was a rich debate around the themes of a cultural account of knowledge. At the same time there was a display of techniques within the History of Science that seemed to me parallel to my own concern with such "technologies of the intellect" as silent reading or the museum. The cultural history of science, like the cultural history of art or literature lays stress on the way that instruments, practices, cultural agendas, and historical experience make possible or impossible an act of dis-

covery, or the particular form of discovery. In the case of art the instruments and practices make possible or make interesting the preservation of attention, the ordering, and the structuring of experience on which the past relies.

My writing while at the Wissenschaftskolleg consisted in finishing my book *Making and Effacing Art*, a book concerned with the consequences for what we call Modern Art of the expectations built into the institution of the museum with its creation of sequences and historical series within which objects are placed. Secondly, I completed several chapters of my book on the Passions and will publish those as essays this year. I also wrote a long essay on the relation of art to a Democratic Social Space, an essay appearing during the fall of 1988 in *Representations*.

In terms of intellectual vitality, diversity, the availability of books and materials, the generosity of the staff with their time and help, the Wissenschaftskolleg provided a nearly ideal setting for a year of work. It was, for me, of particular importance that, located as it was in Berlin, the Wissenschaftskolleg made possible collaborative work throughout the year with members of the Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR, in particular with the Literature group headed by Robert Weimann. At the same time I profited from the opportunity to present my work on several occasions and to participate in the year's work of the John F. Kennedy Institut of the Freie Universität Berlin.

At the end of the year I see three consequences for my own long term thinking. First, a new sense that the historical techniques within the culture of science are rich in promise for cultural history in general. Second, I came to see the value for my project on the Passions of the new style intellectual history, or historical anthropology, as it is practiced in Germany today. Third, I came to see that within the analysis of art a major block, even an historical taboo, has come to exist around what has to be ironically called the "beauty-effect". How to approach this problem is not clear to me, but as a result of this year I expect to work at a later point on the cultural deformation that institutions and practices interested in meaning, interpretation and explanation have produced within the aesthetic realm, especially in so far as they convert the range of aesthetic effects, among them beauty, into an aspect of ideology.