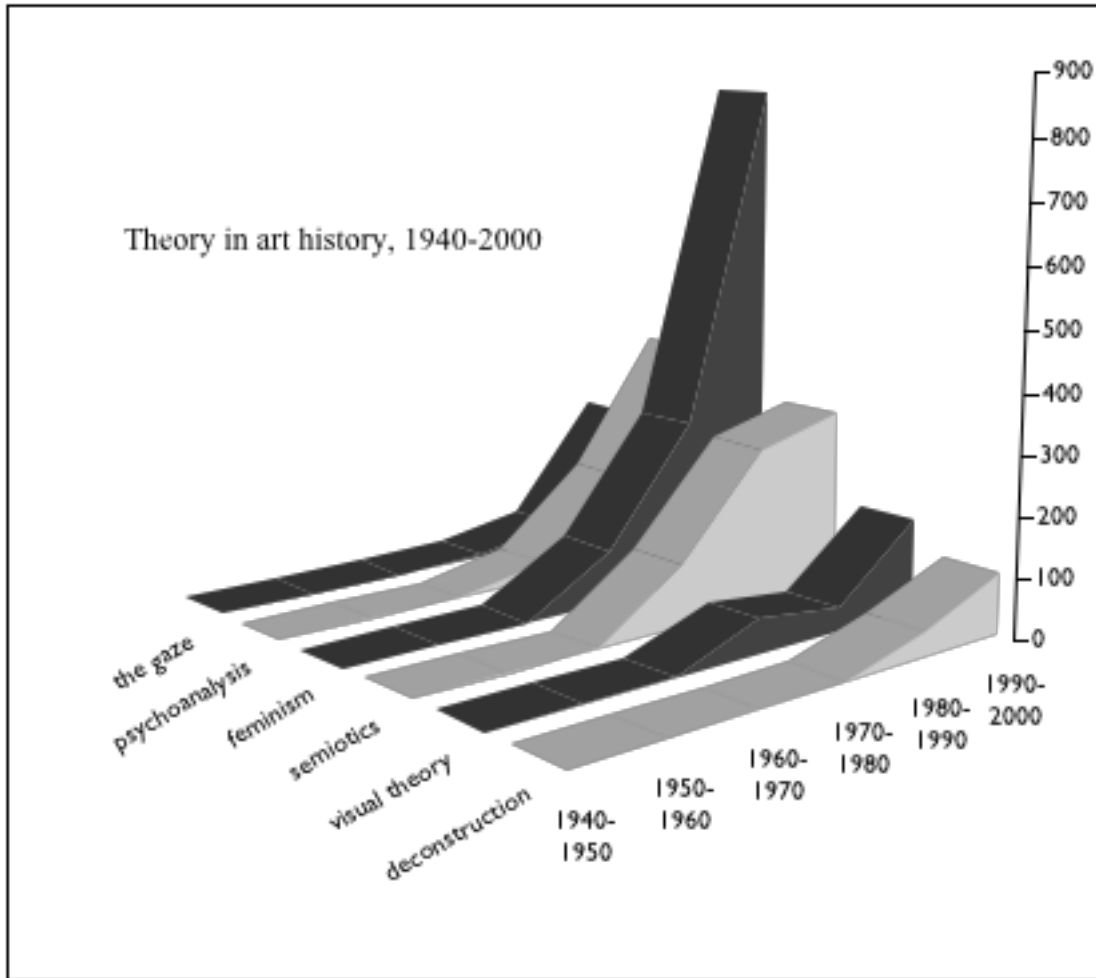


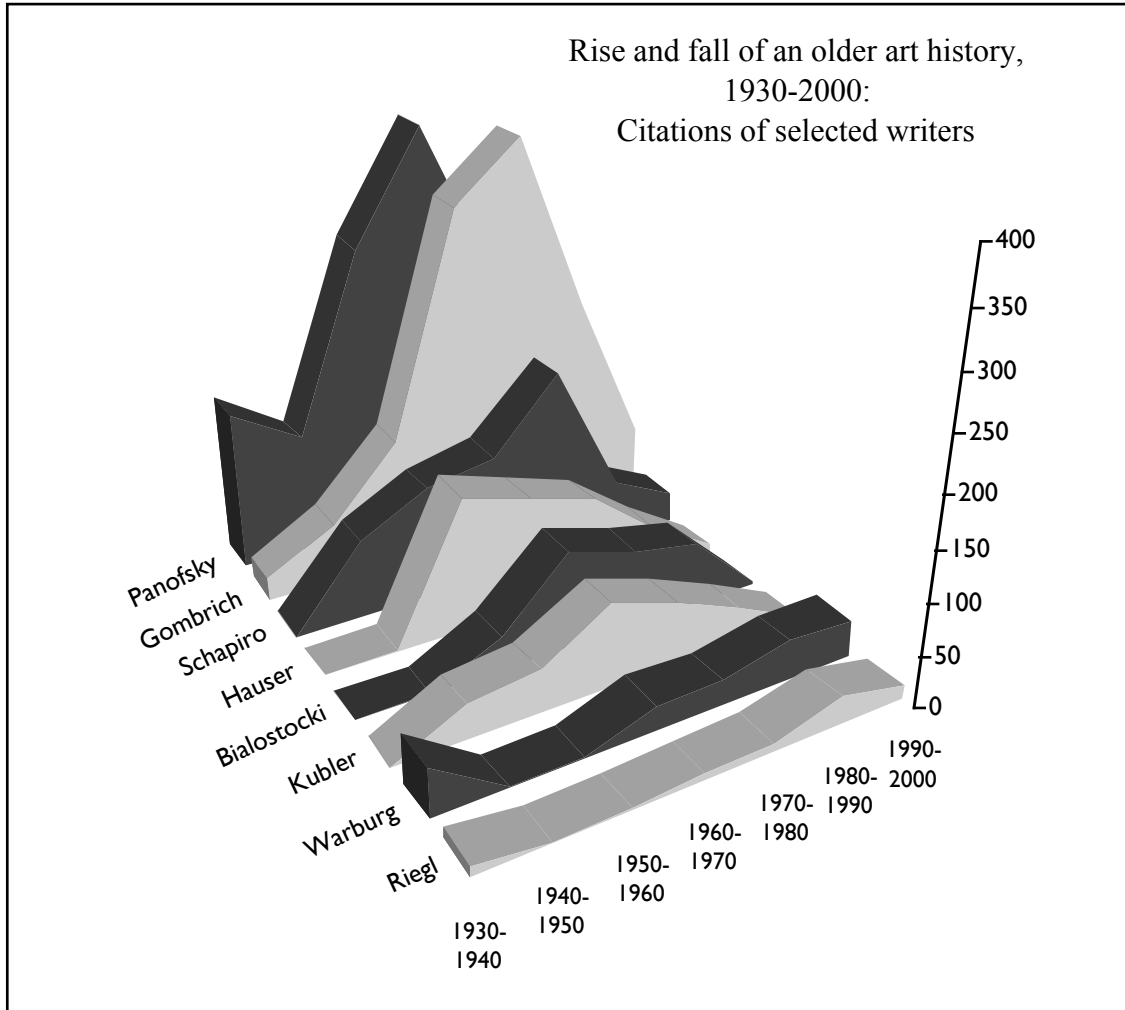
Series Preface

It has been said and said that there is too much theorizing in the visual arts. Contemporary writing seems like a trackless thicket, tangled with with questions. Yet it is not a wilderness; in fact it is well-posted with signs and directions. Want to find Lacan? Read him through Macey, Silverman, Borch-Jakobsen, Žižek, Nancy, Leclaire, Derrida, Laplanche, Lecercle, or even Klossowski, but not—so it might be said—through Abraham (unless it's late Lacan), Miller (the politics is too complicated), Pontalis, Rosaloto, Safouan, Roudinesco, Schneiderman, or Mounin, and of course never through Dalí.

People who would rather avoid problems of interpretation, at least in their more difficult forms, have sometimes hoped that “theory” would prove to be a passing fad. A simple test shows that is not the case. The Table, below, shows the number of art historical essays that have terms like “psychoanalysis” as keywords, according to the Bibliography of the History of Art. The increase is steep after 1980, and in three cases—the gaze, psychoanalysis, and feminism—the rise is exponential.



Another sampling shows that citations of some of the more influential art historians of the mid-twentieth century, writers who came before the current proliferation of theories, are waning:



In this second graph there is a slight rise in the number of references to Warburg and Riegl, reflecting the interest they have had for the current generation of art historians: but the graph's surprise is the precipitous decline in citations of Panofsky and Gombrich.

Most of art history is not driven by named theories or individual historians, and these graphs are limited by the terms that can be meaningfully searched in the Bibliography of the History of Art. Even so, the two graphs suggest that the landscape of interpretive strategies is changing rapidly. Many subjects crucial to the interpretation of art are too new, ill-theorized, or unfocused to be addressed in monographs or textbooks. The purpose of *The Art Seminar* is to address some of the most challenging subjects in current writing on art, those that are not unencompassably large (such as the state of painting), or not yet adequately posed (such as the space between the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic), or so well known that they can be written up in critical dictionaries (the

theory of deconstruction). The subjects chosen for this series are poised, ready to be articulated and argued.

Each volume in this series began as a roundtable, which was then transcribed and edited. The transcripts record those momentary disagreements and dead-ends that are typical of any contested subject: they are barometers of the confusions and moments of clarity that precede a subject's codification into usable knowledge. Each volume of *The Art Seminar* also has assessments written by scholars who did not attend the original events; their brief was to consider the conversation from a distance, noting its strengths and its blind spots. In that way *The Art Seminar* attempts to cast as wide, as fine, and as strong a net as possible, to capture the limit of theorizing on each subject at the particular moment represented by each book. Perhaps in the future the subjects treated here will be colonized, and become part of the standard pedagogy of art: but by that time they may be on the downward slide, away from the centers of conversation and into the history of art history.