

**PROCEEDINGS for the School of Visual Arts 20th Annual National Conference on Liberal Arts and the Education of Artists: REASSESSING, THE MODERN, MODERNITY AND MODERNISM**

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**SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON LIBERAL ARTS AND THE EDUCATION OF ARTISTS:  
REASSESSING THE MODERN, MODERNITY AND MODERNISM.  
OCTOBER 19, 2006**

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER: ROBERT STORR**

I was asked to talk about Modernism, what is it. And so I will try to do so. But this will be a talk, not a lecture. It's written to the extent that I have got a map of ideas that I will follow somewhat. And I may also digress. There will be some images of which this [points to a projected image] is now the first. And the images are to look at, at such time as you decide you're tired of listening, or to look at while you're listening. They don't exactly illustrate the talk point-by-point, but I may reach out and grab one of them and shake it for some content along the way, since they are chosen with some method after all.

And just to start right there, the “Les Demoiselles d' Avignon” painted in 1907 is for many people the pivotal work of Modernism. It's just up the block on 53rd Street hanging. And a lot of people conceive of this as being the sort of break out painting of Modernism in the 20th Century. There are many other people who believe that Modernism began earlier, began with Manet, began with Courbet. My personal view is it begins with Goya, but we can argue about that for a long time.

But, in any case, if we're going to have a talk about what is Modernism, the least one can say is that this is certainly Modernism. And that there is no disagreement that it is Modernism. After that, I think you will find that the disagreements about what constitutes Modernism grow almost immediately from this point onwards and actually were already in dispute by the time this picture was painted. By the time this picture was painted by the same artist, Picasso, Modernism was in a sense morphing into something different, even among members of the avant-garde who had broken ground. And some people will argue that it was not morphing into something different, it was regressing, in fact. It was retreating from Modernism. And I will get into that a little bit.

When one asks the question, what is Modernism, one has to acknowledge first of all it's been asked many, many times before. And if we ask it again, it seems to me the immediate corollary or subsidiary question is, how urgent is the asking? And under what circumstances has the question surfaced this time? Modernism has been under question or under dispute—under some kind of interrogation since its inception. And as I point out with the Picasso example alone, the first questioners of Modernism were often the inventors of Modernism, or at least significant aspects of Modernism. Because the so-called return to order of the immediate post-World War I era, of which this is an example, was a project of many artists who had pioneered it. Matisse's paintings in the same period were more conservative than his earlier paintings. The work of the Italian futurists, many of them became conservative Severini probably being the leading example of that. So, that the idea of Modernism as being one endless progression has never held water historically. The idea that Modernism was one endless progression within the body of an individual artist's work hasn't been sustainable as an idea either. And just side barring, I recently gave oral exams up at the Institute of Fine Arts, where I've taught for four years, and I gave a slide comparison which was four paintings from the year 1950. One, “Number Thirty-Two,” Jackson Pollock of 1950; “Excavation of de Kooning,” 1950; “Woman One” of de Kooning 1950 to 1952—and actually it's a cheater; 1951, one of Pollock's black paintings. That in the year 1950, which many people saw as the pivotal year where finally American Modernism came of age and moved forward into a world which was completely unlike that which obtained

previously, because it was the most completely abstract that art had ever become is the moment where the two leading proponents—Pollock and de Kooning—actually do an about face. And that is the story of Modernism, the myth of Modernism as progress towards a foreseeable goal, the myth that again progress is continuous in a given work or in a given style, it is a myth. And it's worse than a myth, since myths generally shape complex material into a coherent picture, it's a misrepresentation which disorganizes what in fact is a rather clear picture. And the rather clear picture is that the progression is not neat and that there are many doubling backs and regroupings and retrenchments and reversions and so on and so forth. So, that the later Picasso is more radical than this picture and the later Matisse more radical than this picture. But, the later Matisse and Picasso are inconceivable without this picture, just as Matisse and Picasso of the '20s is inconceivable without Matisse and Picasso of the period 1905, 1907 and so on.

In any case, we are now discussing what is Modernism again, and part of the question is under what circumstances, under what conditions, in what timeframe are we talking about it. The term, to apply, is *déjà vu* in a certain sense. The French translation of *déjà vu* in this case is back to the future, since we've been having this discussion since the beginning of the 1980s basically, when it was widely thought that post-Modernism had at last definitively eclipsed Modernism. And of course the translation further from that into New Yorkese is Yogi Berra's *déjà vu* all over again.

Now, if I make light of the question, it is not that I have no respect for the substance of it and certainly not that I have no respect for the people who have invited me to talk about it. But, simply to say that the minute you ask it, it seems suddenly to galvanize everything and everybody says, ah ha, now we're going to find out. And you won't. But, beyond that, the more interesting question is why the question is asked and under what circumstances.

And even a more interesting thing is that the question is perhaps unanswerable. In fact, I am certain that it is unanswerable. And that the nature of the question is the content that it draws out of a particular set of circumstances in which it is posed, rather than the ability to tie it to any particular teleological, historical, ideological, esthetic development that can be held in focus for anything longer than a three, four or maybe five-year period. There is no decade that is a sustainable arc of Modernism, much less half a century or a quarter of a century or a century. In other words, what gives this question more than rhetorical significance are the circumstances in which it arises.

Now, a working definition of Modernism might be something like this. Modernism is on the one hand the sum of its contradictions. Modernism is all about the contradictions between different impulses within aesthetic domains, within cultural domains, within historical and political domains, within intellectual domains, ideological domains. And I think actually, you're in the secular world, this is true, but it is also true in the world of religion. I'm not a bit religious. But I have respect for religion and I particularly have respect for it when artists who I respect have dealt with it as a subject matter. And I think one of the hardest things is for people who are of a religious turn of mind to believe that they are being taken seriously by people who are not religious. But, in turn, one of the harder things for nonreligious people to do is to talk about religious categories as an interesting way to frame questions.

I raise this in part, because one of the artists with whom I have worked the most, Gerhard Richter, in recent years has undertaken a series of projects, some of them by commission and other ones independently, which have unmistakable religious overtones. In particular, he has made a crucifix. He has done a commission for a Franciscan church. He has painted a couple of religious subject matters—an annunciation after Titian, the side of the Dome Cathedral in Cologne, and more recently he has actually made stained glass windows for the cathedral in

Cologne—which nobody among his post-Modern defenders in this country, principally people associated with October-style critique, have any room for whatsoever. It is an embarrassment to them that he has done this. They do not have language to talk about why he might have done this.

Gerard Richter on the other hand, has some interesting language. When I asked him about this set of issues, we had been in a long conversation about the Baader-Meinhof group and why it is that he painted them, since, after all, he was a refugee from East Germany. He was anything but a Communist, although he in fact had been a loyal painter of Communist propaganda when he was a younger artist, but he was an apostate, if you will, from the party, a refugee from the GDR, who then ends up in Cologne and paints a series of works that people think of as the height of disengaged and critically ironic post-Modernist art, who suddenly does one thing—he paints major political events from recent German history. And then somewhat later, but almost as suddenly again enters into this realm of painting of religious subject matters.

Now Richter is—I'll just talk about Richter for a second as a paradigmatic problem in relation to the ideas of Modernism. Richter had already distinguished himself by moving between different options that were thought to be mutually exclusive, particularly in this country. And if we talk about Modernism in this country, we have to recognize the degree to which it is culturally specific, even parochial. The ideas of Modernism that we have here, particularly in New York, are not at all the ideas, or at least not exclusively those ideas that people have in Sao Paulo or in Japan or in many other places where there have been Modernist traditions of long standing dating back to the first decade of the 20th Century, right? Not just post-war or post-'65 or whatever it is. And that Richter is a problem for Americans because he painted abstractly and figuratively. He painted coolly and hotly, so to speak. He has also painted subject matters that are irreconcilable in certain ways. He has done in effect consciously and publicly. It's important that Richter doesn't paint these one after the other; he paints them simultaneously. He doesn't show them in clusters exclusive of each other but makes a point of showing them together, so that you're forced to come to terms with the simultaneities in which he's engaged.

Richter has done this with subject matters. He painted radical revolutionaries, although he was not one. And he's painted religious subject matters. And then the question, is he in fact a believer? There was a term in the 1970s for those people who were not of the revolutionary left, but who were inclined to favor it. And that was *sympathisant*, which is basically a French word taken into German, which means fellow travelers. Right? So, when I asked him point blank, what are your feelings about religion, since at the outset of your career you declared that you were a Nietzschean and that there was no God and so on. And he said, I'm a *sympathisant*. Okay? So, you already have, in the case of this one artist, a person who is entertaining thoughts about something around which he has doubts, of which he is not certain, but which nevertheless engages him on a deep level to the extent that he is willing to dedicate time and talent to making art about it. Political on the one side; religious on the other.

Here we have Picasso, as I say, a paradigmatic Modernist, paradigmatic betrayer of Modernism. Francis Picabia might be another example of this, since Picabia's Cubo-Futurist paintings of the teens were Modernist absolutely and his paintings of the '20s and '30s and particularly of the '40s were the absolute opposite of what people thought of Modernism. But lo and behold, if indeed in certain realms it is said that the first half of the 20th century belongs to Picasso and the second belongs to Duchamp. In truth, a good chunk of the second half of the 20th century belongs to Picabia, and particularly in relation to artists like Richter, Polka and the Germans, whom Picabia's perversities desire to contradict himself, desire to confound schemers, importance, development and so on and so forth, was an essential property of his enterprise.

This {gestures toward the projected images] just to show you some classic Modernism hanging together and to remind you of something else. As I said, Modernism is the sum of its contradictions. It is made out of specific sets of contradictions in each instance. For example, if you look at the Futurists among the early Modernists, the Futurists tried to paint what machinery was like, but they didn't make machine sculpture. The Russian Futurists began to move into the realm of making sculpture that was like machines. But in all the styles that you can identify, there are carry-overs, there are relapses, there are missed opportunities, there are enormous leaps of the imagination, which are sometimes never followed up on. There are all kinds of things going on. And of course there are all these movements going on simultaneously and the contradictions among them are significant.

Now, this actually shows you a corner of the Burton and Emily Tremaine Collection on display. It is of course itself a work of art, since this is a photograph by Louise Lawler. And Louise Lawler is a sort of genius of visual criticality—a word which I don't really like very much, but we sort of have to use it and I'll play post-Modern to get your, get on your good side. Criticality is an abysmal term; critique is not so much better either. Thinking critically is fine. But, anyway...

[Laughter]

...I'm going to try and do that. What Louise Lawler does is show you things. She frames things in such a way that you cannot miss the contradictions, the discrepancies inherent in the image.

This particular example is not perhaps one of the most marked in this respect, except that in this room you have—I think, if I'm not mistaken. What's in the background? Is that one of Matisse's back? I can't quite see. Far in the distance. But anyway, you have Giacometti in the foreground, of the roughly Surrealist variety. You have a Robert Delauney on the left. And there's another one coming up—and on the right, you have “Broadway Boogie Woogie” These paintings are not contemporary. “Broadway Boogie Woogie” comes late. Delauney comes early and the Giacometti comes in the middle. But if you want to think of classic Modernism and if you want to think that these artists were in fact making work roughly similar that did overlap, although these examples do not, you have to realize that Modernism was never one thing. It was always a proposition about what modern art should be under the conditions of modernity in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres, and that those propositions were all hypotheses borne up, not so much by arguments, not so much by any objective proof, but by the strength of the work itself. The appropriateness of the materials, the vividness of the metaphor, the ways in which thought was provoked, the sensation was increased, enhanced, *et cetera*. Those are the arguments in favor of those propositions, but they're not arguments.

There's a very wonderful passage in Lichtenstein where he talks about how there are certain statements which have meaning because they can be verified. They exist in those areas where things can be brought to bare, either the logic of an argument or a fact in the world can prove the truth of a statement. He says that things in the realm of ethics, of religious or spiritual thinking and of art are not subject to proof or disproof. They are, however, things that can be shown. The distinction between proving a point and showing something to somebody in a way that is persuasive, compelling and engaging, *et cetera* is the difference between discourse and words, particularly philosophical discourse, which attempts to be truly philosophical, and that which artists do. Artists show you something and your willingness to subscribe to it, even with doubts, even with resistance, is measured not by things that can be quantified, things that can be checked off, but rather by the force of an alchemy of elements coming together and making substance appear in the place of what otherwise might be a wild hypothesis.

Most of the ideological propositions in Modernism, most of the manifestos of propositions of Modernism, were wild hypotheses that became plausible and believable because people made amazing things out of them, or in their name. But it turned out that many of them did not in fact come to pass in the wider sense, the way the artists had anticipated.

So, for example, the revolutions of art that we speak of Orphism and De Stijl or neoplasticism, or Surrealism—and then there's constructivism and a host of others—those revolutions did not in fact transform the world in the way that any of the artists who made that work and many of who wrote manifestos on its behalf, anticipated.

We should also connect revolutions and art with revolutions in the political domain and there have been many in the 20th century. And most of them were disasters of one kind or another: heroic disasters, hopeful disasters, many kinds of disasters, some of them deeply sinister disasters as well. When we think of revolutions we think primarily of the whole series of revolutions that begin with the French Revolution—actually begins with the American Revolution, which antedates the French Revolution—but, when I'm out in the world now and people come to me and say, but you're an American curator. You don't understand neo-colonialism or the need for revolution and stuff like that. I say, well, you know, this country may have lately forgotten too much of its history in this department, but it actually did have a revolution and it was a colony. So that our relationship to the culture of Europe is like all of the countries of Latin America, of a formerly colonized country coming to terms with its relationship to the old European powers that be. The fact that we in turn economically to other people or that we created slavery or that we did other things, doesn't get us off the hook by any means. But it does mean that we have understandings that transcend the caricature of America as a country with virtually no history or of a country with a seamless history of dominion, if you will, in the modern era.

But in any case, the revolutions that we think about are the revolutions that begin, generally speaking, in the age of Enlightenment with the French Revolution being the pivotal one, Revolution of 1830, 1848, 1871 in France, and then the Russian Revolution. There's also the failed revolutions in Hungary and Germany immediately after the first world war. There is the revolution which antedates it in Mexico and there are a whole host of liberation movements in Haiti, in Colombia and Bolivia and other places like that, and so on.

We think about these revolutions and we use the rhetoric of revolution a great deal in discussing art. But the truth of the matter is that most of these revolutions failed or were stopped or in other ways did not exactly coincide with the aesthetic projects that are allied to them. Again, I'm going to go all over the map, but in simple terms, in the Russian Revolution, there was an amazing commissar education and Enlightenment in Anatoliy Lunacharsky, who persuaded a number of very hard-nosed revolutionaries associated with Lenin, Trotsky and others, although Trotsky was illiterate, an interesting man on the side, that there needed to be an artistic component. And so he created the circumstances in which the Russian avant-garde could thrive.

In Mexico it was Jose Vasconcelos who did roughly the same thing. In Mexico, it lasted about ten or so years roughly speaking, even less. In Russia, about the same period of time, even less. And after that, the political revolution separated from the cultural revolution, if you want to call it that, and you have to deal with them in different terms. In the case of Russia, of course, the political revolution turned on its revolutionary art makers and ate them, destroyed them, destroyed their art, *et cetera*. So, when we think of revolution in art and we think of the manifesto-driven kinds of art, we have to realize that there has to be some kind of historical

corrective to the idea that the history of Modernism is the history of gradual revolutions towards a positive resolution of the relation between culture and society towards an enlightened general populace altogether.

It has mostly been a very grim struggle, which is not to put down the people who tried to struggle, but to caution us in the way that we use rhetoric. In this, I will just make a little side bar. It's interesting that in talking about revolution and culture and using the Russian example that there is a deep divide between literary culture on the one hand and visual culture on the other. There is a magazine called *October* which somewhat nostalgically holds onto the idea that the revolution is still in progress and who celebrates over and over and over a certain facet of the Russian Revolution in the visual arts, to the expense of a good deal of the rest of it, by the way. Which is not to put down Rodchenko, Tatlin and all, but simply to say that the episode which they represent and the things they did are historically as distant from us as it could possibly be and politically and economically also—and very brief.

This is what gets talked about, about the Russian cultural developments. Nothing thereafter practically speaking, so that Moscow conceptualism—Bulatov, Kabokov and others. Bulatov's in here in a minute. This is another thing of the Tremains. This is the same painting of Delauney and it's one of my favorite slides. This is Delauney, Stevie Wonder and Lichtenstein. It's a reminder that most of the art that we look at in museums was actually made to be in somebody's living room, whether you approve of that or not. Okay? Now, the exceptions of course are the Constructivists and are the people who took on a social mission, the muralists and so on. But they are not the rule in Modernism; they are actually the exception, by and large.

Okay, here's Van Doesburg, we're back to the hard-core Modernism.

There is a separation of literary and visual cultures, so that in literary culture, if you read the *New York Review of Books*, the *London Review of Books*, *et cetera*, what you read about the Russian avant-garde in literature is not so much the people who were the natural allies in cultural politics of the Constructivists. Nobody reads Mayakovsky anymore, alas—he's actually a very good poet. They read Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova, Mandelstam. And they read a modernity in poetry which actually was deeply suspicious of the revolution and was the first of the avant-gardes to be sacrificed to it. So, that if you follow one discourse of early Modernism, you are leading into a kind of poetry which is very formal, very inward, very lyrical in some cases, skeptical in one dimension. Also, quite spiritual in another. Where if you do on the Russian side in the visual arts, you are dealing with something that is politically, ideologically oriented that dreams of a collective solution to artistic problems, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, *et cetera*.

So, when we talk about Modernism in Russian, which conversation are we having here? Are we having a Zhivago conversation? Or are we having the conversation of the Constructivist movement one way or the other? And the same cuts across many, many lines and many, many places.

By the way, I should say that there are—and this will show up a little bit later—in terms of the contemporary New York...here's Picabia at his most perverse. This is not his most perverse. Actually, he gets more perverse than that. But this is in the '20s. This is post-Cubism. And just in case you're interested, look at those rings up at the top and look at the hatch pattern and think of Jasper John's "Between The Clock and The Mirror," and so on. Things, ideas strike more than once in our history. Jasper did not learn how to do this from Picabia. But he's not the only one to do it and neither was Picabia the only one to do it.

In terms of the example I just gave you. Who was interested other than people who read poetry

in the model of the Russian avant-garde that was apolitical, inward, *et cetera*? Frank O'Hara. And the whole New York poet school were very involved in that model of poetry and that kind of heroicization of the individual poet and individual lyric voice. They were the people who wrote about abstract expressionism. On the other hand, among the abstract expressionists, who was interested in the other side? Philip Guston, who was a great reader of Isaac Babel and who was interested precisely in the contradictions of the artist who makes an alliance with revolutionary power, watches its excesses, understands its causes and is a sense and ultimately is actually the victim of it. This is again anecdotal, but the intimacy of these relations in Russia are absolutely astonishing. If you read Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoirs, she writes about this discrepancy where the writers of the avant-garde of the Mayakovsky variety are friends with them, but they are writing a different kind of poetry. Meanwhile, among their friends or former friends, is a man named Yagoda, who becomes the secret police chief. And also another man named Bukharin, who is one of the members of the Bolshevik party who recommends changes in economic policy. The end product of the coexistence of the politics and art in Modernism in that particular moment means that the Russian poets are in intimate relationships; at the same time, in intimate conflict. That one of their friends arrests them and torments them. That another of their friends is arrested and tormented. For example to defend Mandelstam, Pasternak gets a telephone call directly from Stalin. Those are the kinds of things that one has to think about when one reads discussions of art in politics and when one reads streamlined versions of what art in politics might mean.

There is of course another kind of revolutionary modernism of a deeply sinister variety, which we also must factor into this, and that is futurism. Futurism in Italy was, from almost the get-go, militaristic, violent, misogynistic, and prone to Fascism and then fully Fascist. Fillippo Marinetti its founder, famously wrote that war was the natural hygiene of humankind. He wrote this in advance of the first world war and the first world war very efficiently killed off several of his greatest talents. He then, of course, made an explicit alliance with Mussolini and became a Fascist dignitary. So that if, on the one hand, Russians like Rodchenko did essentially propagandistic work for Stalin., on the other side of the coin there were Modernists who did willing work for Fascism. And this included also in the German hierarchy numbers of Modernist artists who were fellow travelers of the Nazis, absolutely. And one of the things we forget is that there were people within the Nazi party who liked Modernism and Modernists within Germany who liked the Nazis. That one of the ironies that we know is that Emil Nolde was admired by Goebbels, but he was too rabidly anti-Semitic for some other people under the circumstances. But, because he was a Modernist, he was forbidden to paint.

Now I...there's a purpose to my digression and I will try to get to it in a few minutes. Let's jump ahead. This, by the way, to give you another example, this is Asgar Jorn. This is a *détonnant* of a painting. This is an expressionist's attack on the academy for academic painting in which neither is sincere. Those who are upset by Richter should look at Jorn as much as they should look at Picabia, and understand that sincerity in the conventional and sentimental sense of the term is a measure of just about nothing. And actually, no less than Stravinsky once said that one must remember that ninety percent of art is sincere and about eighty percent of that is bad.

[Laughter]

So, in other words, sincerity is not an aesthetic criteria, particularly when sincerity is invested in dubious causes.

Let me just jump a little bit here. Modernism from my point of view is the sum of its contradictions and it is the sum also of the proposals for what Modernism should be. Such

that—and I will use this in regard to my own experience of working at the Modern—rather than try and construct an idea of Modernism, which unfolds as a necessary flow of ideas towards a culminating idea. This is a carryover of course from Hegelian thinking, the idea that what we will do after all is to realize the spirit. But what we will do with enlightenment is finally to resolve the conflicts in our nature, the conflicts in our society and that reason shall rule. Of course, reason when it rules tends to be unreasonable. It was Goya, which is one of the reasons I think of him as the first Modernist, who famously said, the sleep of reason produces monsters. Now, one way of reasoning, thinking about when reason is not operative, monsters arise. Another way of thinking about that is when reason dreams, it produces monsters. In other words, when reason becomes ideological extensions of itself beyond the domain in which reason actually applies, when it creates universes from whole thought, it produces monsters. And I'm more inclined to the latter definition, whether or not Goya actually meant it.

But, in any case, that Modernism is the sum of contradictions and the sum of propositions. And that the last thing one should do in thinking about Modernism is to try to sort it out so it will make a neat story that gets to the end in a proper way. So that, finally, one will know the truth of art and the truth of society. What is interesting is the validity and compelling nature of each of the propositions and what is necessary in dealing with each of them is to maintain a very high degree of skepticism about their direct applicability to just about anything. Which is to say that art does change the world in how we look at it, but it cannot change the world in terms of how it actually functions. If one is to change the world, one must enter into true politics and work with the mechanisms of culture in that domain. One can be inspired by art, one can be consoled by art, one can learn from art. But, if you want to change the world, change the world. And if you want to change consciousness, make art. They are not one that leads to the other automatically. Again, I will not look for outside authority on this; I'll take the rap for having said it for myself, but it didn't entirely just occur to me. Ad Reinhart was one of those people who believed more or less that art was in its own domain and politics was in that domain. The same person could have two layers of consciousness and two fields of activity, but that art should not be about something else. It should be about itself.

Now, I don't take as strict a limitation as he did, but I think it's a good starting point to think about those places—where dealing with aesthetic capacities, aesthetic possibilities, possibilities in materials, possibilities in consciousness, possibilities in symbiotics, possibilities in all kinds of things—is not a matter of applying them to statements about the world. But rather, to start and see what kind of statements they can engender if they are manipulated in ways which are free of an *a priori* content, an *a priori* will to persuade, and so on.

Now, some of the area I've been talking about the sinister variety, the Fascist variety, of which there was a great deal of Fascist art in Modernism, which people politely avoid discussing. Mies van der Rohe was desperate to get commissions from the Nazis. Okay? So, our Modernist architect *par excellence* would have been only too happy to build for Hitler had he gotten those commissions. Not that it makes him a Fascist; it just makes him somebody who was ideologically open to a variety of things that we would now have every reason to question. But this is basically not part of the story that we learn about him.

There is another kind of Modernism, which I would like to address, which is a Modernism which does not invest itself in visions of the past recovered and improved upon, or the future grasped and realized. Either in their dystopian or utopian forms, I would say either in their pessimistic forms or their optimistic forms. There is a whole type of Modernism which is devoted, if you will, to the idea of the present and of the actual. And much of the Modernism that we look at—Cubism in its first instances, for example—a great deal of realist art, for example. And also a great deal of avant-garde art which is entirely experimental, for a principal

example, since he affected virtually every art form, John Cage, thinks in terms of the presentness of things and not in terms of predictions about historical time. The art is not validated by what was or what will be. It is not even validated in the words of a magazine published by the abstract impressionists in the Fifties—it is. Or in the worlds of Michael Fried, who wrote a famous attack on Minimalism—presentness is great.

To think about Modernism as being an attempt to take account of an advantage of the present is a very different orientation towards Modernism than the ones we've been talking about. Now, again, I will mention that my having done this little riff on the teens, revolutions, the '30s counter-revolutions, is not just my personal passion for history. Although I can't understand how anybody would think that they could discuss Modernism and what it is and isn't, without not only interesting history, but an imaginative regard for history. History is not something one learns; it is something one in a sense recreates intellectually step, by step, by step. It is not entirely relativistic. I do not subscribe to the notion that every historical interpretation is out there to be done. There are more or less plausible ones. There are more or less well-grounded ones. But it is in fact an imaginative enterprise no matter how rigorously you subject it to rules of evidence, rules of argument and so on.

But the whole idea that a discussion about Modernism could happen without a discussion of history, and history of some distance, is indicative of this negative version of presentness, which is not grace, which is simply ignorance. Which is defensive about the past and worried about the future and wants to retreat from anything that engages the person in having to think about what is really the wreckage of the 20th Century, as well as its glories and its excitements and so on. Of people who don't want to do any work, who don't want to read any books in this field, who would like to be told what the lessons of history are without paying too much attention to what it was.

Now, in making this argument I would also say that most of what we think of in this country as Modernism is in fact focused on one particular definition of Modernism and that's the definition of Clement Greenberg. Greenberg's influence, baleful as I personally think it is, is huge. And he for many people defined Modernism in ways that affected their understanding of art that had been made when he made that definition, which was in the late '30s, early 1940s, and also for the future thereafter up to sometime in the 1970s, and even now. Since many of the discussions of post-Modernism are discussions not of the whole of the art that one could look at and debate in order to frame such a discussion, but they are an addendum to the discussion of Modernism initiated by Greenberg. And they are an attempt to answer to that by suggesting that we can get beyond Greenberg and, if we get beyond Greenberg, we can talk about a wider field of activity, but we are still somehow bound to the notion that Greenberg actually got the answer to the question correctly of what Modernism was.

Now, again, in a circular—not quite circular—argument, but a little double-back, I have again stressed early things. Greenberg's whole argument about Modernism begins in '38, '39, when he is trying to answer the question what will happen to culture in the rise of Fascism and in the rise of an increasingly authoritarian Soviet state? The idea of Modernism's progress or regress is exactly attached to political and cultural events of that time. And it has never been anything less than that. The attempt to create a politically neutral Modernism is in fact itself a political gesture. It's an attempt to cut away from that episode and follow more or less Daniel Bell's ideas of the individual, at which point we can talk about culture as if it was entirely separated from any other contextual relationship. Here again, I go to Ad Reinhart. You cannot do that. You can talk about them discretely, but you can't talk about them as if the other did not exist. Reinhart was intensely political, but not in his art. In his civic conduct, in his cartooning and so on. But he didn't imagine that there was a place you could go called art where all of the rest of that went

away.

Greenberg's role in all of this story was in fact to be intensely political, to posit a definition of Modernism which was rooted in a crisis of that particular moment. To then further posit that the task of people who are artists was to save culture from the annihilating effects of totalitarianism. And then gradually he staged a retreat from politics into that domain of art where it became art for art's sake. And he was the first neo-con as far as I'm concerned in the writing of Modern art, if it's not for nothing, that the sort of dynamic neo-con, Hilton Kramer, has embraced him wholeheartedly.

If I'm interested in these issues, partly it is because I see shades of them in the present, frankly. Partly, it is because I think you cannot unscramble the mess that Greenberg's definition represents, without revisiting them and asking the question how is it that he excluded so many dimensions of modernity as a world condition from the definition of Modernism as art. How is it, moreover, that he created a history of Modernism in which so many dominant tendencies in modern art simply are not discussed? Go back to the Russians. He imagined an art which was about pure form but had virtually nothing to say about Malovich, Rodchenko, De Stijl. In the case of De Stijl, he denigrated Mondrian, even though Mondrian represented in many ways formally the kinds of propositions that he was about. His was a history of modern art that allowed for only very few players to have any role and those who took his ideas about form but connected to the world were the first ones to get either the dismissal or the ax in terms of his arguments.

Now, as I was saying, there is a kind of Modernism which is not about predictions or re-livings or re-imaginings of the past, but is about the present. That is indeed the Modernism of Manet. The idea of a radical realism is an essential part of Modernism. The idea that you can paint a picture of the world which captures its actuality is a Modernist idea. The idea that painting could be in a sense realistic like Manet jumps through time in a variety of different realisms, which don't look anything like Manet. So, that a Philip Pearlstein or Chuck Close can paint such a painting. So, it is not stylistically about what Manet did. It is about a desire to capture the immediacy of the visual experience and also to question the nature of the constructs of that visual experience in the medium. Because, of course, the other modernity of Manet was that Manet tried to paint Paris life as it was, but he tried to paint in a way that makes the actuality of paint itself visible and subject to questioning and examination. And Pearlstein does this and Chuck Close does this and of course Gerhard does it *par excellence*.

There are other kinds of actualities, present tense versions of Modernism, which are Mondrian, which are also Robert Ryman, which are for that matter, Ad Reinhart. That there are many kinds of abstraction which exist only in the confrontation between the viewer and the object in real time and in real space. What Benjamin famously called aura. Aura is not the religious penumbra around certain images. It is that exchange, that relationship. So that the one-to-one confrontation with a work of art in time, in space and in an individual's experience of it creates that. What happens in a world of mechanical reproduction is not that it kills the religiosity of art, it distances the viewer progressively from any experience of the work. Other than—and this is the nice way things like that create their own subject matter—other than the point at which the very distancing mechanisms become that which is treated as immediate and become, then, the presentation or the subject of a certain kind of art making.

Photo Realism is a case where the devices of photography which multiplied images ad nauseum become the subject of painting which returns them to a unique state. And that's what Close has done and that's what Malcolm Morely has done and that's what Richter has done and that's what countless other people have done.

Now, let's see where we are. I've got about five minutes, so I'm going to cut to the chase here a little bit. The presentness is grace. It is a version of Modernism that has another dimension. And it is the difference between the emphasis placed on the active interpretation or the emphasis that is placed on central apprehension, if you will. The idea that the mind thinks but that the body doesn't is a very prejudicial Cartesian kind of dichotomization of what it means to be involved with anything in the world, but especially with art. The rebellions against this were picked up very early on by Cage. And that Cage's emphasis on the experiencing of sensations in the world as being equal to the artifact that was constructed. That the sound made by a truck is equivalent to the sound made by the composer is one of the first stabs in this direction. And that is a kind of realism, if you will, of sound. And Cage taught this to countless artists in one form or another. He taught it to Guston he taught it to Ellsworth Kelly he taught it to Johns, Rauschenberg, et cetera. He taught it to Richter. Cage is, in my view, one of the seminal figures in modern art period. And one of the key figures in American art, far and away more influential than many of the people that he influenced, much as I like their work, because I like to look at images and paintings.

But another manifestation of this was in the critical apparatus and the fact that certain kinds of criticism even began to sense their own limitations, even began to admit to their own frustrations. And the key article in this is a 1964 piece by the late Susan Sontag called *Against Interpretation* in which the last of a series of propositions are in the place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.

Post-Modernism has been almost entirely a hermeneutical enterprise, a re-reading of the classic accounts of Modernism with a view to punctuating those accounts and finding a brand new glorious day. They have been a kind of intellectual utopianism superimposed on a series of other practical, not practical, tangible material image utopianisms of one kind or another. The idea that Modernism would come to an end is an extension of the Hegelian idea that we will find someday the resolution to contradictions and the ultimate realization of the spirit in the world. The Marxist version of this, the Hegelian Marxist version, or the revolutionary Marxism view is somewhat the same. We will finally realize humanity in the world by resolving contradictions, class contradictions and the list goes on.

These are among what were called the grand narratives of Modernism. These are the enlightenment projects. And one of the signs of post-Modernism was when Jean-Francois Lyotard, the French theorist, declaimed the end of the grand narratives, the failure of all of these utopian or idealistic projects and the dawn of a pluralist age. Or, on the conservative side, when Francis Fukuama in the 1980s talked about this history and he viewed this as the ultimate final triumph of democracy over ideological cultures, as if democracy itself was not an ideology. It's one I prefer. But one has to admit that it is one.

In any case, if that is the situation, we can by now clearly say that we are not coming to the end of history. Since Fukuama declared this, we have had all too much history. All too many wars, all too many persecutions, all too many revivals of ideas that we thought reason had banished. All too many ways in which reason itself has become monstrous in an absolutely Goyaesque way. We have also found out that the end of the grand narratives is in fact a grand narrative. It is an alternative narrative and it is an alternative narrative which tends in the direction of thinking that reinterpreting the world in the more and more subtle ways that the hermeneutics allows, will actually solve the problems of the world such that people now read their way out of reality and out of art into a series of metadiscourses in which they are much safer from the bruises and the traumas of actual life.

It is possible through this kind of thinking to open up parentheses within the accounts that we have been given and fill in chapters that need to be filled in. And this is true of the neglect of a variety of cultures, of gender issues and so on and so forth. But to think that having opened up those parentheses we will finally get to the satisfactory ultimate account and narrative and we will settle the key debates, is another thing entirely. And in any case, reasoning one's way and interpreting one's way around these things does not stop the relentless progression of events in the world, which belie most of these theories and does exactly what we thought was not possible or could not be possible.

Now, I have three more minutes and so I will just kill some pages here, and say roughly this. At the beginning I said something on the order of that this is a perennial issue of what is Modernism. My proposal is that Modernism is always and has always been plural. Just give you another slide to look at. This is Peter Saul's very negative account of Modernist painting. He actually has a tee shirt saying Yale, which is where I now work, so I guess I'm a friend of Peter's. But, you wouldn't know it. When I was a student at Skowhegan and he was teaching there, I was making some art and he came into my studio. We didn't know each other. And he looked and he said, it looks pretty Modernist to me, which was his version of saying it looks like shit.

[Laughter]

But, so this is Modernist painting and its academic form, according to Peter.

In any case, the question of when we ask this question of what is Modernism brings us to the question of what time is it now? If we want to know what time it is in terms of this teleology, how far or how distant are we from these resolutions that we've been promised? How much faith do we have any longer that they will in fact be resolved according to these teleologies. It is also backed up by a sense of urgency or lack thereof. It seems to me utterly striking that what has gone on in this country for the last five, six years has not provoked a deeper questioning of a lot of the cultural assumptions that go into these discussions and that people who have been talking politics haven't done any. That the whole nature of this discussion has turned academic, things that for the people who had these debates in the '30s, like Greenberg—and I give him credit for that time, by the way—or in the '20s, in the different avant-gardes, or in the 1960s and '70s during the Vietnam War, that this discussion, the hermeneutical devouring of the erotic, so to speak, has also devoured the political. That people have escaped in fact exactly as Greenberg imagined they have escaped into an idea of saving culture from its enemies by elevating the discourse, but they have not done it by escaping into art. They have escaped into the discussion of art and they have neglected anything in that discussion that would bring them back down to earth. That would re-engage them basically in the discomforts of their condition, rather than to allow them to discuss *ad nauseum* other people's discomforts, or versions of their discomforts that they have somehow been insulated from by the nature of the discussion and perhaps by their professional elevation.

I'm just going to cut to the chase. This is some Modernism. Here's some more Modernism.  
[shows a series of images on screen]

[Laughter]

Here's some post-Modernism.

[Laughter]

Here's some more post-Modernism.

[Laughter]

Here's some more post-Modernism. This is what happened to transparency. Greenberg's idea was that the medium should be transparent, so along comes that wise guy, Sigmar Polke who creates paintings which are actually transparent. But where something is going on, on one side that you cannot fully see from the other side. So, that although transparency suggests that you shall have total perceptual grasp of the phenomenon, actually you are stymied over and over and over again.

This is also Sigmar Polke, by the way. This is a version of the line standing out in front of the Entartete Kunst show, which was the famous degenerate art show in Nazi Germany. These are echoes of the Fascist era in recent German art. And it should be a reminder, by the way, that the greatest exhibition ever made of modern art in Germany, probably to this day, was made by the Nazis to ridicule it. And people remember this show as their first and last chance for twelve years to see Modernism.

This is a work of Ellen Gallagher to remind you that you may not always see what you're seeing, or you may miss what you're seeing. This is a Modernist painting which I acquired for the Modern, in which this overall field is actually made up of small eyeballs with large whites and small pupils and large lips, which are lifted from racist caricature and planted as if...

[End of recording]

R. Storr: ...or this, Kara Walter, who takes the most gentile of kind of artistic traditions, the silhouette, and plays America back to itself in its uglier dimensions and sparing no one, by the way.

This is Jackson Pollock, the great maker of the new American painting. And this is Michael Kelly, Mike Kelly, doing the same thing only different. This is an excerpt of the garbage thrown by Sad Sack, the famous cartoon character.

This is Jasper Johns, the "American Flag".

This is Kim Dingle. This is America as remembered by high school students in Las Vegas. This is what they did when they were trying to recreate the indelible image, or as Johns would call it, the things the mind already knows. But, clearly, people know that thing differently.

This is a response to the utopian projects of Russia. There is Eric Bulatov and this is "Walking To Work of a Cold Morning" in the socialist state with poor dear Lenin ever striding forward, but getting nowhere.

[Laughter]

And this is another figure in the great coat. This is Gerhard Richter's "Uncle Rudy," happily on the way to war. The war is the Second World War. He is, of course, a Nazi.

And this is Felix Gonzales Torres, and this is where I am headed. This is a portrait of family values. The values that are held up to us now in political discourse as the only values. It's wonderful to see all the people whose family values include adultery, pederasty, and so on and so on and so forth, finally getting their come-uppance. But, in any case, this is the nuclear family. It happens to be the family of Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Leon, the person who was responsible

for persecuting Jews in central France.

This is another version of reality. This is Philip Guston and this is indeed his projection of his own identity into the midst of the Ku Klux Klan. This is what Philip Guston did with Isaac Babel. He imagined what it would be like to be among the marauders. He imagined the excitement and also the terror.

And this, all too current image, is by Leon Golub. This is called "White Squads." This is a painting made in the 1980s to talk about the use of torture and the disappearance of people in Central America at the time of the Iran Contra scandals. Of course, we know now that this is not at all distance from us. This is Abu Ghraibe.

And this is Felix with which I'll end for images. This is a billboard in public space on Sheridan Square, with what I like to call an anachronology. It is a chronology of disparate events describing the multi-textured, layered nature of history as we actually experience it, including major events and minor events, fads and thoughts and so on and so forth.

Anyway, what I wanted to sort of finish with was this question that if we are going to ask again what Modernism is let us hope it is not in order to ask it so we can have another protracted discussion that will promise us a great defining moment in intellectual discourse, while we neglect to look at the things that are being done around us and often in our name that actually are changing our world and where the initiative is not in our hands, but in other people's hands. Let us begin to ask how it is so possible to talk about art in politics and then to do none of the latter and not very much of the former. Why it is that so much of this discussion removes us from the object of study towards pure study of the language and the tertiary and fifth level interpretations, which is not to call for a particular solution to this. It is actually to call people to have these disagreements with each other in each other's presence and to make things, both politics and art, that bring those disagreements to a head in interesting and enlightening ways.

As I said, I worked at the Museum of Modern Art and when I walked through those galleries, all I could hear was people arguing with each other.

[Laughter]

The pictures argue with each other. I know what the artists wrote. They argued with each other. I know what the curators who acquired them over time, this is arcana really, but you do know that the Museum of Modern Art was not made by a presiding divine intelligence. It was made by people with very different views of Modern art. And what's interesting about the collection is its disparateness because the people who made it didn't agree. And I'm basically arguing that Modernism is about its disagreements. And what we are losing in the process is a sense of the urgency and the grit of those disagreements in what is either on the one hand a streamlined version of Modernism—and you can pick along what criteria you will streamline it. Or simply, the wonderful luxury of talking forever about what Modernism is as if there were no stakes. But, if you do read your history and if you do take the work seriously of people who were in the great museums and the lesser museums and of minor artists and major artists, for them they were playing for keeps.

Thank you.

[Applause]

**M. Hendricks:** If you're interested in asking a question, will you come down to the microphone.

UF: Hi. Thank you for your talk. I really appreciate it. I'm an historian and, you know, two days ago, we all sat by and lost the right of habeas corpus, something achieved at the dawn of the revolutions you just talked about. I guess I'd like to push you a little bit in, you're sort of saying it is a time for politics and a time for engagement for artists and non-artists. What would you recommend? What is the next step?

**R. Storr:** I think it depends very much who you are and where you are. So, I will say I think it's interesting that younger people whose futures are compromised have not done what younger people are in the best position to do, which is to state the basic no. We don't agree. We won't accept this. That it should, in my view, since I am Martin Luther King and Gandhian, Malcolm Xian. In other words, you've got to be tough, but you've also have to be non-violent, you have to think strategically about how you deploy if you will force, if you deployed at all in the context of demonstrations and so on. You have to think very strategically about how you do this, because the demise of politics in this country has a lot to do with the huge mistakes made by the left at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. We absolutely do not need to replay this. And people who would like to caricature our positions are waiting for us to do so. So that the demonstrations against WTO, which have been involved in trashing and so on, are surely counterproductive. And I'm sure probably also largely led by provocateurs who would like to see them go in that direction.

But in any case, it's not for me to get out there and sort of organize demonstrations. And since I'm now a member of the establishment, it's not appropriate to do that. It's disingenuous. I am now officially a reformist.

[Laughter]

I try to work within institutions for change and I try to play fair with those institutions in order that change come about. But I try to make those institutions live up to their nominal commitments.

**B. Schachter:** My name is Ben Schachter. Along the same lines with your experience with the Venice Biennale and seeing what art is in New York and the United States, do you find that the younger people have similar responses to—maybe described as this apathy or this disconnection between their power and the art they're making or the context that we're living in, in a global way.

**R. Storr:** One has to be very careful about generalizations. But I think I have seen very little art that has an urgency on these issues equal to what happened in the early—let's not even talk about the '60s. Because that sounds generational. We did it all and what is wrong with the young people. No, in the early '80s there was a lot of very interesting art being done. I have Felix up here because I think Felix is really an extraordinary artist in just this domain. But all the group material, the work of Act Up and Gorilla Girls represents this kind of work. Now, I like Robert Ryman. I love Robert Ryman. So, I'm not saying that the choices you're making are activist art versus something else. But those who have a gift for politics—and many people don't. Leon Golub, Guston had a gift for making political art. And some people don't and they shouldn't. But then you go back to Ad Reinhart. Well, if you're not going to do political art even because it's not part of your talent, or because actually the kind of art you have in a sense excludes content of the declarative variety, what are you going to do in the public domain as a citizen?

**B. Schachter:** Thanks.

UM: Hi, I'm really glad you returned to speculate about teleological definitions. And what I've been thinking is you started out by talking about, not speaking against a notion of historical progress in art, but against an account of historical progress in art that was kind of uni-dimensional. And sometimes you alluded to, but never really kind of embraced a notion that's, you know, kind of like the simpleminded guy like me notion that Modernism is essentially driven by responses to changing technology. And then Post-Modernism is driven by responses to further changing technology. So, I'm asking, does it have to be more than that materialist account?

**R. Storr:** No, I hope I didn't say that technology was the key thing. Technologies are an issue on some Modernism. I think I was talking about photography particularly. But Modernism is driven by changes in epistemology. The ways in which we think about the world. Since the beginning of the 20th Century, essentially, or at least very early in the 20th Century, the idea of temporary relativity has been with us. The idea that there are different time cycles at work and there can be the absolute version of that in terms of physics and Einstein. Or there can be the literary version of that in terms of Borges and others. It's interesting, however, that when we get to conversations about Modernism, we immediately revert to more or less linear models. We're moving ahead, we're moving back. And we're doing it in unison. The idea that there are multiple tracks traveling at multiple speeds is not really something people have a handle on. They know it to be true. And in very elaborate ways you will find this in a lot of Post-Modernist writing, but the simple statement is something that makes people crazy.

Now, I view this as an historian in a sense. I'm not an historian, but I've read a lot of history and I think in historical terms. The ways in which Modernism developed is not equal, which is not to say that what is not equal to this is inferior to that. But not equal in the sense of the rapidity or the breadth. And the model I've tried to propose as an alternate to Greenberg's idea of the mainstream, is the delta. Rivers have main channels. But they also have deltas where they spread out. And Modernism is primarily a delta phenomenon. The classic traditions of Western art could possibly be described as a stream, many tributaries, many feeders, many things like that. But, at least in painting there is a tradition of painting coming out of the Renaissance which flows around the world and in and out. But once you get to modernity, it is a plain and the plain is wide. And the channels are spread out. And some are shallow and some are not shallow. They're deep and some are wide. And some are narrow. The speed with which the water travels in them, the nutrients they pick up, the nutrients they drop. It's all different. So, to talk about Modernism as one phenomenon it seems to me, and particular if it is channeled in this way, is a fundamental mistaking conception and a metaphor. If you look at it the other way, you can then say, okay, in—pick your date—in 1914-15 in Brazil, something happened. In 1913-14-15, something happened in New York. Something also happened in Paris. They're not equal. But they're related to one another. That the Modernism of the Americas in general is a phenomenon to be considered because, if you look at what happened in Canada, and what happened in New York, and what happened in Brazil, and what happened in Uruguay, and so on and so forth. Up and down this hemisphere, you see this. There is more radical art being made in Buenos Aires, maybe, in the Constructivist tradition, in a certain moment than is being made in New York in the same moment. You know? That doesn't mean they win. [Laughs] We lost. [Laughs] The fact that it doesn't extend itself as far has to do with cultural power, economics. Has to do with a lot of things. Has to do with access to the world. But the radicalism of Latin American art in particular is really, really profound. And Mari Carmen Ramirez *Heterotopia Show* made this case very forcefully. That the bodies of individual work tend to be small, because the artists tend to work in situations where there is very little support, materials were difficult to obtain, little was shown and so on. Does not diminish the radicality of what they do. But there are things happening in Japan in 1950 than are more radical than what's going on in

New York in 1950 is important to know.

The one example I like the most, and I've used it a lot in the Biennale, because it speaks to the Italian condition. Italian futurism first of all was invented by Marinetti before there was any work to back it up. It was a bluff. Most of the artists were engaged in late Pointillist or late Impressionist kinds of painting one way or another. And he invented this idea of the machine aesthetic. And he published it in 1906, if I have my dates correct, in *Le Figaro*. So, the Italian revolution in art—and mind you, Italy was a largely agrarian country, still a monarchy, recently composed out of smaller entities and so on and so forth. It was not a modern country. It was again a bluff. They wanted to be the most modern country, having been in fact one of the least in Europe. And for sometime thereafter they continued to be.

So Marinetti publishes the Manifesto of Futurism in *Le Figaro*, a French newspaper. It is not published in Italy first; it was published in France first. Where is it published second? In Tokyo. Within a matter of weeks. So, the idea that the news should travel from, you know, Milan or Rome or wherever it was to, ideologically the thinking goes on in Italy. It's published in France. It goes to Japan. All right? Changes—if you follow these patterns—and there are many, many, many of them—if you follow these patterns, this changes the way we have been trained to think of as a trans-Atlantic conversation between New York and Paris, which is just plain not true.

**G. Moore:** My name is George Moore. I'm interested in the epistemological...well, what I would like to ask is, aren't the terms Modern and Post-Modern temporal assignments or purifications? And might it be, since we're going through time, and Modernism is not the recent past, but it's an epic or centuries back, Post-Modernism has now aged. There's a difference between a, let's say Fauvism, New York Expressionism, Cubism, as a movement name. And a temporal assignment that ends up hypo-statization. You end up freezing time and maybe there's a way to jettison this vagueness or self-referentiality of Modernism, Post-Modernism, given that they're aging and becoming part of the past.

**R. Storr:** Okay. Let's try this. Modernism is not a temporal term; Post is. The problem begins when you add a temporal prefix to a non-temporal word. Modernism is in fact a term that remains to be defined. Greenberg's basic definition has a kernel of interesting thought in it. He says more or less that Modernist painting is defined, and Modernist art in general is defined, by the search of each medium's own essential and intrinsic qualities without being otherwise contaminated or confused with that of other mediums.

Now, I don't accept that wholeheartedly, but the kernel is interesting. He basically says that Modernist art is art that is by its definition self-reflexive. It does not take its means as an unquestionable end towards the expression of an idea, but it questions its means as a part of anything that it puts forward in the world. That I think is good.

But that is not a temporal definition, because that could happen anywhere and everywhere under whatever circumstances there might be. You can do a social and historical definition, but of a different nature in time. That Modernism is the art of capitalism, of the rise of the Bourgeoisie and that post-Modernism will happen when capitalism is over. Now, I am not among those who use what Ernst Van Dell meant in a serious way and has now become a kind of catch phrase, late capitalism is a term you throw around. We may be in a phase that, in terms of Mendelian/Marxist theory, could be justifiably argued as late capitalism, but nobody tells you how late it is. [Laughs] And a lot of post-Modernists are hoping that late capitalism is a little bit like talking about your late uncle, it's over, right?

[Laughter]

So, all you have to do is wait for the uncle to drop, but he's gone already. No. No. If this is late capitalism, it's going to go on for a century at least I would say. And it has gone on maybe if you take Mandel's definition for half a century already. But if you think another way, people don't like to actually think historically at all. They don't really think in historical classifications, they think in philosophical or ideological ones. Fernando Braudel who is the founder of a whole school of historical thought associated with the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* wrote about what he called *longue durée*, which means long duration. The idea that historical change and historical development takes place over long periods of time. Furthermore, he focused in his writing, not on the surface events of the major actors, movements, dramatic crises, but the underlying events: changes in population and demographics; changes in economic structures; changes in climate; *et cetera*. Well, it seems to me maybe it's time to look at modernity, not as something created on the one hand by individuals. I think we're passed that. Picasso didn't create modernity, but he made great strides in articulating possibilities that are intrinsic to modernity. That, it's not by movements, because most of the movements die out rather fast. And, if they don't, they endure in a pathetic after life, like surrealism did after 1940. But if you think of modernity in terms of long durations and, therefore, modernity is not old, if you think of other things that are as old, like capitalism, as older. But, it is long in the tooth. I don't deny that. But, it is not that we can get rid of it just 'cause it's old. And part of our problem is that we have to live with the aging of our culture. Not live gracefully. Live in a testing and challenging way. But to understand that it is in us and we are in it. And wishing it away with a prefix, post, doesn't solve the problem; it actually avoids it.

S. Kiese: My name is Sylvia Kiese. And I'd like to refer to your earlier statement about John Cage who had a very influential impact in our Modernist culture. I have used John Cage as a subject and concept of sculpture making with students and also working as an independent artist. I found that working with students, just taking the subject as a studio art is extremely difficult. And I would like to hear an answer, how can we make this persuasive, because it's even more ethereal or more intangible than something that you can't see. There's too much noise. I need some help and I'd like to extend this program further. Very interesting.

R. Storr: Okay. Couple of factors. One, is the backdrop to Cage is again a large historical backdrop. The idea of the non-committal. The idea of not seeing oneself as acting upon the world, but as acted upon by the world. The idea that paying attention to what is, is as important to making what isn't resonates profoundly for people like Guston in particular and for other people as well. Because they had come up in a world when the idea of the historical necessity or the individual will had been so touted. So, between a kind of activist political '30s left approach to art, which was prevalent, or an abstract expressionist existential approach, the idea of letting the world be was very profound. There's a gender politics to it, too, and I don't belong to the school that says you can explain Cage by the fact that he was gay. But I do think that the resonance of Cage's work demonstrably affected a lot of gay artists because it articulated a position which did not see the male artist—and it was largely male artists who responded to this heroic figure. It was possible to be something different and something, I guess you would have to say, gentler with the world. More indirect and so on. Jonathan Katz has written interestingly on this. So, there's a gender politics in Cage as well.

S. Kiese: Oh, I see.

R. Storr: There are a lot of ways. But another—double back and say, okay, Cage says be quiet and listen. He says be quiet and listen to the noise. So that he will bring radios into a concert hall and turn them on. Radio was relatively recent. It was much less sophisticated in those days. So that if you bring a relatively primitive radio into a highly charged space of high

culture and play it, the contrast is dramatic. Kids are not in highly charged cultural spaces nowadays. And radio is very sophisticated. It's not noise. It's just another level of hyper-orchestrated, hyper-manipulated sound. So, it isn't the anarchic thing that disrupts the organized sound of the concert hall, it is a competition with the organized sound of the concert hall. And when kids listen to that, I presume what they hear is more of what they hear already, rather than something else that jars their idea of what culture might be.

So, how would you do Cage in a contemporary idiom with contemporary attitudes? How would you remove the other worldliness of his Zen and have street smarts in? How would you get a kind of noise that wasn't already synthesized noise and so on? If you can do that, you're home free.

Silya Kiese: Okay. Thank you very much. Good.

M. Hendricks: I think that's probably it.

## **THE FOUNDATION DILEMMA: IS THE ART/DESIGN DIVIDE A MODERNIST CONSTRUCT?**

**Rosanne Gibel**  
**Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale**

Let me preface by saying that my comments on design education are heavily influenced by my own background and teaching in graphic design.

Anyone who teaches art and or design at any level is aware of the divide between these two closely related disciplines. Historically, as we know, the distinction is an evolution of and distinction between craft and ideas, of work for hire and art for arts sake, of the ongoing influence of technology, which seems to come to an apex in the early years of modernism and to have been clear for a while at least.

Where do we start? Let's start by framing the discussion in terms of western thought, since modernism might be argued to be peculiar to Western culture (the influences of colonialism and globalization aside) in any case. This is already a problem in current education, since our student body is certainly not homogeneous or particularly western European in the way it might have been 20 or 30 years ago.

Let's also frame it with the understanding that, for graphic design education, modernism is still a major issue, in a way it is not in most fine art programs. Much of the theoretical and pedagogical discussion in design is still derived from and reacting to this.

The Renaissance is the period when we really start to know who made what and who hired them to do it. It is also the beginning of commercial printing and standardized typography. That makes it a good place to start. Looking at that alone tells us there was no distinction made between art and design as disciplines. Works for hire? Artists moving between painting, sculpture, architecture, science and engineering was not even an issue, but a matter of interest, ability and opportunity. There is no discussion of who used technology or of what type, because everyone was experimenting.

It is in the Industrial Revolution, as craft starts to move toward mass production, that we start to see design separate from the actual making of things. Product, textile, consumer goods are conceived with the eye toward cheap and fast. Designers are needed to visualize this and engineer the transition.

At the same time, the Romantic Movement produces artists who are more interested in the intellectual aspects of art than in art as a means of earning a living. This is not to imply that earlier artists did not pursue ideas, but that this is where the real separation happens. The idea of art for arts sake takes hold, as well as the notion of the artist who sacrifices his economic well being for his art.

Even then, it does not happen quickly. At this point in history, there are artists working across boundaries. But there are also emerging, those who work exclusively for mass production, who create illustration for information, journalism or editorial commentary. Not to mention advertisement.

As we move into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mass media as well as mass production, the divide becomes clear. Art is for pure aesthetic and intellectual purposes and design is for function and

commerce. The disciplines have separated, sometimes in an absurd manner. Until I started studying design, I never understood the practical relationship between, for example, dada and the commercial art world. Art history taught me that it was a theoretical connection. Today the divide is both more and less clear. Design programs are certainly larger and command more clout than they used to. The gap between high art and consumer culture is both wider and narrower. The pressure is on for students to get a degree that pays. Many students who love making art in high school think that a design degree will fit the bill. For some it does, for some not.

So, how does this all impact the education of artists and designers?

One place where the discussion seems to be ongoing and heated is at the first year level. As the discussion heats up, particularly in the graphic design field (where I work and teach), where the stakes are large and everyone is convinced of the correctness of a particular way of thinking, the desire of designers seems to be to separate, while the thoughts of those in the visual arts seems to be that their thinking and way of teaching is essential to the success of the same group of students. The question of how much and what liberal arts requirements are necessary is an integral part of the discussion.

Should drawing be part of the design curriculum? How much digital training do fine artists really need? Do they need any? Design students need much more specific training. There is too much to teach and we need to cut the liberal studies requirements. Design programs are larger and commanding more space, budget and faculty. I hear the need for a separate foundations program more often from this side than from the fine art side.

At any time in history that there are major technological changes or major changes in the way information changes hands, education changes with it. The invention of the printing press certainly had an impact on the availability and exchange of information and education in the Renaissance. The need for more paper and therefore better technologies for making it certainly flowed into the education and practice of artists.

The Industrial Revolution and the philosophies that went with it generated the need for more people who were literate and the utopian idea of universal education. The invention of faster and better means of communication- telegraph, radio, and television changed the way we looked at the world as well as the way we negotiated it.

While the broad base of education changed and specialization emerged, the skills needed for art and design still overlapped. The crafts of drawing, painting, building models, principles of design, color theory evolved, but did not drastically change.

Let me digress for a moment to the progression of my own career and education.

I began my undergraduate career, back before electricity (read “computers”), as a fine artist. I wanted to paint. No sullyng my life with “commercial art.” No selling my soul for illustration. I soon got into trouble by taking my first printing class. My professors let me know in no uncertain terms that this was a lesser calling. That there was a premium placed on the technical in that field that would distract me from making serious art if I concentrated on it. There was also some issue about multiples. I could never understand that one, because I just liked kinds of images I could produce. And I loved the process.

This was also made clear in art history courses. There was a clear hierarchy of media and who did what (and often where they did it) that determines their importance as an artist. I won't go into it. Anyone who took a survey course in art history before 1990 knows what I am referring

to. My exposure to design came through my interest in printing and the examples I was shown in those classes.

None of the schools I went to had graphic design programs, so I was never in close proximity to that study. It never occurred to me to change course.

Fast forward to graduate school. Like a lot of people in the eighties, I was using type with my work. But in very un-fine art fashion, I fell in love with the type. To the horror of some of my professors, I started to study typography. Others found it amusing. Possibly obsessive, but certainly unnecessary. At one point I was publicly ridiculed for commenting that a publicity poster for the visiting artist program was not legible. Then, I started using the computer in combination with my printmaking. At the time, that pretty much precluded me getting a teaching job in that field. Ironic, given the current norm. There were faculty members who encouraged my use of new technology as forward looking, but I wasn't using it in quite the right way. I was supposed to be challenging the precious object not learning precious crafts. This was not the only irony. I was "accused" of doing design, not art. Given the other work being done at the time, it would have more sense to accuse me of being unoriginal. Finally, I gave up and made a series of posters about a political issue I cared about. And after graduate school, I earned my living as a designer. I knew about printing, I knew type and I knew the computer, at that time an unusual skill.

Aside from the politics of my particular department, what was really going on was the battle of the new and the old. The techies versus the Luddites. The Industrial Revolution versus the Romantic Movement. I was caught in the crossfire of what different faculty members thought was important. (Not a problem if you don't have to put together a review committee.) Here's what else: the beginning of the next big thing. The new printing press. The personal computer and later the Internet. And the myopia that we all suffer from, that of thinking that the time we live in defines history.

It seems that every discussion of foundations complains that we are still working off of the Bauhaus model. Taking a look at Gropius manifesto, I am not sure we ever aspired to a Bauhaus ideal:

Let us therefore create *a new guild of craftsmen* without the class-distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artists! Let us desire, conceive, and create the new building of the future together. It will combine architecture, sculpture, and painting *in a single form*, and will one day rise towards the heavens from the hands of a million workers as the crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith.

That is certainly not the attitude I was educated to. As I have said, one of the issues of me studying printing was that there was too much craft involved and I should be working with ideas. Interestingly, no one ever complained about the amount of time it took me to make a drawing series that covered a 9 x 12 foot wall.

Not only do we subscribe to the myopia of our times, but to the myopia of our own education. So, how do we get past it? It is not easy, but here are a few thoughts.

One, Internalize (not just recognize) the fact that the world has changed and our students perceive and negotiate the world in a different way than their instructors for the most part. Two, Figure out what that implies for their education. What skills are needed, really needed? They may not be the same as they were 20, or even 10 years ago. And what do students already

know. I am amazed at the number of programs I looked at that still had basic computer literacy courses in their core. At this point, that should be remedial.

As part of the same discussion, realize that the old model of giving students an introduction to various parts of their craft as part of the foundation year doesn't work any more and that part of the intensity of points of view has to do with what do we give up to put something else in? Let go of the old model. What do they really need to know? And be able to do?

Three, consider the overlap between the training that is needed, and what is gained or lost by the disciplines being separated. Yes, art students generally have a different sensibility than fine arts students. Is something gained or lost by specializing early? In a world where it is all too easy to funnel out all but your own point of view, this is an important question. So what do I think? I will answer by addressing a few issues I most frequently hear as part of the discussion.

One example, the issue of drawing as part of the core art curriculum. The fact is, in 20 years of teaching drawing, I have realized that most of the students who will use drawing as a major part of their work already draw pretty well when they get to me. They can be introduced to new techniques, new ways of looking at the page, better observation, but they already can draw. On the design side, I have seen many assumptions that the designer does not need to draw well, and indeed students who are weak in this area go on to be successful designers. On the art side, there are a lot of other ways of working these days. Some students would be better served by a class in CAD or basic programming. So do I think a drawing class is essential to the art curriculum? No.

I do, however, think there is a case to be made for drawing as a part of the liberal arts core. Everyone should learn to see and a perceptual drawing class is an effective vehicle for this. In a world where so much visual information is delivered via a screen, we need to be forced to understand the physical world in a physical way. As I was working on this presentation, I came across an article in the newspaper lamenting the loss of penmanship skills and speculating on the effect this might have on cognitive development. It is time to reframe some ideas. Stop lamenting the way we learned and figure out how to replace the cognitive skills, not the handwriting that may no longer be the most efficient mode of written communication anyway. Example two, the discussion of design basics being taught digitally or traditionally? I have taught it both ways, and guess what? It is the same course. It is not about media, it is about concepts. When I teach art appreciation to culinary and advertising students, I teach the same concepts. They are in every art appreciation text. The difference is in the actual application, with pen and paint and ink, with computer program and screen and printer or with words. This is not a radical issue and we should stop discussing it as though it were. When we figure out what application the students need to learn for their use, we can decide how this course should be taught to each group.

Then there are the issues of skills that used to be acquired through the liberal arts and applied in the studio, including research and writing. When I first started teaching, I could safely assume that students could do some basic research and apply it. With the amount of information available today, that is no longer the case. They may know how to cite a book, periodical or website, but do they know how to determine the validity of the information? Or for that matter, how to find it. Google may have become a verb (and a useful one), but it is not the only one.

As the meaning (and the very nature) of information literacy has shifted, so has the need to integrate it into the foundation curriculum. We all agree that research skills are basic to every discipline. Undergraduate research programs are growing across the disciplines, including the humanities, but are noticeably absent in studio art and design. This is for a variety of reasons,

brought into focus by the recent discussions of the need for a research focused Ph D in the arts in addition to the performance based MFA. The real issues are the evolution of art and design as disciplines and the complexity brought on by new media and outlets. The need for interdisciplinary work has never been greater. If our students are going to be prepared for the demands of the field, new skills must be integrated into the foundations program, among them the ability to find and evaluate information.

Then there is that ongoing discussion, diversity. Up until now, so much depended upon geography. It is still pretty easy to teach western European culture as the norm and everything else as other if you live in the Midwest. Or in South Florida for that matter. And it still goes on, despite the revision in textbooks. I know, most college level educators can give me examples of how they go beyond that. I have the same discussion with myself all the time. But diversity is not just about culture anymore; it is about ideas as well. Never has it been so easy to insulate yourself from ideas you do not like or find immediately interesting. It is not that students are apathetic or uncaring. They just live in a world where it is okay to tune out what you don't like. Exposing them to diversity is not enough. There has to be a consequence of not paying attention. How do we introduce this in the classroom? I am still working on it and am open to suggestions. But I am convinced that it is essential to creating a new base for education. As I have said repeatedly, I do not pretend to have the answer. Nor do I think that there is a utopian, universal answer to the question that will work for every program. Do I think that the divide is a construct of modernism? I should be clear by now that I do. Until we embrace the idea that students today have radically changed (changed, not developed a counter-culture, not rebelled) as a result of a major shift in the way the world works, we will not be able to build an adequate foundation for their education.

## SCULPTURE AND THE ALCHEMY OF METAPHYSICS

**Silya Kiese**

**Artist, Educator, Lecturer**

Art indeed begins with the conception of the result to be produced before its realization in the material. My question here is: Is the ultimate form the material will take preexistent? I've observed that creative thought, concept and idea combined with the imagined and spiritual, shapes the archetypal properties concealed within the mind's eye of the artist. My next question is: Or does the material, juxtaposed by the artist compose the form? To my observation, teaching studio art in sculpture and my own art-practice is that the alchemic process of the form directs the final *shape* of the artwork. The artistic process is not outdated; "The First Form"<sup>1</sup> the original proto-type, from Greek *prototupon* is still possible and is a vital source within the artist today; and it is also contingent upon the physical properties of the materials the artist selects to create works of art. The form in the human soul is that which starts the making. For the seed is productive in the same way as the thing that works by art; because it has the form potentially. The soul possesses an originative source of movement, so that the soul will be the *alchemic metaphysician* and start the process to create. According to the law of nature this human process in art must continue the soul's movement simultaneously within our *Zeitgeist* of modernity and the technology age.

Plausible metaphoric examples are the laws of nature and the universe. Johannes Kepler<sup>2</sup>, concluded that the effect of the moving soul in the sun *weakened* if it is traveling light is not in harmonious proportion to its source. Keplers' scientific observation of planetary<sup>3</sup> motion could provide enlightened insights of possibilities into the still mysterious properties of gravity and motion and the human soul. For example, the creation of art has to begin from the code of the soul, which is the center and intuitive origin of art visualization, and cannot begin with mechanical tools, or lets say a digital camera for the process of art-making alone, because authentic art develops from the potential alchemic substance, which is the soul's center.

The contemporary philosopher Tamar Gendler<sup>4</sup> says:

In the old days good or bad, depending on your views, it would have been very hard to propose "laws of nature" necessary and be taken seriously (that applies also to the human soul and individuation). After all, what the laws of nature are is a matter for empirical investigation, and however they turn out, we can imagine them having been otherwise. When scientists look for laws, there are various hypotheses as to what the laws might be, and so long as there is no hidden contradiction, any of these is are conceivable, and so represents what the laws are in some possible world(s). Certainly, the laws of nature may represent, or underlie, weaker sorts of necessity, physical, biological, psychological or economic necessity, but such necessity would be understood as being compatible with contingency of nature in a wider sense. Maybe, as things are, the unsupported cup has to fall but surely the laws could have differed so that under the very same conditions, it would not fall. We can surely imagine it, and in the old days, this would have been enough. Thus, it no longer seems so clear to many that the laws of nature are metaphysically contingent; also called *Humean supervenience (unexpected)*, also sometimes called *The Dretske-Tooley-Amstrong view*. A number of philosophers actively propose that they are in fact necessary in the strongest sense, and many more philosophers are willing to take the idea

seriously, despite the seemingly clear contrary testimony of the traditional tests for necessity and possibility.”

Gendler emphasizes the importance of traditional imagining, conceiving, creative thought and visual experiment. She says:

*The necessity of laws of nature is presumably metaphysical.* The laws of nature seem to be contingent and will help us better see both the difficulty and plausibility maintaining that they *are necessary* at least in a metaphysical poignant way. The laws of nature as *metaphysically necessary* have focused on the fact that the existence of genuine possibilities, established by imagination, *undermine* any explanatory force beyond explaining our linguistic behavior, in terms of conventions, or metaphysical punch that these supposed necessities are supposed to have. With the focus on the empirical, there will be at least apparently imaginable cases where the truth fails to obtain, and if these cases *do not undermine* the claim to necessity, they will at least undermine any metaphysical *pretense thereof*. In conclusion there is the general significance of imagination and conceivability on both the epistemology and our very understanding of possibility and necessity.

Authentic modern art examples are Eva Hesse’s installation *Contingent 1969*<sup>5</sup> and Joseph Beuy’s installation *The Pack*<sup>6</sup>.

Finally, this paper will focus on modern objects in design and sculpture and the necessary steps from the creator’s thought, visualization, the imagined to creation. My venture will include the international Bauhaus style and object of use in design and sculpture of the modern and their complementary visual concept that of apparent motion similar to birds in flight. My introduction, or re-introduction, includes the well-known *Barcelona Chair*<sup>7</sup>, also called *Sculptural Chair* and a number of my sculptures from a series of abstraction based on birds in flight, entitled *Concealments: Birds in Flight*.<sup>8</sup> First, I begin with the obvious fact that a chair is unable to fly, thus the *Barcelona Chair* offers a visual flight experience. The word “chair” comes from the Greek language, called *hedra* meaning *to sit*, and is counterfactual to Mies van der Rohe’s vision: making a chair with *architectonic properties of spatial lightness and flight*. The exploration here is to reveal that both concepts convey essential metaphysical visual experiences: an example is: the chair as “an object of use” and “objects as sculpture” exemplified in the sculpture series *Concealments*. Both ideas are in a strong sense complementary; although not in the element of comparing their structural, *final* compositions. They do not in any way demonstrate resemblance of form. Thus, both concept-constructs contain obvious identical properties of visual geometry, an example here is: both concepts create the *compositional ground* made of cubes, one, the chair designed with negative volume and sculptural objects made with the actual cube form and pivoting spheres. Here chair design and sculptures share a link of visual aesthetic experience, that of apparent movement or flight, the spatial geometric structure that support the base of the chair makes this visual aesthetic experience possible. The base is constructed of metal-chrome tubing, shaped into two sets of bird-winged architectonic structures, and finds its origin in the “Klismo” chair build in ancient Greece. The seat of this famed *Barcelona Chair*, is composed of negative space from a three-dimensional volume of the cube. Here Mies van der Rohe<sup>9</sup> cross-pollinated two historic epochs, that of ancient Greek functional design object(s) (Klismo chair) with the International Style of the Bauhaus School.

From this historic point of view, van der Rohe could have had the same imagined properties complementary to the Greeks; because he recognized their Klismo style and utilized the concept to build the base of the *Barcelona Chair*. This presentation began: Is the ultimate form the

material will take preexistent? Did the ancients observe *birds in flight*? My venture here is: It is possible that the people of ancient Greece conceived and visualized birds in flight, the wing-form and spatiality using factual observation and their imagination for the original design of the Klismo chair. At the same time the Greek's discovery of organic materials from their environment, combined with their ability to envision structural forms for *objects to use*, shaped the final design and sculptural arrangement of the chair. I conclude here that Mies van der Rohe's creative concepts for architectonic, design and sculptural *Form-Expressions* originated from his relation of the mind's eye to our ancient ancestors. The *Sculptural Chair* has also proven that an object of *functional use* is able to mirror the possible *archetype of imagined flight* that gave form to this chair.

The next focus is the concept of motion and flight for the sculpture series *Concealments* which takes its structural composition from the geometry of wind atmospheres. These ephemeral spinning spirals, known as *thermals* are shaped by the warming of the rising sun and support the flight of birds. Modern philosophy concludes: "Where there is matter there is geometry."<sup>10</sup> The invisible properties of form and matter in nature have always captured my interest. I've selected three sculptures from the above mentioned sculpture series *Concealments*. The titles of these sculptures are: *Harmonias Flight Properties*, *Pivoting Bird Call* and *Eternal Flight*.

These sculptures are composed of wood cubes, metallic pivoting spheres and wood triangles; the oscillating property of the spherical forms expand the visual aesthetics of motion in space, and also convey the autonomy of the virtual concealed within the form-geometry in nature, and is signified through the synthesis of mythical meaning known as "Kabala wisdom's and wise sayings". For example: The circle and sphere combined with sculpture *Harmonias Flight* conveys kaballic wisdom of motion within the infinite space of the universe. The circle is also a window to fertility and to the inner human space of the soul's invisible location, sprouting the seed of boundless energy and is a spherical construct of strength that circumscribes the cobalt blues of the sky, love, transcendence and unity. The cube and the triangular wood shaped forms I assembled to all three sculptures transmute into a visual alchemy of materials that unfold into spiritual dynamism of geometrical forms. The cube is a symbol of collective human stability and strength, and the juxtaposition of blue, yellow and red combined for each individual sculpture illuminate and reveal conceiving possibilities, intuitive knowledge and vision within the invisible geography of human souls and the artful magnitude strength of the mind's will to pursue and reveal the wheel of human life.

Does the material, juxtaposed by the artist compose the final form? Or, is the ultimate form the material will take preexistent? In conclusion, *Concealments* is a sculptural synthesis of autonomous concepts and ideas, elemental materials, wind geometry and metaphysical principles in nature. The dynamics of the three-dimensional geometry of forms for the three sculptures I mentioned earlier already existed and grew from the infrastructure of cellular form made from molten glass, natural wood-binders, the splendid alloy of metals and the mineral matter of rocks. An example here is: sculpture *Harmonias Properties of Flight* is assembled from colored glass, welded metal spheres using the fire-pencil, and a cube-shaped rock. The rock is the base for the sculpture and took the shape of the Philosopher's Stone.

## **SUMMARY: SCULPTURE SERIES AND SCULPTURAL CHAIR**

My venture of sculpture and metaphysics is that the alchemic process of the above mentioned sculptures transmuted from both the pre-existing form dynamics hidden in the selected materials and the sculpted synthesis from each created individual geometrical form. Mies van der Rohe's fresh way of seeing, shaped a chair into a visual metamorphosis belonging in both

worlds: the world of functional architectonic furniture design and the mental imagined space of art.

My final statement summarizes the philosophy of Hannah Arendt<sup>11</sup>. Arendt was a builder of conceptual worlds, she believed in ideas as a sense of goodness and intellectual constructs, rather than objects of use, and thought of art has to come with original openness, because spontaneous origination is the power of art. She says:

We can work within the realms of freedom and create possible metaphysical world(s) through thought, an idea into a work of art, as a signifier of the alchemic process originating from the heart and mental soul.

## NOTES

- 1 Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, The University of Chicago Press.
- 2 Johannes Kepler, *The Secret of the Universe*, Abaris Books out of print.
- 3 Kepler's harmonic law translates to an algebraic transformation  $T_1 + 1/2 (T_2 - T_1) = r$ .
- 4 Tamar Szabo Gendler, *Conceivability and Possibility*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- 5 Eva Hesse: installation, title: "Contingent" 1969, medium: 8 panels cheesecloth, latex, iberglass.
- 6 Joseph Beuys: installation, title: "The Pack."
- 7 Barcelona Chair, Bauhaus design, International Modern Style.
8. Kiese, Sculpture series, *Concealments: Birds in Flight*, 1993, Gallery Astley, WA, Rutgers University, NJ, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Germany, University at CA, Berkeley, CA, others.
- 9 Mies van der Rohe, German architect.
10. Karsten Harries, Professor of Philosophy at Yale University, *Infinity and Perspective*, p 273. The MIT Press, 2001.
11. Hannah Arendt, German philosopher.

## **AWE AND NOVELTY (POSTLUDE TO THE POSTMODERN)**

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To reveal the “new” requires one risk originality. We try to replace our origins by a reaction to, say, the history of art or contemporary art criticism but nothing is novel if not in relation to the origins of one’s being. We can invest in self-conscious reactions or rearrangements of items, or “looks”, which age and evaporate, or perhaps retrieve from pop-historic dustbins retrospective kitsch, but nothing, finally, replaces our origins. Awe is our word for the non-affective apperception of the origins of being, understood here as the becoming of our noticing of the world as we intentionally perceive in time. Since the origin of our consciousness so focused rises from nothing—without a first cause or pre-given essence—we need not grasp at any historical or temporal straws for the *new*. We are already new at every moment until we translate or betray “it” into that which seems “new” when alienated from our origins, that is, from awe. As we lock into a reified grid of opinions we screen experience and replicate the obvious. Or negate it for shock appeal. This arch-novelty infiltrates the trade in commodified art-objects and careers wherein artists and critics respond to each other as an “art-world”. Through time this constitutes popular history with its names for movements, retrospectively associating diverse artists, often against their will, so that history books and critics, *we* can discuss them with varying degrees of cleverness.

Historic periodicisms are useful as long as they produce new feature from a temporal metaphor linked to an art concept. When, after a constellation of scholars and artists have exhausted the metaphor, that is, the detailed insights and facts, or *feature* amplified by our descriptive modes (or our arts and sciences), the noticing inspired by any metaphor passes into cliché, and another metaphor, movement or concept must rise—to become history as well. But there is a difference between, say, Dadaism or Fauvism or Neo-Expressionism as thematic movements and temporal assignments, like Modern and Postmodern, because the latter will always be attenuated by time. Preferring novelty to trendy art-theories or kitsch, to choose what is truly new, to experience and create originally, is to return to our beginning, to the origin of perception and time (for consciousness is the origin of time-perception) and this we call awe. Any literal application of historic or temporal signatures of the Modern, should mean *recent*, and Postmodern, if we use it at all, should “remain” *contemporary*—but it cannot—and must age. The beginning of this very sentence is already in the past.

Yet the new becomes old instantly only in the “specious present” of reified time. Art perceived through this reified temporal filter recalls what Sartre referred to as the practico-inert, the materiel of reflexive representation, or bluntly, the stuff that’s still around we have to deal with made by others *before* us, and thus reveals the whole problem of clinging to Postmodernism. The representation of any medium to itself is problematic enough but Postmodernism destroys, supposedly, representation itself by exceeding it, and since all representation is superseded by experience (and time)—so is Postmodernism.

The terms “modern” and “postmodern” turn time into a thing to be frozen then examined as if either were not subject to sliding through time nor as ephemeral or mortal as we so evidently are. As “modern” slid backwards past one to several centuries, to an epoch, critics constructed another superlative, hyperbolic term as an arch-novelty, but its shock and conceptual value may have faded away. The old “new”, arguably, became a nostalgic theory *before* it added to what

history and art “means,” yet what about now, or the future? As understood by Leotard the postmodern provokes and exceeds the limits of representation and so points to an experience beyond any representation, inspired by Kant’s concept of the sublime. As the postmodern recedes, need we rush out a new “ism”? I suggested years ago, at this very forum, perhaps the postmodern should be superseded by postfuturism—as a joke—but few laughed. The point was to deflate the vanity-balloon of frozen time implicit in post-modernism’s temporal naiveté, since there is a comic, at least a grim humor, in the paradox of an aging postmodern. We can respect Leotard’s apt application of Kant’s concept of the sublime to non-representational “conceptual” art, which eschews beauty as its goal—without this temporal albatross. Yet novelty, the truly new, neither has to deny nor affirm representation. If we freely choose vis-à-vis the origins of our being, evoking awe, we can create what we please.

As postmodern self-attenuates, just as we are still making history after Fukuyama’s end of history, our challenge is both to survive and dismantle ideas, which obsolete our understanding. Will we speak of the 50’s or the 60’s when we are struggling to understand the 2060’s? How can arbitrary pop decade groupings last? Why should they? Why should this journalistic shorthand replace real historical consciousness or sully our aesthetic vision? Representation has been challenged for two centuries, diffused, fragmented, discarded, ignored—but is this *new*? These temporal references override real art movements and confuse critical reaction and individual creation. As the world walks past our memory, future artists and critics too will feel seduced by temporal paraphrase. I call this the arrogance of the present, a near physiologic pride in breathing and consuming, but also in perceiving. The future will naturally disdain our efforts to fix time as modern or hubristically determine the “post” future. The choice of these unspecific temporal terms for a vast number of individual artists perpetuates a false naiveté, a copy, really, of authentic awe.

The need to demarcate aesthetic movements in time for critical understanding should be respected. If we do not thematize to reveal cultural influences, or confluences, we cannot create nor illumine why or how different artists respond to their times as archetypes of symbolic understanding. As many artists, if not sealed off as Mallarmé wished to be, but obviously was not, mirror as they invent “what’s going on”. But the demarcations are not to be reified, just as time resists being frozen and always moves on even when the clock stops on our lives. And, modern and postmodern were, or are, terms which drew new metaphors and critical insights when first invented, but they will not in the future and perhaps do not now.

Again, since the theory of the postmodern represents what cannot be represented it is either a paradox or a self-contradiction, or both, as it disavows itself while it enjoys the fruits of both. This mutual exclusivity may be the key to its seduction from the outset and may explain its attraction beyond its phantom afterlife, but cannot consummate our understanding of invention nor influence.

No, one need not oppose surveying history, or realizing its import even when those influenced do not. Yet the arrogance of the present can stun one with a seeming obligation to over-blow one’s knowledge simply because one is born later than those now dead, to shrink or ignore lives as vibrant as we are when our actual knowledge, the noticing of consciousness is suffused with awe, and when combined with accurate noticing, we experience a discharge of energy, or *radiance*. They were, as our offspring will be, radiant, just as we are when we practice the courage to dilate our souls to creation, in awe before true novelty.

Indeed, how can we help but feel awe before true novelty? To create or witness creation, rising from nothing into becoming evokes awe. Astrophysicists claim the universe exploded from nothing into existence, to expand outward in all directions, defining while denying all

directions, originating dark matter, galaxies, stars, and, also, consciousness. Our brief lives were not meant to be “post” or “pre” anything, but unique and sentient. These temporal canopies nihilate our vivacious hunger for experience. Would those who lived, wandered, indeed wondered under the sun in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century believe for a moment they were part of the “middle ages”? They lived as we do with the kaleidoscopic simultaneity of the present and when dilated of soul felt an elemental gratitude simply to perceive and to create, and witness, creation.

What should we then say to contemporary artists? Perhaps what should we say to each other, to ourselves, that creativity as conceived by the Greeks, *poesis*, *making*, opens us to authentic creativity, that at the incept flame of novelty we create time, that temporal movement-names constrict our understanding, and that without elemental gratitude, or awe, we paraphrase originality. We may consider the roll novelists experience when their stories seem to write themselves, when a painter’s canvas seems to grow independently as the artist loses arbitrarily segmented seconds, hours, *months* immersed in the “time” of creation, when the dancer’s tempo clears time for creation in space, when the poet invents new metaphors evoking a mortal eternity beyond publication or career, when the critic ceases to be the abstract surveyor or arbiter of art, and, informed by awe, discovers art in the nativity of its genius. When *we* exceed the self-conscious paraphrase of reified time, we may peer into the origin of art. Now a critic echoes the origin of criticism in aesthetics, in philosophy, and recalls why and how he or she first loved art. When the novelist, painter, dancer—the critic—lose the dualistic once (or twice or more) remove, the shell of persona, the gratuitous intervention of self-consciousness, a veil drops if we risk awe *and* noticing, to receive, in radiance, a new, a novel insight into what makes history, art, and time.

If awe is not confused with sentiment, nor noticing with instrumental fact in conformity to use (career, prestige), noticing *and* awe reveal active consciousness, or radiance. Rather than a bundle of impulses we are seamlessly integrated into each of our actions when not distracted by self-consciousness. Awe-as-sentiment may mask our original perception. We may fool ourselves into believing we hover in periphrastic transcendence, and noticing may be commodified, but precise noticing suffused with awe reveals our native power of perception wherein perceiving full detail, feature, opens us, as we open, to ideational creativity.

Receptive, we allow the *suchness* of perception to unfold without self-conscious intervention so that noticing feeds back uncannily to the origins of our perception, unfolding into awe, as both allow *suchness* to be.

The *suchness* of our noticing then offers an immediate, non-self-conscious meaning, not a script nor formula for behavior but pure world-discovery. Further, if noticing is not cleverness, nor awe cupidity, nor the study of descriptive modes a classicist empire of (or a burial in) discrete facts, scholarly expertise or degrees (the industry of tuition) and, equally, if radiance is not cosmetic appearance, nor awe naïve nor dumb joy (masking ignorance by disarming it) then awe before existence creates immediate meaning and the energy of our active, dilated perception provokes novel experience, exposing the root, the origin, from which we reveal meaning.

Novelty, *fresh* feature, rises as perception is “made new” by anyone who notices with awe. Our noticing can never be static, a “state” fixed in time, but rather an engaging with what and whom we notice in process of uncovering, wondering, comparing, pondering, a reaching-for the feature which connects with other feature, and especially with our lives, mining as well as inventing new insight-ore, which will set up a whole new row of features, which will enable yet another row, and another, to yield new discoveries after that, ad infinitum.

There are those who believe say Plato, Kant or Hegel finalized truth. Each system implies closure but even if none of these systems could be logically refuted none could finalize truth. *Truth cannot be finalized.* There is always a next truth.

We will not immediately value truth without experiencing awe. The briefest episode of noticing combined with awe reveals a truth dilating the full spectrum of experience. We echo the origin of consciousness, opening ourselves to notice a universe in awe. To sharpen noticing, to incarnate in language new truth, to be able to be understood and understand, to rise from the thickets of specialized terminology, equations, special interests, clichéd conceptual coinages, and never lose the accuracy of our original noticing, amplified, if we wish, by the arts and sciences, we desire the performances of logos, we desire the active radiance as we desire new truth. And this is the key to novelty.

## **THE QUETZEL: METAPHOR AND MESSENGER OF THE MODERN MOVEMENT**

**Mike Fink**  
**Rhode Island School of Design**

Why did the Pope condemn “modernism” in the first decade of the 20th century, as detrimental to ecclesiastical control? Why did the Fuhrer reject modern art, as a Jewish invention, in the name of the Nazi esthetic? I have been searching for a symbol of the movement, derived from so many sources, that we knew mostly and merely as the mode, the fashion, of our bygone century. Like the revolutionary veteran in ornithologist W.H. Hudson's “Green Mansions,” I would like to focus on the shape and form of the Quetzal bird of Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Meso-America.

Modernism made the most of the colonial interest in the exotic. Africa, especially after the discovery of wondrous things in the tomb of the youthful King Tut. France, whose industrial designer Raymond Loewy put our coke into bottles shaped in the art nouveau style, our ugly typewriters and railroad cars into streamlined envelopes, and whose designer Coco Chanel trimmed our ladies and groomed them into garçons. But how about closer to our home hemisphere? If the modern movement began even before World War I, scintillated in the roaring 20's with the development of the Hollywood stars, took us through the FDR depression and recovery mock Gothic Gotham City 30's and burst into new cities and suburbs for the postwar world—what of the Good Neighbor Policy that turned our eyes toward South America, Latinized Caribbean, and the realms of Carmen Miranda?

“From the Halls of Montezuma” we sang for the marines in the Duration. Within those fabulous fabled halls there was a civilization that furnished an often overlooked aspect of the Modern, of what we came to call Deco. In its trivialized, commercialized forms, it meant the personified lamps, logos of corporations, the look of things from Woolworth's to the jewelry of the Windsors. On a deeper level, it meant the quest for lost values, vanished kingdoms and pagan faiths, the inspiration that can be democratically redeemed in the hand of the artisan, the pen of the poet, or the worker in a factory. After Liberation, modernity burst like a phoenix, a Quetzal.

Now, back to the Quetzal. This bird, native to the cloud and rain forests, became a popular motif. With its crown of feathers, its elaborate geometric swirls of bright color, its breast-vest of crimson against iridescent blue-green-purple plumage, and its incredible elongated tail feathers, it suited the style of mid-century tastemakers. Yet the bulldozer was destroying its habitat, and the bird, always mystical, became so rare that it was almost mythical. And yet, it had been worshipped as God Himself. Or the incarnation, like an Angel, of the Sky-God. Or the embodied souls of warriors or of victims of noble sacrifice. Angels with messages. Angels whose feathers could be used to show off the pride of emperors, but whose lives were protected by royal edict. No harm could come to them from their human neighbors. That is ironically and tragically perhaps why Cortez, wearing a feathered helmet, looked like a divine conqueror, a human version of a Quetzal.

Birds, which migrate over the globe defying national borders, seem to symbolize peace, hope, resistance, defiance, protection, other-worldliness. The opposite of war. Living prayers for peace and the resumption of routine, of tradition. The Quetzal was the emblem of what we all dreamed of and awaited. Beauty, gentleness, good luck.

The Modern movement can be summed up as a collective seeking of new ways of standing against corrupt authority, false propaganda, the burden of outgrown symbols. In newness lay freedom. In respect for abandoned lore lay the discovery of beauty and belonging. Perhaps my choice of the Quetzal as a messenger of the ecological movement can serve as a hint. To save back some notion that nature holds secret treasures. The beauty of nature is the best medicine for our minds and bodies, our souls and spirits. As the Quetzals retreat farther into the high places of their regions, like peoples in refuge from trouble, they live as they always have, like the people of Rima the bird-girl of W.H. Hudson's romantic legend.

My own quest for the Quetzal follows the footsteps of the great ornithologist Alexander Skutch, who wrote books about the bird of his career. He lived through the entire century of the hunting and gathering of feathers. I found the skins brought to Harvard by collectors—poor specimens from the very start of the Modern movement—there in Cambridge, on a winter's day. And then, by an odd coincidence, a busboy at a restaurant showed me two smooth stones his father had found in their yard in Guatemala. They were ancient relics from a lost world. The Quetzal is depicted on one side of the rock. The face of a God is carved on the other side, one image blending into the other. He had brought them into his North American life. It is forbidden to take them, to own them, to sell them. He can only carry them like magical talismans, tokens, fetishes. I described these stones in a prose poem which was published in a small edition of paragraphs here in Rhode Island.

Some of us yearn for a glimpse of the noble and divine. The Quetzal of Central America, emblem of pre-Colombian "America"—of Inca, Aztec, Mayan civilizations, survives on coins and postage stamps, on souvenir belts and purses, in museum glass cases and drawers, and as jewelry and lamps. And also as environmental modern metaphors for lovers of poetry.

## **THE REJECTION OF THE SACRED IN THE MODERN WORLD**

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We have embraced modernity for so long, we have created a disconnect with all that nature means and symbolizes. We have evolved into an autonomous culture. The moral fragmentation of society, and its abandonment of myths and rituals, has despiritualized our present secular beingness. This, in turn, brings about a rejection of the sacred.

Society's current view of women and animals, both of whom have been regarded as sacred since ancient times, is as objects of consumption and control in our very patriarchal society. This is a topic worthy of examination and ethical redefinition by artists today. We have become disconnected as a society, but also from each other, and in turn, nature. The result of this effort will most likely reconnect us with nature.

In this paper I will discuss my own research in preparation for making art addressing society's view of women and animals, how both are marketed, and the perception versus the reality that exists. Women recognize the interconnections between themselves and animals; how they are viewed, how they are marketed and, ultimately, how they are consumed. Women and animals are literally and metaphorically consumable. Some animals are dismembered so they can be eaten and others suffer physical violence. Women are also dismembered through physical violence and their continued exclusion from employment, politics, and the art world.

Most animals on this planet are no longer regarded as sacred. They are utilized for food or work, and suffer great abuses. They are hunted, trapped, poisoned, branded, castrated, impregnated by force, mothers separated from their young, tails and ears docked, debeaked, confined, transported, slaughtered, burned, cut, gassed, starved, asphyxiated, decapitated, decompressed, irradiated, electrocuted, frozen, crushed, paralyzed, limbs amputated, organs excised, lobotomized, isolated socially, addicted, and exposed to disease against their wills.<sup>1</sup> Patriarchal control of other's bodies includes continuing to prey on animals by hunting them down—not for subsistence but for sport. To compound the atrocity of the murder of animals during hunting season, the battering of women also increases.<sup>2</sup> We oppress in a patriarchal way by comparing animals and women to "prey" in hunting and seduction and by doing so, continue to give both a lesser status—one far removed from the sacred.

We have utilized animals as icons in the arts, and as literary and religious referents to inspire us. We choose who is a pet, and who is not. We continue to wear their skins, use them for entertainment, hunt them, trap them, vivisect them, by modest estimates, at a rate of twenty-five million a year, and raise them for food consumption (over one hundred million livestock and billions of chickens each year).<sup>3</sup>

The most omnipresent example of our disconnect with Nature involves factory food production. Animals are processed, disassembled, packed, and dressed. The majority of animals we eat are female and mothers. The females are impregnated forcefully while under physical restraint called a "rape rack" and held in "iron maidens" for the birthing process. Factory farming denies the beingness and the connectedness to Nature of over 7 *billion* animals annually in cloistered slaughterhouses.

Our relationship with the animals we consume is more complicated than it may appear at first glance. Our love affair with meat is consummated by meat eating. It is the most frequent way in

which we interact with animals, and this one action causes immeasurable suffering. The average American eats 43 pigs, 3 lambs, 11 cows, 4 veal calves, 861 fish, and 2,555 chickens and turkeys in a lifetime.<sup>4</sup> We kill more chickens for our table than any other warm-blooded animal.

Other cultural practices contribute to our separation from Nature. We have a clever way of changing a living thing's beingness by altering language. We say steak or hamburger instead of cow, pork or bacon rather than pig, leg of lamb rather than lamb's leg, and chicken wings not chicken's wings. Author and activist Carol Adams' "absent referent" refers to the thought process that separates the meat eater from the end product. As philosopher Theodore Adorno, a German Jew forced into exile by the Nazis wrote, "Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals" (qtd. in Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, 53).<sup>5</sup>

Any negative image of any species contributes to the oppression of that species. The objectification of women and animals in everyday language contributes to their oppression. Women are called "chicks", and "birds". We mock that "She's a fat pig (or cow)". A woman is a "dog" if she has not met the social obligation of being "pretty." We not only demean all women here, but all dogs!

We reduce the animal to "dumb" to justify why our victim deserves such treatment. We pretend animals "beg" us to eat them or punish them, as the woman who wears a short skirt is "begging" for rape. We have continued to exploit and victimize animals throughout time, even using that as a foundation to victimize each other. Ironically, who is it that we turn to when there is no one else—often an animal, a companion. Despite this bond, HSUS estimates that 8-10 million dogs/cats enter the shelters each year and 4-5 million are euthanized.<sup>6</sup>

The media contributes to this misperception as well. The blurring of the distinction between women and animals can be clearly demonstrated in advertising spreads in which animals are dressed as women, i.e., a pig in high heels in a food ad. Animals are reduced to body parts, and sometimes marketed with sexual innuendos referring to women's body parts. Colonel Sanders asks of his chicken consumers, "Are you a breast man or a leg man?"<sup>7</sup>

This objectification of women denies accountability; it is viewed as "just a joke." As Carol Adams says, "We're *just* looking at a pig," or "We're *just* eating at Hooters." (Italics mine)<sup>8</sup> When I discuss Hooter's Los Angeles outdoor board campaign with my design students, they are mostly perplexed as to why I brought it up, and respond with giggles until we dissect the campaign. The last board read: "Only a rooster can get a better piece of chicken." As young, urbanites, they do not question the marketing implications.

During a discussion with students recently regarding the design of the Cold Stone Creamery logo, a student mentioned that on the website the cone was described as having ample "cleavage" to hold the generous ice cream servings. "Advertisements are never only about the product they are promoting. They are about how our culture is structured, what we believe about ourselves and others."<sup>9</sup>

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) maintains that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment. As Ingrid Newkirk, PETA's co-founder says:

How many feminists realize (or want to realize) the amount of violence, oppression, and suffering they support at the meat counter, the dairy case, the leather goods store, the fur shop and the cosmetic counter? ... It took me 22 years to realize that inherent in feminist ideology is the basic philosophy of freedom from oppression for all living beings. ... True feminism must deal with much more than relations between the human sexes. A true feminist upholds the

rights of those who cannot speak for themselves, those who trust and depend on us as children and all whose fate is in our hands. ...Human chauvinism or “speciesism” and the oppression of all other-than-human life must end if we are to accomplish our goals as feminists.<sup>10</sup>

My research demonstrated that women and chickens have much in common. As an artist and an activist, it seemed appropriate to examine the culture’s relationship to chickens to symbolize the struggle of all animals, and also the culture’s relationship to this suffering. John Lennon wrote a song called, “Woman is the Nigger of the World.” *Chickens* are the “nigger” of the animal world. From the moment of conception until death, their two-year life in a factory farm is one of complete misery.

The *female chicken’s* two-year existence is a life lived against her will and against every natural grain in her being. Her body is not her own. Her natural desires to dust bathe, roost above predators and nurture her young are denied her. Instead, her two years in a factory farm are a living hell, an insane asylum. She lives with 4-8 other debeaked hens in a single wire battery cage measuring 18” x 18” x 14”. These cages are stacked in dimly lit buildings holding up to 125,000 hens. She cannot stretch, spread her wings, or nest. She stands on wire, stretches her neck through wire to eat swill from a tray, lays her eggs on wire with no place to prepare or nest, defecates through wire and often dies on wire, before her slaughter after two years as an egg layer. Those who *do* survive two years as a battery hen, do so only to face a horrific slaughter. She will ultimately have *more* room in the household microwave.

She is lastly reduced to garbage on a plate, automatically thrown away with the paper cups, cigarettes and gum; without a thought for what she once was, or rather never had a chance to be. Yet, she remains a pastoral symbol in the kitchen; decorating hand towels, painted on the morning coffee cups, dyed at Easter, and referenced as a nurturing mother figure in children’s books. The genocide of over 25 million chickens a day ends the lives of these gentle, earthy souls. This self-serving affair with meat that was once a being operates between desire and denial.

I recently created an installation, titled “Peep Show,” which reveals aspects of the chicken’s path from birth to slaughter with a sexual subtext. It did not include any chicken imagery as I did not want the viewer’s reaction to the work to be based on their preconceptions of a chicken. On one level, it highlights the parallels that exist between society’s treatment of women and its treatment of animals, specifically chickens. On another level, it demonstrates the dichotomy of perception versus reality.

The installation is comprised of a series of six egg-shaped boxes that hang on the wall. The face of each is equipped with a knob, complete with pastie tassel. The viewer must use the pastie knob to slide the cover aside to reveal a series of seductive photographs of eggs or frozen chicken carcasses. The installation ends with an 18” x 18” x 14” plex “battery cage”—the same size wire cage that holds eight other hens in factory farms. The plex cage contains the remains of fast food consumption; soiled paper napkins, cups, food, carryout packaging, and chicken bones. The box’s contents allude to the end of the chicken’s existence *without* giving her a face. That is how she is consumed—faceless and therefore without identity or beingness.

Over the years, I have maintained an ongoing dialogue with artist Judy Chicago regarding our mutual interest, animals. She has, powerfully, included them in her work throughout her career. In her courageous book, *Holocaust Project*, she says:

I had learned that during the Industrial Revolution pigs were the first “things” on the assembly line. I began to wonder about the ethical distinction between

processing pigs and doing the same thing to people defined as pigs. Many would argue that moral considerations do not have to be extended to animals, but this is just what the Nazis said about the Jews. Others argue, or believe subconsciously, that animals exist for human use. They assume that people are more important than other species and are horrified when human beings are treated like animals.<sup>11</sup>

Artist Sue Coe has also addressed the struggle of animals and she wisely included the inhumane treatment of slaughterhouse workers as well as the inhumanity towards the animals in her book, *Dead Meat*. The six years she devoted to visiting and sketching slaughterhouses gave us graphic documents of animal decapitations, debeakings, electrocutions, dismemberment and the human ability to “detach.” She said:

The Holocaust keeps coming into my mind, which annoys the hell out of me. I see this reference in so many animal rights magazines. Is this the comforting measuring rod by which all horrors are evaluated? My annoyance is exacerbated by the fact that the suffering I am witnessing now cannot exist on its own, it has to fall into the hierarchy of a “lesser animal suffering.” In the made-for TV reality of American culture, the only acceptable genocide is historical. It’s comforting—it’s over. Twenty million murdered humans deserve to be more than a reference point. I am annoyed that I don’t have more power in communicating what I’ve seen apart from stuttering: “It’s like the Holocaust.”<sup>12</sup>

I began combining my roles as artist and activist when I was doing animal rescue work in Texas as a volunteer in the 1980’s, I was aware that there were always more women than men on the team, the ratio of female to male involvement in all aspects of our rescue effort was consistent. Today, membership in the animal rights movement is 75% women.<sup>13</sup> Although I am aware that the inclination women have for volunteerism is culturally influenced, I frequently observed a strange phenomenon that I am certain was not unique to our group. In essence, the women volunteers were always the ones putting themselves in harm’s way during rescues—going into unsafe neighborhoods in the middle of the night, facing gruesome animal injuries, loading and unloading them for transport to vets or shelters, or making the heart-wrenching decisions to euthanize an animal who could not be saved.

During this period, I constantly photographed animals and our rescue efforts. In addition to the rescues, we were involved in lobbying for the animals in the political arena, specifically attempting to convince the City of San Antonio to replace the method by which they killed unwanted dogs and cats at the animal control facility for over twenty-five years. The animals were killed by use of the exhaust from an old pickup truck engine, a process that usually took up to forty-five minutes. This barbaric practice had long been concealed by the parties responsible, not what one would expect from a city of over a million, a designated “All-American City.”

During this time, I created a piece for a show at the San Antonio Museum of Art which involved a ballot box covered on all sides with images of sick and/or dead “pound animals.” Viewers were to make a choice—voting to either get involved to help the animals or remain apathetic, using one of two different colors of dog tags from animals at the facility. The ballot box sat on a mirror, so viewers were seeing their own faces and hands reflected in the mirror as they cast their ballots.

Activist Henry Spira’s mother wrote to him in 1954: “It is not the theoretic question if life has any purpose. It is the practical question which purpose do we put to life.”<sup>14</sup>

We are aware that art exists within social, political, and cultural concerns. Our modern society suffers from a loss of values and hope. The compassionate artist will create meaningful art, which will allow us to take control of our destiny and stop our race to destruction into which modernism has seduced us.

When the artist, a Modern day shaman, takes responsibility for the work created and understands the potential of society's spiritual healing and therefore for moral transformation through art, we will then have an opportunity for revitalization as a whole through the recovery of the soul, a spiritual reawakening to the sacred and consequentially, a reconnectedness to nature.

## NOTES

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## **RECONSIDERING THE CERAMIC OBJECT**

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Modernist hierarchies, ideals of originality, and notions of progress have placed craft-based practices in a marginal position within academia and the broader art world. The study of modern ceramics offers an opportunity to investigate, question, and challenge this received history. My paper provides a case study of teaching a history of craft-based practices within an art school. In the course, “Reconsidering the Ceramic Object,” students engage in a reassessment of Modernism by drawing on a range of texts both within and beyond the field of ceramics. Further, they work with a set of methodologies to rethink ceramic art and to create a strategic framework in which to place their own emerging practices.

“Reconsidering the Ceramic Object” is a course that centers on a critical re-examination of the economic and ideological place of ceramics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I originally designed it as an intensive, three-week summer offering. In brief, the first week we assess the Modernist canon and reassess functional ceramics as a point of anxiety within that canon. During the second week, we examine the field of ceramics at mid-century that is initially consumed by incorporating avant-garde practices and then subsequently concerned with interrogating its own “low” craft history. In the third week, we focus on how contemporary ceramic practices engage postmodern theories of feminism, identity politics, and post-colonialism. Our final day is the student’s forum discussing how to speak and write about one’s own studio practice and remapping ceramic history of the last century.

Ceramic history, which is either absent or marginalized in standard 20<sup>th</sup> century art history, is an intriguing platform to reexamine Modernism. Before the class examines specific artists and movements or general practices and theories, we critique the very creation of the modern canon. I lead off the course with these two images: Alfred Barr’s “Development of Abstract Art” that he created for his 1936 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and a Mark Lombardi drawing. This comparison jump-starts our interrogation of how information is displayed and how history itself is constructed. This detective work continues into an investigation of the very language we use to discuss and critique art.

Given the subordinate position of craft-based practices, I feel it is essential to concern ourselves with the nomenclature of craft. For this, Paul Greenhalgh’s work on the etymology of the term “craft” is invaluable. His work outlines the term’s changing meanings, shifting alliances, and continuing tensions.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of the field of design during the interwar period altered the relationship between “art” and “craft;” and it is this period (the 1920s), rich in discussions about functionalism and the social role of the artist, that we turn our attention.

Soviet production of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century provides the initial “test case” for the reception of ceramics within Modernism. We examine both Suprematist and Agitational porcelain. Chashnik’s “Black Ribbon Plate” observing Malevich’s aesthetics and Chekhonin’s “Red Sailor” plate commemorating the achievements of the Baltic Fleet are typical of these productions. While adventurous in many respects, Soviet porcelain remains little known. In class discussions, students are encouraged to think about the critical emphasis on originality and the corresponding irrelevance given to production work.

Function was and certainly remains the central anxiety surrounding ceramic practices. After looking at 1920s commentary on this topic, the class moves into the war period. Bernard

Leach's 1940 publication entitled *The Potter's Book* presented a clear and credible standard for functional potters.<sup>2</sup> His ideal was based on Chinese Song aesthetics and it provided both a critique of mass-production and a rationale or justification for modern pottery production. Leach's writing dominated the immediate postwar ceramic discourse and continues to exert an influence within the field.

Leach's wartime message of a humble, yet profound practice is brought into the present with a recent issue of *Studio Potter*, edited by my Alfred studio colleague Linda Sikora.<sup>3</sup> "Functionalism Revisited" is ambitious in scope. Its essays critique Leach's legacy, discuss pragmatic concerns of the marketplace, and raise philosophical issues. Economic questions on how our society promotes certain types of art and how we collectively assign value are also present. Ceramic practitioners write the majority of articles, and the voice of the artist here is crucial. These voices—eloquent and expressive—immediately engage the students in a wide-ranging debate on contemporary practices and their own emerging philosophies.

The connection between studio ceramic practices and that of the avant-garde is the central topic of the second week. At this time, postwar aesthetic discourses both in the East and West are examined. We survey Isamu Noguchi's ceramic production and that of his Japanese counterparts (such as Yagi Kazuo and the Sodeisha or "Crawling through Mud" group) in the context of the emergence of the non-functional vessel.<sup>4</sup> This creation of a new category of art in Japan (i.e., the non-functional vessel) is linked to the current broadening of avant-garde practices (such as Gutai events or other performance-based work.)<sup>5</sup> Ceramic experimentation is viewed outside its own field and coincides here with emerging avant-garde practices, both of which adventurously challenged the status quo.

We also investigate the construction of the avant-garde in the U.S. The "triumph" of postwar American art is examined through the figure of Peter Voulkos, the best-known practitioner of "Abstract Expressionist Ceramics."<sup>6</sup> We look at his work along with other members of the Otis School (such as John Mason), paying particular attention to their ambitions and critical reception. The class critically appraises the heroic construction of the artist and the masculine rhetoric surrounding Abstract Expressionist practice.

The internal ceramic critique of Voulkos's "triumph" was led by the next generation of practitioners. In the 1970s several sculptors working in the medium of clay—most notably Ken Price and Robert Arneson—became increasingly enamored with mining the "low" culture of modern ceramics. They audaciously quoted the curio, the tourist souvenir, and the craft collectible. We examine the nature of this appropriation of debased imagery, which continues even today to raise questions of economic value, ceramic history and critical distance. The class addresses the following questions: Do ceramic sculptors who use a devalued source from ceramic's own history have an inherently different relationship to their source material than other artists? Already seen as participating in a marginal practice, do ceramic artists compromise their work—critically or economically—in their appropriation of kitsch? Do artists who work in clay risk devaluing their own work by quoting low forms that remind their audience of "cheap goods?"

The discussion of appropriation leads directly into postmodernism and the role of ceramics in questioning modernist notions. Seventies Feminism and its critique of craft offered an alternative to mainstream practices. A central project in this discussion is Judy Chicago's 1978 "Dinner Party." In presenting this installation that uses essentialist imagery that seems so visually reductive to students today, I am indebted both to Amelia Jones's recent scholarship (and indeed its re-presentation) of this work and to Glenn Adamson's writing that examines the feminist recasting of craft. Both readings offer a wonderful platform for class discussion.<sup>7</sup>

Postmodern ceramics is a rich topic. At this moment, we view a range of work, including Michael Lucero's engagement with modernism and its love of "the primitive" as seen in his "Pre-Columbus Series." Lucero's sophisticated and witty layering of history is also witnessed in Adrian Saxe's playful engagement with Rococo aesthetics and in Kathy Butterly's feminist-inflected homage to the George E. Ohr (alias "The Mad Potter of Biloxi.")

Post-colonial strategies enter the discussion when we examine contemporary Third-world artists. I focus on Magdalene Odundo, an artist who takes inspiration (in part) from African body ornamentation practices, she provides a fascinating case study of the critical reception an artist of color. Kenyan-born Odundo, who was educated England, lies in the critical interstices between Africa and Europe. There is a sense of vertigo in literature surrounding her work; authors cannot decide where she or her work resides: Third or First-world, traditional or contemporary, pottery or sculpture. In place of this limited dialectic, I offer the strategy of triangulation used by some writers to disrupt dominant cultural practices.<sup>8</sup> Through triangulation (a process that de-centers the mainstream) we can reposition practices that have been marginalized. We discuss the use of this strategy to specifically site Odundo's work and to broadly map the field of ceramics.

The final presentation is the students' own remapping of 20<sup>th</sup> century ceramics. I should mention that in our class first meeting, I handed out this assignment and asked them to read either Tufte's chapter "Escaping Flatland" from his book *Envisioning Information* or Deleuze and Guattari's introduction on the rhizome from *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>9</sup> The results of this assignment showed a diversity of visions for modern ceramics and the student's own place within the field. Among the final "maps" were:

- A spider web of inter-related movements, with calligraphic lines leading in various directions and showing nodes of shared interests
- A double major in art and ceramic engineering offered a glaze calculation chart with tiles marked with artists and movements
- A monstrous clay "golem" with various artist's names in graffiti marking its body and a series of teacups lining its vertebrae
- A Japanese student gave a cooking lesson with ceramic history in the guise of modern cookie evolution
- A thrown cylinder that epitomized the "Alfred" aesthetic of "Song over Bauhaus" and giving a twin-lineage of teachers that led to the student's own name placed at the bottom of the vessel

These students framed ceramic history in a highly personal and radically different mode than in the received history of Modernism.

Craft history is an under-represented area of art historical research and debate. I designed "Reconsidering the Ceramic Object" to both retrieve this history and to rethink mainstream values and hierarchies. Beyond a broad reassessment of Modernism, my specific goal is that art students are empowered to create a conceptual framework in which to place their own practice. Choosing to work in ceramics (or any other craft-based practice) should not be defensive, but defensible. Perhaps some students may even conclude, as Turner prizewinner Grayson Perry does, that "pottery is the new video."

## NOTES

1. Paul Greenhalgh, "The History of Craft," in Peter Dormer, Ed. *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997.
2. Bernard Leach. *A Potter's Book*. New York: Transatlantic Arts, Inc., 1940. For a critical discussion of Leach, see: Edmund deWaal, *Bernard Leach*. London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998.
3. Linda Sikora, Ed. "Functionalism Revisited," *Studio Potter* 33/2 (June 2005): 19-43.
4. Bert Winther-Tamaki, "Yagi Kazuo: The Admission of the Nonfunctional Object into the Japanese Pottery World," *Journal of Design History* 22/2 (1999): 123-141.
5. Paul Shimmel, Ed. *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998.
6. John Coplans coined this phrase to place new ceramics in the context of current Avant-garde practices. See: John Coplans, *Abstract Expressionist Ceramics*. Irvine, CA: University of Irvine, 1966.
7. Amelia Jones, Ed. *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" in Feminist Art History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. And Glenn D. Adamson, "Craft Paradigms: The Studio Craft Movement and the Avant-Garde, 1966-1972." Diss.: Yale University, 2001.
8. See, for example: Judith Wilson, "New (Art) Histories: Global Shits, Uneasy Exchanges," in The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, *New Histories* (Boston: ICA), 1996: 14-23.
9. Significantly, all of these authors are outside the field of art history. Edward Tufte is a statistician, Giles Deleuze was trained in philosophy and Felix Guattari is a psychoanalyst and political activist. See: Edward R. Tufte, *Envisioning Information*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990 and Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1987.

## **HOW MODERNISM, MODERNITY AND MODERN ART ARE THE IMPLICATED IN THE BETRAYAL OF CULTURE**

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In culture and art, the modern, modernity and modernism have always been associated with progress, certainly amongst the cultural-elite, the avant-garde and industry. I will argue that in that association both modernism and progress are double-speak disguised as an oxymoron. I will argue that they have both been corrupted in meaning by our very own species history in evolution and cultures of cognition, in knowing, doing, achieving and art.

It is a corruption in cognition passed on from generation to generation over millions of years of loyalty to an ancient limbic-system driven logic. Claude Lévi-Strauss named it *bri-coleur*, Von Domarus and Silvano Arieti more accurately outlined its associative-process as sub-predicate in logic wherein a common quality of disparate elements joins them in a bri-collage in narrative that easily within the dominance of emotional-bodyfeltness that limbicness is, reconciles in retribution.

As a logic in narrative, limbicness is inherent to that more primitive bio-brain system architecture that our species some six million years ago sprang from. It has throughout our evolving as a species, despite our relatively recent pre-frontal advances in bio-brain-system architecture and wiring held us hostage to a culture, art and acculturation that permits only a primitive, cognitively visceral reconciling, even within its most intellectual expression as  $E=Mc^2$  confirms.

Keep in mind that our species potential for a self-reflective sense of self, capable of such introspection as (I am hostage to my limbic-dominant bio-brain system's logic in cognition, hostage out of a complicity in acculturation that has betrayed my fulfilling my destiny in cognition. A complicity that has betrayed my fulfilling my destiny in culture and art).

In the most primitive syllabic sense the betrayal began as a possibility some two million years ago. This ancient betrayal is complex and deeply embedded in the history of our psyche. This is not the kind of knot that can just be cut. It has been tied and retied in cognition for some two million years of generation upon generation conditioning in reflex, wherein we have permitted only a Limbic-Logic led perception and dominance in development of intellect. Sir James Frazer tracks its more Gordian expression, in the Theodor H. Gaster abridged, revised and edited version of his book *The Golden Bough*, retitled *The New Golden Bough*. His research reveals an esthetics in culture, art and behavior, that as it is dominated by limbic-logic, it to that extent morphs cognition in the most subtle and radical retributive-ways, no individual or collective psyche or culture is exempted. It is a third-worldness in morphing of cognition subtle and extreme that is shared by a diversity of cultures, of countries and continents throughout the world.

Frazer makes clear that there are no exemptions no matter the class or worldness of the culture. What they have in common, what they share is a more or less limbic-logic betrayal of their cognitive potential.

In Frazer the betrayal reads like a Dada, surreal drama that makes *Waiting For Godot*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man* and *War Of The Worlds* seem normal...

Sir James Frazer in *The New Golden Bough* speaks to the anti-intellectualism and sub-predicate associational process of *bri-coleur* in cognition, making clear its regressive retributive, phobic-logic in problem solving. It is this Id regressive logic and narrative of the *bri-coleur* central to the cognition of the primitive-culture and its art that the modern-artist in their pursuit of a primitivism that would release their noble-Savage within employed. I argue that as a species we have pursued such a primitivisation of cognition confining it to iconic, indexical, and the simplest of symbolic referencing since the beginning of time. Here I reference Terrence W. Deacon's *The Symbolic Species*, "Chapter Three: Symbols Aren't Simple."

Plato hated the esthetic of primitivisation and saw it as a betrayal of culture and more profoundly a disturbing of the soul, and sought to drive artists pursuing such expression out of town. Aristotle in defense of primitivisation argued for its importance, calling it catharsis.

Whether the marker is 2.7 million years since *H. habilis* or some 180,000 years since our evolution as sapiens sapiens, the betrayal of our species potential in cognition has always plagued us. A Frazer like collecting of cultural practices would even today reveal that no matter its first or third worldness culture continues to be a generational acculturation in a history of Id directed taboo. It would reveal that development of abstraction in logic and its outcome in intellect remains hostage to limbic-logics iconic, indexical dominant-*bri-coleur*.

There is a puzzle here a kind of mind within a mind like those eastern European bowling-pin shaped doll within a doll. The point is we all are limbic-logic led out of acculturation what ever our development in abstraction in intellect. It is within our mind within mind that we find our ancient brain's Id-mind as the internal narrator that out of our limbic logic led acculturation we permit to advise even direct our internal and external psychosomatics, to advise and direct our external socially-engineered reconciling with all its inherent retributive design

The betrayal has become within culture process structural, almost Baldwinian. From generation to generation our species has created cultures that acculturate to dominance our ancient bio-brain system architecture with its conscienceless-retributive processes in logic. It is this ancient brains Id-mind which out of its dominance in cognition organizes itself such that our later developments in brain architecture identifies our Id as our entire-brain. Much like the split brain experiments wherein each hemisphere identifies itself in cognition as the entire brain. Here I reference the research of Michael Gazzaniga, discussed in Howard Bloom's book *Global Brain*, in chapter seven.

Certainly in terms of our potential in cognition from *H. habilis* to sapiens sapiens the betrayal has been and continues to be an Id that is acculturated to refuse to be subservient to our modern pre-frontally evolved brain with its Ego and super-Ego mind.

The fact is that our pre-frontally evolved bio-brain-system is fully capable of a cognition that reconciles all things in free-will in intellect. It is a process inherent to our modern-Brain's<sup>2</sup> potential in cognition, that we are capable of achieving providing there is a maturing of cognition to abstraction, and from abstraction to objectivity, essential for the realizing of free-will in intellect. The catch is that a reconciling in free-will in intellect is not possible as long as the betrayal I speak to in this writing continues to dominate cognition.

I argue that central to the betrayal is our creating cultures and art-esthetics that inhibit lucidity in cognition in both our internal and external world leaving cognition with a logic which gives our limbic-system-dominant old-brain-Id-mind a dominance in the external world, equal to the Id-mind dominance in our day-dream and sleep-dream imaginings, and most retributively in what become our night-mares. Theories of self-expression of art-esthetics that speak to the

manifesting of the Id as a liberation reach back in western culture to Aristotle for whom catharsis was such a liberation, freeing us of the internal surplusly-repressed Id narrative-Content.

What Aristotle and those who continue his theory of Id-regression and catharsis over looked, is that the internal Id-mind inherently morphs truth-condition to confabulation and as it releases as unconsciousness to consciousness it organizes intellect in service of the confabulation forming consciousness in Id-stuffs image.

An important given here is the betrayal, that since our syllabic potential some two million years ago has tainted all expression in culture, bringing into complicity all progress, all that we call modern, modernism and modernity. In other words the betrayal I speak to has no time-line whether it is the betrayal from the time of the Chimpanzee, *H. habilis* or that of Cain and Abel the definition remains the same. To betray is (to lead astray), (to fail), (to desert in time of need), (to deliver to an enemy by treachery). While the modern is associated with (the novel), (the new). modernism with (a self-conscious break with the past), (a search for new forms of expression), and (most recent developments). modernity is associated with (that which relates to modernism) a (tending to the new) and (contemporary thought). They are definitions conceptually inherent to all phenomena of nature, within all time, space and change. The terms themselves and all their adjectives are operative in the history of all things tainted and therefore tainting our species evolving in cognition in culture and art.

It follows that the betrayal of and by culture and art, needs some language meaning, some dictionary definition. Culture is defined in *Webster's Dictionary*:

As the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior that depends on mans capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

Art, I define as the pre-digital, digital and post-digital identifying, organizing and processing of information that includes all the micro-macroness that nature is including all our species was and is in cognition, behavior, ritual and the traditional handi-crafted and more recent techno-crafted invention in art.

It is within this micro-macroness that all creation is, that we find the endless variety of art that nature is. We can begin with the organizing of the Universe, the planetary systems, our planet Earth the lands even continents that throughout this planets history appear and disappear. The volcanic-eruptions and earth-quakes, as well as the endless variety of mathematically-precise crystals and gems that form in the alchemy of volcanic activity. The rains, the oceans, the creatures that form in and migrated from the oceans. All are the never ending art at the center of all that creation was then and still is. There are the little molecules, sub-atomic stuff, DNA, little creatures like viruses and bacteria and giant creatures, like those resurrected in the movie *Jurassic Park*. Here I reference Howard Bloom's *Global Brain*, the prologue and first five chapters.

Continuing to skip through an evolutionary time tracking of natures art-making that leads to us sapiens sapiens we skip to some 35 million years ago there we come across the old world monkeys, skipping 25 million years forward to some 10 million years ago and there we encounter our genetically closest relative in evolution the chimpanzee. Keeping track of events these 10 million years we catalogue 16 failed gene pools of our species. A slight leap back from the present some 180,000 years back and there we are, our present sapiens sapiens selves migrating out of Africa. Of course there are the elephants and giraffes, all sought of things that

borough and fly and eat each other. There are the termite and ant hill, the bees and hornets nests, the birds nests and spider webs and animal origins of art<sup>2</sup>like that of the Bowerbird.

It is a history of art-making in nature that our oldest ancestor the some seven million years ago chimpanzee contributed to sharing their art of weaving leaves together for bedding and the cracking of nuts with large stones. Their other inventions include the use of twigs to scratch themselves and pick from termite mounds free of termite bites to their fingers their favorite snack of termites. The twig also served as a fork to pick out monkey brains from the cracked open skull of monkeys killed by the chimpanzee in their hunt for food. *A ramidus* one of our early species versions, prior to *A. africanus* created the first stone shard tools. Moving up the evolutionary-tree to two million years ago we encounter *H. habilis* the creators of oldowan stone tools and user of the antelope's thigh bone to crack their predecessor Australopithecines skull. While 1.4 million years ago with the appearance of *H. erectus* the hand-axe is invented. Then 90,000 years ago we sapiens sapiens invent crafted-bone-tools.

50,000 years passed before enough abstraction surfaced above limbic-logic in cognition to make possible the invention of figurative cave-sculpture including engraving and painting on cave walls. It was some 24,000 years later, some 26,000 years ago that enough objectivity was permitted to develop through which to evolve the techno-craft of ceramic-clay figurines.

Skipping through these thousands of years of natures and our species artistic expression in invention we come across our sapiens sapiens mammoth ones architecture of over 18,000 years ago. Leaping to some 1,200 years go with more pre-frontal-lobe expression to abstraction, we invent classicism and from the late eighteen hundreds to the present all the Isms of modernism.

They all represent the various twists and turns of our species history of invention in art in more or less Id-limbicness in cognition and assertion of abstraction in more or less service to limbic-logic, representing the more or less betrayal within which we generationally have compromised ours and others (in a bio-brain-system architectural sense), potential in cognition. I would suggest that it is in a Baldwinian sense a conformity-enforced betrayal of ourselves and each other.

It is within generation upon generation of Baldwinian Culture-Enforced Gene-Pooling and Nurturing that these past some 180,000 years as sapiens sapiens our bio-chemical and hormonal processes have been directed. Keep in mind that it is the hormonal processes that turn our genes on and off, genes that serve our forming, or morphing in our forming according to their sequencing. Culture can have impact on and effect our genetic-process and in a Baldwinian sense our Genetic-Structure that as they interject themselves into our species culture-pooling process they effect our species potential in bio-brain-system process.

For a thorough discussion of Baldwinian-processes and their relation to evolution, I reference (pages 322-331) of *The Symbolic Species* authored by Terrence W. Deacon. Also Howard Bloom's Book entitled *Global Brain*.

Steven Mithin's book *The Prehistory of the Mind: The Cognitive Origins of Art and Science* presents what I consider a chronology of stasis and progress that speaks to Darwinian-Evolution and the later Baldwinian, nature-nurture view of Darwinian evolution to explain how traits old and new become, remain and change as regular features of a species bio-brain-system processes and behavior. Deacon, Bloom, and Mithin combine to make clear the role of nurture adoptive and cultural to stasis and progress that is our species history of cognitive and behavioral betrayal of self and the other.

It took us sapiens sapiens some 20,000 years to cross to the next modernism and progress, to get from the art and invention of the bow and arrow good for hunting by surprise and the safety of distance, to be good for killing ones enemies by surprise and the safety of distance, to the killing of even millions of the enemy and totally destroying their cities from a great distance with missile launched atomic bombs. It took 6,000 years to get from the first wheeled wagon, to the war-wagon and the tank, from the raft to the air-craft carrier, from the celebratory rockets of ancient China to the rockets that carry the atomic bombs as ballistic missiles to anywhere on the planet.. And then of course there is the modernism, the progress in artistic-invention that the atomic war-headed-missiles that sit in satellite silos are that circle the planet, that movies like space cowboy make central to the sub-text of the movie, a sub-text that speaks to the retributive extremes to which our sapiens sapiens Id driven art in invention caught in the cognitive betrayal can take us. Here I reference *Armed Mad House* by Greg Palace.

All three worldnesses are in betrayal of our species potential in cognition, culture, and art. The 1st-world engages the betrayal with greater intelligence and less phobic-emotional-bodyfeltness. The third-world engages the betrayal, with less intelligence and a dominance in phobic-emotional-bodyfeltness in Id-logic what separates them is not the issue of betrayal itself but the extent to which this betrayal is in more or less Intelligence in more or less cleverness in confabulation that is more or less embedded in the culture and art process of the individuals and the societies class-structure of each of the worlds. Since it is within intelligence in service of Id-will and its logic that worldness within the betrayal is established and the power relation between the worldnesses transacted.

For instance within the betrayal are the radically-enfranchised in their first-worldness, within their greater advantage in Intelligence and resources seeking to de-construct the betrayal, they would have to de-construct the chasm between them, and the radically-disfranchised. Are both the enfranchised and disfranchised serving the status quo or are they serving to further widen the chasm by further empowering the strategies of betrayal. The history of failures or extent of the success of the Civil-Rights movements of the radically-disfranchised throughout the world answers that question.

The betrayals in cognition, in our species potential in logic in cognition and resulting Id-morphing of behavior and identity, do not begin or end with the Id-logic, limbic led truth condition that drive so much of the confabulated, fabricated truth in bias we encounter in the art and esthetic that organizes the printed media and what we view on TV.

Imagine connecting reel to reel all the movies that have since the beginning of film making spoken to our not so noble Id-logic led ancient-brain, that continues the primitivisation of our cognition, as it continues to churn out cinema that organize cognition and esthetics in art to speak to and inspire our species ancient brains archetypal hate, xenophobia, and misogyny. Remember the movie *Birth of a Nation*. Regression in service of the Ego like the releasing of the noble-savage-within has wended its way back to our species most ancient history of bloody mayhem, and genocidal slaughter. Imagine the effect of such imprinting to our species psyche as we generation after generation continue to embrace the esthetic of regression in service of the Ego, in service of modern-arts noble-savage within.

If it's not the invading monsters it's the invading hordes, if it's not the invading hordes it's the murderous vampires, Wolf-people and deadly body possessing space-alien-creatures, all are served up everyday as entertainment that speaks to our species history of phobic driven fantasies. This is the legacy that the primitivisation of cognition has left our culture and art has left us with. A legacy which still hold us hostage in our imaginations and in our day to day reality as phobic-counter-phobic, victim and victimizer.

All told it's been some seven million years to today virtual-reality digital interactive video-games and the betrayal in slaughter and violence many of them educate us too. I myself have not noticed much change in the culture of betrayal of our species cognitive potential and the resulting retributive fall-out over these some seven million years from the chimpanzee time to that of our present sapiens sapiens time in evolution.

For the radically-enfranchised of Europe that came together to primitivise their culture and art, they did not argue that they were adding something missing from their psyche. No they argued that what they saw and understood of the Aboriginal-culture was within them buried under repressing layers of civility. It took a lot of Id directed Intellect for them to fabricate the notion that their over-civilizedness surplusly-repressed their old-brain and the id it empowered...

Surely it is absurd to believe that ones true-self is ones old-brain self complaining about a limbically-morphed notion of self with all kinds of psycho-somatic acting-in and acting-out, believing one is in fact smothered by ones middle and upper-class radical-enfranchisement.

It takes a lot of Id directed Intellect in fabrication to envy the radically-disfranchised third-world. To imagine our species epitome of nobility and freedom of expression as a regressive-process in cognition, culture and art. It makes as much sense as ones envying the spiritual-enlightenment that is experienced by the near death and dying and imitating the near death and dying to experience the spiritual-enlightenment. Here I reference the movie *Flat Liners*.

Today the tradition of regression in service of the Ego, in service of the Id is still alive and well, making more inroads into first-world culture than ever before. Witness the regressive-culture of taboos superstition, fetish and ritual-objects. Witness the regressive-culture of body-tattooing, body-piercing, the younger and younger sexualizing of identity to that of pornography.

We no longer disguise our retributiveness in clever social-engineering. The betrayal is more blatant than ever. We conjure scape-goat without a second thought. We bold facedly project our Id's retributiveness on to the other stirring phobia and fear in service of our enfranchisement, even if it is in truth-condition a fabricated notion of enfranchisement upon which all bigotry rests.

The Aboriginal-culture and logic of the noble-savage and the present day noble-savage stand-in's are now delivered to us everyday, in every form of media-communications and entertainment. We see it translated into the culture of the alpha-male and alpha-female within the culture of the radically-enfranchised, and dangerous-male and dangerous-female within the culture of the radically-disfranchised.

The challenge like the myth of Sisyphus has always been to try and try again to overcome the retributive taboos and other socially-engineered obstacles and conformity-enforcements in service of radical-disfranchisement. To understand that it is a spell cast some eight million years ago by our chimpanzee ancestor. A spell carried forward these millions of years in a conformity-enforcement overseen by generations of wicked-Shaman in defense of the Id-will to power of the radically-enfranchised. It is by understanding this Sisyphian-spell the way it binds our potential in cognition that we begin its deconstruction.

The spell has made us forget that it is a spell, that we can choose to walk away from the Sisyphian-fabrication of reality the spell is and release Id-will from its will in retribution to serve to inspire our choosing our species potential in cognition, to serve to inspire our species inherent potential to abstraction to objectivity and free-will in Intellect.

The modern, modernism and modernity like progress have since our beginnings as a species been organized within this spell to serve it and perpetuate it. modern-art not only did not escape the spell it was conjured out of the spell to serve it, moving what ever maturing in cognition in culture that was occurring to a stasis through its limbic-logic led aesthetics of primitivisation.

The spell continues to plague culture and certainly artists-education, inhibiting their role in the de-construction of the spell as it continues to foster the primitivisation inherent to the spell. The history of the spell is the history of the betrayal of our species potential in cognition.

In other words central to the culture and art of betrayal is the fact that our culture and art as our educators in cognition educates us to reject our more recent bio-brain-system pre-frontal-lobe development with its potential for objectivity in abstraction so critical to our release from Id-will within our personal and larger world.

By rejecting our potential in pre-frontal-Lobe cognition we reject its role within our bio-brain-system-evolution as our liberator in cognition from the tyranny of our limbic-system-Id-logic. All communication occurs within a truth-condition of encoded hidden-agendas of layers of fabrication and confabulation. More simply put we lie to ourselves and others with more or less cleverness, within more or less retributiveness, according to the extent of our development in Abstraction and Abstractions subservience to our limbic-system and its retributive emotional-bodyfelnness in logic.

Call it modern-art, modern-medicine, modern-politics, modern-business, or modern-warfare, its easier if we slice into history and go back just 40,000 years to “the great leap forward,” as Jared Diamond in his book *The Third Chimpanzee* titled one of his chapters. To our cro-magnon-sapiens-sapiens time of the Leap in our evolving complexity of cognition, syllabic-language, Art and Invention.

It was a leap for the few enfranchised, who inspired by our species developing abstraction, broke with their taboo enforced loyalty to our species ancient more Id-limbic-led cognitive-mode. The compromise was an old-brain, new-brain merge of developments in abstraction with those of our species more body-felnness in cognition. The result is still alive and well, an intellectually led truth-condition in confabulation with its inevitable fabrication in meaning. It is this leap that has from our most ancient time until now been as an acculturation organized as the truth-condition that is part of every leap forward, as every leap forward contains within it the modern, modernism and modernity since the first twig, stone and bone was imagined and employed as a tool in cultures throughout the world.

We need simply observe history and see societies and nations with such leaps-forward in cognition and invention radically-empowering the enfranchised-few with the resulting leaps-backward in cognition and dis-empowerment of the many and see a third-world that rose to first-worldness fall back to a cognition and culture of third-worldness time after time.

Nostradamus envisioned culture, morphed in old-brain logic, collapsing in a politic of disaster driven by retributive-confabulation after retributive-confabulation. But one does not have to be a visionary to see the grim future our betrayals birth as each generation pushes more of our Id-regressive unconsciousness unconsciously to consciousness, leaving culture, art, behavior and identity, to serve no purpose other than to continue to educate us to serve the old-brain-Id and its truth-condition in iconic and indexical referencing fundamental to

Confabulation. Here I reference Terrence W. Deacon's the *Symbolic Species*, in particular chapters three, four and nine.

Modern-art is not designed to raise to maturity, to consciousness our history of unconsciously-acculturated cognition in regression. Yes the culture of modern-art wants to release our unconsciousness except it does so unconsciously. as a more viscerally-dynamic unconsciousness as consciousness. Try to be doubly unconscious, see where it gets you, by comparison it makes triple-forgetting simple to unravel.

Absent lucidity each art-work is a secret-diary, coded through signs, symbols and icons of visual and psycho-kinetic-language secrets of our species history of Id driven phobic-retributive-behavior that remains unconscious, that remains secret from ourselves.

It is because the heart of the betrayal has always been cognition and that at the heart of cognition is art, that the esthetic and the cognitive-mode in cognition that drives art demands attention. I have pointed out how the esthetic of modern-art serves the betrayal.

The solution is in the present of cognitive-science beyond semiotics, beyond structuralism, and post-modernism. The solution is an esthetic that is more intellectually rigorous than that of post-structuralism, that is in the fact of its commitment to science committed in the Intellectual-maturity of its esthetic to the maturing of cognition to a lucidity that places old-brain-behavioral-meme in service of new-brain-verbal-meme. Such an esthetic makes possible a dialogic that is multi-sensory-psycho-kinetic that is post-literate and biogenetic in its post-structuralism.

It is an esthetic committed to a language-fluency that in it Lucidity makes conscious all unconsciousness in expression, such that the Id is raised in consciousness to its appropriate role in our sapiens sapiens Bio-brain-system potential in cognition, and inspires our pre-frontal-lobe potential to free-will in intellect.

It is possible then for the art-process at the center of all our species behavior, at the center of our species culture-process, to serve to raise our art-making, to raise all the processing in information art-making is as expression of self to a conscious, lucid, language-fluency. The result is a dialogic-conceptual-grid that best serves a multi-sensory-psycho-kinetic-embedding of the various aspects of the content-meaning of ones intention in narrative. Dosse writes in the *History of Structuralism Volume 2*: "Chapter 34 History Returns: Quoting Genevieve Idt."

This theory implied taking the linguistic notion of situational context, the material conditions of discursive production and reception, the institutions that conditioned discursive practices, the interlocutors, the public of the literary message - in other words linking it with social and cultural history by studying the hierarchization of message codes during the period in question, as well as their implicit and explicit references to prior messages. There was no question of rejecting structuralism's achievements, but of articulating the history to open up reflection to form, materials, and content.

The resulting art and the semiotics at its core, in behavior, and all expression of self will in its vocabulary be inter-disciplinary, varied in materials, technique, technology and translate as essential to the de-construction of the betrayal of our species potential in cognition to free-will-in-intellect.

## **MIX AND MISMATCH: THE MODERN IN PAINTING TODAY**

**Boris Zakic**

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It started as a single hypothesis: *Paint* includes the impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself<sup>1</sup> But then as with most hypotheses, it grew more complex to include conditional arguments and other ill-defined presumptions that art can't let go. All of which marked-out the tendency of a distinctive and influential approach to paint that may, as some critics have hastened to predict, reach a climax at a decade into our commencing century.<sup>2</sup> Optimistic or not, there is an urge for artists, receptive public and the rest to move along.

### **CURRENT-UNDERCURRENT**

In 1998, as a graduate student I attended the exhibition *Abstract Painting "Once Removed"* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston. It focused on work that wrestled with the boundaries of this age-old medium to produce visually and intellectually provocative "paintings" distanced from the "abstraction" of earlier periods. In addition to experimental but still wall-bound oil-on-canvas works, the exhibition also included free-standing panels and floor arrangements, sculptural, photo- and computer-based projects, made from materials as diverse as mylar, aluminum, crushed velvet, silk flowers, mirrors, shellac, and glue. Organized by Dana Friis-Hansen, the Museum's senior curator at the time, the exhibition contained about 50 works from about 20 artists.<sup>3</sup>

It was not the first, nor will be the last exhibit of this kind. Earlier exhibitions include, as the curator cited himself, "Painting Outside of Painting" at the Corcoran,<sup>4</sup> "Painting: the Extended Field" at Malmo, Sweden, both in the 90's,<sup>5</sup> and its premise continued with "Extreme Abstraction" held at Albright-Knox gallery in Buffalo, NY 2005. And most recently, Infinite Painting (Italy) and Extended Painting scheduled for next year (Spain).

*Abstract Painting "Once Removed"* had an elaborate and very influential catalogue.<sup>6</sup> Its scope was far from modest. Beginning with the question "once removed from what?" essays analyzed, abstraction notwithstanding, what's at stake in painting at large. Calling for the reconsideration of painting within the context of the here-and-now, authors contended for the new uses of the medium in favor of irony, parody, optimism and new technologies. Moreover, a corresponding CAA session was held in NYC in 2003. A panel of artists and art historians, elaborating further on what was hinted on in the catalogue texts, proposed that these works are the result of the "exhaustion of binary thinking."<sup>7</sup> I will illustrate with three general points:

The first is an obvious one, but conveniently overlooked. To continue with artificially polarizing positions is to constitutively conceal that abstraction merely gave special cases of the figurative, limiting its repertoire to the mentally representational, like geometry, and the ambiguous products of chance or dreamy associations. The figurative is always pregnant with abstraction. So, to say that they have now joined hands would be a mistake for that still presumes them as adversaries. Negativity and opposition do not transform into acceptance and collusion for there has never been existence without co-existence. There is no meaning in either if meaning is not shared.<sup>8</sup> And if there is a doubt in a case of Mondrians and Pollocks, "they are so far removed from normal figuration that they practically circle around to reinvent the figurative from scratch."<sup>9</sup> Without leaving it at that, I am suggesting a clarification: an asymmetrical tension-countertension bind. As painters' fixations are indebted to spite more than to any history, to chance over determinism, and above all, to metonymy, consider Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*. I will

not go into details, but it simply gives an operationally diachronic sense to what may (have) be(en) apperceptively misunderstood (or *will have been* misunderstood) as pure nonsense<sup>10</sup>

Second, we are now faced with abstraction of abstracts, a kind of meta-abstraction. For example, if textile companies hire artists to design patterns similar to those they already produce as paintings, and if abstract painters use the very same commercially available fabrics to compose further work, we must fess up to seeing double: abstraction once removed by itself. In more ways than one, it is a likely progression of artists with abstract roots. They are trying to reintroduce to abstract painting, as in Gertjeansen's case (fig.1), elements that were intentionally placed outside of its boundaries.



fig.1  
**Doyle Gertjeansen**, *The Wave*, 2001  
acrylic on fabric, 66x66 inches  
courtesy of artist

This kind of phenomenon is not exclusive to abstraction. To the contrary. A Post-representational exhibition entitled *Re-presenting Representation (III)*, held at the Arnot Museum in Elmira, NY, presented similar concerns.<sup>11</sup> For instance, this curatorial project by John O'Hern focused on "something else" as a knee-jerk reaction to comfortable figuration. The "something else" he generalized was "that which would disturb the minds built on the confusion of *comfortable thinking with clarity of thought*."<sup>12</sup> At the very best, some paintings tried to "re-conceptualize" the figural, with tactics ranging from the "pictorial vs. illusion" to the ways in which representation could be "mannered" by itself. Works aside, I believed then as I do now, O'Hern's initial premise was most challenging. What I am highlighting here is the belief in its possibilities: that one would dare hope, let alone succeed, of conceiving something outside of the figurative genre. It proposes, if nothing else, that Post-Abstraction and Post-Representation do not aim in opposing directions but are tautegorical instead.

The third point is digitization. Like a genuinely inauthentic painting attempting to free itself from the 'aura' of authenticity but unable to sever the umbilical cord, the digitally aided objects edge into becoming a synthetic farce. Need not worry; artificiality is not a pejorative term any longer. The rationale for "once removing" is precisely to define a positive relation to artificiality and to classify the underlying conditions of authenticity that we would be willing to accept. It has its own challenges of course: simply compounding pictorial matter that is indistinguishable from its sources in hopes to make the work extremely unstable, may prove just as misguided as non-removal at all, in which case these paintings would be just too weak—there would be too little thought in them and too little at stake.<sup>13</sup>

All these are slippery terms, I understand. But in this context, what does it mean to take a chance? What would the chance effect be in painting? Recognizing that all distinctions are porous does not preclude the need to establish divisions and points of differentiation. Experimentation is an adventure that assumes a certain point of departure—here the genres of abstraction, figuration and the genre of re-conceptualizing the two—while projecting the inscription of difference.<sup>14</sup>

## REIFYING ‘PAINT’ AND PHOTO-*ING* ABSTRACTION

With these issues at hand, I opened an exhibition *Rift This, Rift That* at Jonathan Ferrara Gallery in New Orleans in 2003. Paintings rested on the following principle: “The disjunctive function is also and at the same time the synthetic function. Something is this, it is not that: for inasmuch it is this, it is not that. A principle rests on synthesis, when in order to dissociate one side from another we must be on both sides at once. As soon as you disjoin, you unify.”<sup>15</sup> And, in studio language, this became a hesitantly dubbed approach of reifying ‘paint’ and photo-*ing* abstraction. Defined very simply, to “reify” paint is to instantiate, that is, to give a concrete or tangible example to abstraction. And what I call photo-*ing*, is not photography, nor a camera, darkroom or computer produced print or object, but a desire and the capacity of rendering photo-effects in paint. Activated together and at the same time, they form a methodology of erasing the gap between the representational space, representations of space and the space directly lived.

Reifying is seeking existence of some immemorial voice from within the lifeless fluid. What’s it saying this time? These are *painters’ issues*, not for curatorial talk, often incompatible with any politico-market driven language, counter to art history rhetoric even. So they are often concealed within faint variances of graceful swags and drooping peaks, or as a smudge, a smear, a smirch, a splat, a smutch, a splotch and perhaps in a decisive dab. Reifying appeals to all of whom the liberation of paint—through drips, strokes and splashes—parallel their own liberation. “I want to make sincere paintings, but at this point in time you cannot do that without a certain sense of self-consciousness...”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this distancing is analogous to the artist’s struggle to be noticed and the struggle to remain invisible.



fig.2 Scott Richter, *Big Sky...for FC*, 2002. oil paint, medium w. plywood base on paper, palette table. 60x26x49 inches. opposite views. Courtesy the artist

Still, reified paint is *only* an object, fragmented and left-behind. Its pleasures are distinctly patient, unspectacular and satisfying. Once an image however, it turns spectacular! As in Lichtenstein’s *Brushstroke* (1964) for instance, what was once considered *painterly* becomes flattened and two-dimensional—a graphic. As if not sublimated enough, paint must be perceived as if available to touch. So this is where photo-*ing* offers just that. And it too provides a way around the abovementioned binary oppositions—as “erasure” of rifts between the authentic and the reproduced, or the reproduced and the irreproducible. One of the challenges encountered when viewing these works through photographs or slides, is that the relationship between

painting and representations of paint rendered in paint' is so seamless that the viewer is thoroughly confused about what is real and what is represented. One struggles to separate the signifier from the signified. The layers can only truly be understood (and believed) by viewing the work in person, thus appealing to a firsthand experience of the "original."

I only think of the photographs as visual record. I have no other intentions. I do find, however, that regardless of how explicit my verbal descriptions are to someone who has never seen the work, a 'surprise' is still produced when shown as photographs, even with other artists! There seems to be an orthodoxy created as soon as one thinks of painting, and then, even the detailed descriptions tend to numb information into familiar categories. (Richter)<sup>17</sup>

Don't get me wrong, this strategy alone without the factor of "something else" proposed by O'Hern, can be easily dismissed as a mere pop-abstraction. When Glenn Brown feeds into the predictable ideas of an already weary audience, it is not unusual for viewers to care more about the amusement value than the art of painting. Brown offers photo-*ing* as "re-paintings" of well-known artists, further coat tailing on their popularity. His "surrogates" were pitched by art-dealers as "vibrant works that combine the appeal of the best in pop culture—like New Order songs and 'Bladerunner'—with the highs of the best visual art."<sup>18</sup> So it seems he is but a pop-painter for them too. Yet to me, as evidenced by his latest work, he is inclined to be "once removed" from pop-abstraction by revisiting personal, collective or historical narratives, very much an aspect of post-figuration.

In the final analysis, what therefore defines this type of practice is not that it imitates the look of abstract painting and not that it turns figurative into the conceptual, but that it takes their respective legacies seriously—which again is to *mix and match* the desire to dispose of one by the other with the acknowledgement of the impossibility of such disposing altogether. This paradox is the precise similarity among Brown's "Re-paintings," Scott Richter's "Palettes of Paint," and Gertjeansen's "Not Ones and Zeros."<sup>19</sup> This work is not for everyone. Nor is it for everywhere. It depends on experience that is guided by a highly articulated, even if unbridled, set of visual conventions. It still needs staging. That is the *current*. On the other hand, I can't imagine that people would contentedly read wall texts forever? Our eyes, as demanding organs want the exercise worthy of their ability to discern and discriminate, given an emotional reward that justifies the effort. *Its undercurrent*. So in this climate of opinion, this may perhaps be the last remaining vestige for painting to seek its renewed sense of signification and still remain true to its medium.

## NOTES

- 1 An appropriation of Jean-François Lyotard's "The fact is that this temporality of modernity includes the impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself. Modernity is pregnant with its own postmodernity. We must rewrite modernity, that modernity is, moreover, its own rewriting." (*Re-writing Modernity, The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, p.26).
- 2 Peter Schjeldahl, *The Rise of Abstraction II, Abstract Painting "Once Removed,"* exhibition catalogue, CAM, Houston, 1997. Also, a general prediction was made by Robert Hughes in the conclusion of *The Shock of The New* (Knopf, 1991).
- 3 21 artists: Polly Apfelbaum, Kevin Appel, Uta Barth, Glenn Brown, Ingrid Calame, Fandra Chang, Mark D. Cole, Sally Elesby, Jeff Elrod, Tad Griffin, Jim Hodges, Callum Innes, Emil Lucas, Fabian Marcaccio, Beatriz Milhazes, Takashi Murakami, Aaron Parazette, Richard Patterson, Monique Prieto, Scott Richter, and Pae White. Dana Friis-Hansen has since left Huston is currently the director of the Austin Museum of Art, TX.

- 4 *Painting Outside of Painting* (1995) organized by Corcoran curator Terrie Sultan included more than 80 works by 26 artists who, as Sultan wrote, were “reconceptualizing and refiguring the very structure of painting.”
- 5 Daniel Birnbaum, “Painting: The Extended Field” exhibition review, *ArtForum*, Feb 1997
- 6 The Catalogue includes essays by Dana Friis-Hansen, David Pagel, Raphael Rubenstein and Peter Schjeldahl, documentation on the artists’ careers.
- 7 Jane A. Sharp, Introduction to Session: Abstract Painting “Once Removed,” CAA NYC, February, 2003.
- 8 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*. Meridian Stanford, California Univ. Press. 2000 “There is no meaning if meaning is not shared because meaning is itself the sharing of Being.”
- 9 Peter Schjeldahl, *The Rise of Abstraction II, Abstract Painting “Once Removed,”* exhibition catalogue, CAM, Houston, 1997.
- 10 Lyotard’s elaboration on Freud’s term. (Heidegger and “the jews” University of Minnesota Press, 1990 p.15-17).
- 11 Re-presenting Representation is an ongoing curatorial project by John O’Hern, the Director of the Arnot Museum in Elmira, NY. The initial exhibition was held in the fall of 1993, the success of which resulted in seven subsequent Re-presenting Representation exhibitions. It addressed and continues to address representational, figurative and realist trends in contemporary art, displaying a broad range of artists, inclusively but in a well-informed way. The show now enjoys the position of a biennial at the Arnot with the upcoming *Re-presenting Representation VIII* scheduled for 2007.
- 12 John O’Hern, conversation with the author, Elmira, NY, July 18, 2006.
- 13 David Ryan in conversation with Fabian Marcaccio, 2002, URL: [www.paintants.com](http://www.paintants.com) [09/25/06].
- 14 Andrew Benjamin. *What is Abstraction?* Academy Editions, London 1996 p.37-51.
- 15 Lyotard, Jean-François. *Libidnal Economy*, Indiana University Press, 1993 p.242.
- 16 Aaron Parazette (as quoted in Abstract Painting “Once Removed,” exhibition catalogue, CAM, Houston, 1997).
- 17 Scott Richter, conversation with the author, NYC July 16, 2006.
- 18 Advertisement, URL<http://www.amazon.com/Glenn-Brown-Frederic-Paul/dp/2906574007> [10/05/06].
- 19 Doug MacCash, “Doyle Gertjensen’s Exhibit on the Arbitrariness,” *Times-Picayune*, Friday, September 08, 2006.

## ORNAMENT AND MODERNITY: CRIME OR NO CRIME?

**Bozenna Wisniewska**  
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I plan to examine the significance of ornament and its roots in the vernacular traditions of design and architecture. The works of Luis Barragan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Antonio Gaudi will serve as points of departure leading to a broader discussion how ornament may enhance and strengthen design and architecture or how it can reduce them to meaningless, spineless surfaces. The ornament's persistent appearance in a design practice proves its integrity as well as connection to history, tradition and folklore. A quotation from Paul Shephard's writings is helpful in establishing new and exciting articulations. Shephard says "What has happened? Why has *architecture* come to mean only *buildings*?" (Shephard 43)

Adolf Loos' famous and infamous lecture series "Ornament and Crime" triggered a heated debate in 1908. Loos became so overwhelmingly critical of ornament and decoration in architecture that many of his contemporaries perceived his critique as a personal attack directed at their practice. His *Steiner's House* completed in 1910 denied any ornamental interference and to him it proclaimed a victory over ornamental degeneration. Monochromatic in the use of materials and colour the house became a statement of the effectiveness of a minimal architectural palette. In his declaration Loos wrote that ornament =crime and that only primitive people are charmed by it. He claimed that civilized societies reject it with a conscious pride. However Loos' text lacks depth and an objective analysis of ornament, therefore it is to a degree a document of mono-vision.

Robert Venturi's 1980's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* addressed Loos' disdain of ornament and victoriously heralded that the use of it should not be punished but rather celebrated. Both Loos and Venturi's texts do not provide persuasive arguments either against or for ornament. Venturi introduced to the architectural lexicon the concept of a *decorated shed*. He believed that the idea of the *decorated shed* would replace Mies van der Rohe's dreaded *less is more* of the International Style. Yet, the *decorated shed*, more or less, became quite synonymous with drastic interventions of post-modern architecture. It did not replace the anonymous *International Style* with invigorating new ideas perhaps because these new ideas called for many imitative design strategies, as Venturi and Scott-Brown tell us: why go to Venice if one can go to Las Vegas? Better climate, newer buildings, in other words, one gets more and more... The idea of showing off with more affluence, more power, more words, more money and more *decorated sheds* is cherished!!! The virtual reality of pompous measures has entered our lives.

In my neighborhood there is a newly designed house by an architect of fame. This building that accommodates only one family could have easily housed three or four. This dwelling is a very typical "decorated shed" which proclaims its undeniable status of money and power. In this neighborhood which has a wonderful mix of people, someone actually dared to add to the sign proudly displaying the name of the architect: "the architect of the ostentatious". One refreshing statement, quite ornamental, and proving to architects that the public sees quite clearly the difference between the shed and the architecture. Decoration, in the case of this building, addresses the surface and lacks integrity.

The concept of *less is more* can be a haunting one. In Minoru Yamasaki's Pruitt-Igoe project the deliberate obliteration of ornament caused a class action of the inhabitants resulting in a coup-de-grace: demolition of the complex. Does this example show that there is an intrinsic human need and desire to be surrounded by ornamental forms? And if there is, what are the

characteristics of ornament responsible for it? Is it because ornament can be a reminder of our body and our history? There are no ready-made answers to these questions and that might be the reason why ornament and its dilemma has been repeatedly provoking discussion and disagreement among scholars and practitioners of architecture.

The origins of ornament in architecture are reaching far into the past and emphasize its *genius loci* and *anemos*. The ornament, even in its basic form, is expressive of the necessities of the body and the mind. Antonio Gaudi's architectural designs expand on the idea of the genius loci by belonging to the urbanscape of Barcelona. They recall traditional means happily mixed with the newest and most advanced technologies. The ability of ornamental articulation became Gaudi's precious design gift since most of the users of highly evolved technologies were quite oblivious to the ornament as a form of expression. One of Gaudi's intriguing architectural proposals is *Casa Battlo*. The flat elevation of *Casa Battlo* is enchanting to look at because of the creative use of a mosaic. The mosaic on the façade becomes alive under the natural light, its colours shine and resonate with energy, creating a captivating visual effect. Gaudi's architecture possess a unique quality of engaging ornamental aspects of the human body within a designed space. He claimed that a human body did not contain any straight lines, thus the architectural space that surrounds it should be just as ornamental and curvilinear. Through his approach to design, Gaudi constructed a Catalan identity that helped the survival of Catalan culture under the oppressive measures of general Franco's regime during his occupation of Catalonia.

One of the best examples of ornament stripped from exuberance and rooted in indigenous tradition is embedded in the architecture of Luis Barragan. Barragan's designs embrace Mexican inheritance prior and after its colonization. His architecture is organic in its form and approach. Thick, remarkably textured walls grow out of the terrain that it is at once lush and barren, adding to the spectacularly designed environment. Colour and texture vibrate within the borders of straight lines and they become truly ornamental. The rhythm and a sequence of planes form screen-like reflective or absorbent surfaces from which cast shadows of trees and flowers are beautifully reflected or absorb magenta, violet and yellow against blue and white textures become spontaneous and unifying elements of Barragan's design. Their qualities are striking in an engaging and energizing simplicity. They are also persuasive in their vernacular vocabulary as well as the unification of tradition and history with a contemporary aesthetics. The way Barragan announces his conceptual re-vitalization of ornament becomes a continuous and touchable beauty of history, memory, vernacular tradition, materials and imagination. The words of Richard Sennett when he talks about a design that "outgrows a purified identity" (Sennett 135), can be used in describing Barragan's architecture because it amplifies and strengthens Mexican identity with a persuasive voice.

Similar efforts can be observed in some of Frank Lloyd Wright's projects that acknowledge their belonging to the organic and ornamental execution of design. The usage of ornament in Wright's Falling Water is based on the principle of a rhythmic flow of forms that are connected to the terrain. Simultaneity of designed forms and nature create ever-lasting impressions. Frank Lloyd Wright once announced "I know only one scale: it is a human scale" and there is a wonderful familiarity related to human scale in all forms of his ornamentation. There is nothing monstrous and pretentious about the use of ornament in Wright's architecture and this is where its truly refreshing quality lies. Wright recognized the difference between ornament and decoration. It is not how much, how rich, how exuberant, but it is about how it touches, reveals, how it addresses human environment and what kind of responses it can trigger. Ornament is not about a surface treatment for if it were, it would have not made such a vigorous imprint on architecture and design.

Since ornament can be so intrinsically connected to the human body and its movement, it is helpful to look for ornamental qualities of defined space, enhanced by dance. Martha Graham and Isamu Noguchi reinstated ornament in modern dance, choreography and scenography. Several of their collaborative productions incorporated stimulating concept of movement as an ornamental expression. Noguchi's interest in space and movement found a perfect niche in dance.

Many of Eva Hoffman's words present themselves as an ornament in literature. They evoke memories of physical and tangible places such buildings, plazas, parks, streets and courtyards. Her writing might be nostalgic but it does speak with powerfully convincing complexity about the necessity for ornament and its warm embrace. For Eva Hoffman the circle containing her whole life was in Cracow. Her book *Lost in Translation: a Life in a New Language* is united by three chapters: *Paradise*, *Exile* and *The New World*. Hoffman left Cracow and Poland with her parents in the 1950's. She was eleven when her paradise, the heart-beat of her city, her universe, were all left behind in Cracow.

She writes:

Cracow to me is a city of shimmering light and shadow, with the shadow only adding more brilliance to the patches of wind and sun. I walk its streets in a state of musing, anticipatory pleasure. Its narrow byways, its echoing courtyards, its jewel like interiors are there for my delectation: they are there for me to get know. (Hoffman 38)

Cracow of the 1950's became Eva Hoffman's utopia and while in Vancouver she revisits the city of her childhood memories:

The Planty are another space of happiness, and one day something strange and wonderful happens there. It is a sunny fall afternoon and I am engaged in one of my favorite pastimes-picking chestnuts... The city, beyond the lacy wall of trees, is humming with gentle noises. The sun has just passed its highest point and is warming me with intense, oblique rays. I pick up a reddish brown chestnut, and suddenly, through its warm skin, I feel the beat as if of a heart. (Hoffman 41)

Nothing will replace the intense warmth of the chestnuts found in Cracow.

I would like to conclude my thoughts on ornament with a short story of a mental recovery. It is a story about how an ornamental work of design became a refuge as well as a way of the re-adjustment. Georges Braque like many of his contemporaries served in the army during World War I. The service left him with psychological wounds. These were wounds impossible to be treated or cured by any bandage. What his wounds required was a painful mental katharsis. Braque almost instinctually involved himself with creating beautifully ornamented objects: jewelry made out of gold and precious stones. He wanted to remember but also to escape. As Christopher Hewitt said: "...beauty is the perfect marriage of sadness and sweetness." The objects that Braque worked on embodied the shapes of fish and birds. Braque became quite attached to his ornamental birds: it would be so wonderful to be a bird and fly away from the trenches of horrors of war.

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## **THE POSTWAR RIVIERA: MODERNISM AND THE ATTRACTION OF MODERNITY**

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Nice's reputation for attracting artists and tourists was well established by the early part of the twentieth century. This city has been distinguished as the first of its kind—one built on a tourist-based economy.<sup>1</sup> The geography of Nice, with its “abundant sunshine and natural beauty” drew international and French visitors since the early modern period; these physical qualities provided the foundation of the locale's economic success—one shaped by outsiders as much as its residents.<sup>2</sup> Modern art played an important role in the formation of its regional identity. Matisse, Derain, Picasso, and Dufy—tourists themselves, captured the sensuality of place with its vibrant color, paradise-like landscape, and lyrical atmosphere for a French audience—just as touring tastes were changing and modern visual languages were transforming ways of seeing.<sup>3</sup> As a tourist destination, the area drew international visitors and long-term residents to its cultural cosmopolitanism, renowned beaches, and celebrity atmosphere throughout the twentieth century. This paper will situate the works of Yves Klein and Martial Raysse, artists associated with the first indigenous artistic group to emerge in the late 1950s from the Riviera—the *Ecole de Nice*, within the context of the revitalized Riviera, a locale which capitalized on the sociological and cultural changes that impacted reconstruction France.

Nice and surrounding towns were never considered central to French modernism but rather a satellite locale where artists blended leisure and experimentation in an atmosphere distinct from that of Paris. Despite this, the perception that the area was a cultural desert by mid-century—by comparison to Paris or other culturally important urban centers—was unfounded; the presence of modern masters along the Riviera and the area's link with leisure, tourism, fashion and film contributed to its international caché in postwar France. The inauguration of Matisse's *Chapelle du Rosaire* and the artist's leadership in establishing the first museum of modern art (Galerie des Ponchettes), the establishment of the Picasso Museum at the Chateau Grimaldi in Antibes, and Jean Cocteau's *La Chapelle Saint Pierre* in Villefranche-sur-Mer signaled an extraordinary cultural vitality through the 1950s, which attracted artists and tourists alike. Regional strategies, in tandem with Parisian de-centralization initiatives, situated Nice and the Côte d'Azur in as the likely cultural and recreational capital of the Hexagon.<sup>4</sup> Aided by the increased mobility of the French public due to government efforts to construct transportation systems and highways, the greater consumption of automobiles, and changing popular views of leisure time, the region emerged as antidote to the country's postwar existential crisis.

The site of the Cannes Film Festival, then a small fishing village on the western outskirts of Nice, was chosen because of its enchanting milieu” in June 1939.<sup>5</sup> After a five year suspension during the war years, it soon drew a growing audience of socialites and celebrities beginning in the 1950s and into the 1960s. International media events such as the wedding of Prince Rainier and American star Grace Kelly added to the glamour; Jean Cocteau even wrote a wedding ode in their honor.<sup>6</sup> According to Dave Kehr, two simultaneous developments catapulted the festival's success—bikini-clad starlets and the emergence of the French New Wave. “Cannes became synonymous with palm trees, cocktails, sunglasses, white scooters, and bikini tops abandoned in the sand.”<sup>7</sup> While the Riviera saw little damage as the result of World War II, and American troops arrived on its beaches with guide books in hand,<sup>8</sup> there was a perception that the area was reinventing itself, driven by a growing youth culture, a hedonistic impulse, and the images generated by mass-media. Nice was in the process of defining its profile in the production of

signs and images meant for visual consumption—nature, film stars, beaches, fashion, and regional and international art.

This was vividly captured by the *Nouvelle Vague* filmmaker Agnès Varda in a promotional documentary commissioned by the French National Tourist Office in 1958, titled *du côté de la Côte* (*The Riviera – Today's Eden*), released in book format in 1961.<sup>9</sup> The film begins with the refrain “azure, azure, azure,” as Nice and the surrounding towns were introduced by publicity posters from the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée train line. Slogans such as “come to the coast for a sense of freedom” are echoed throughout Varda’s witty script. Varda even includes Brigitte Bardot, jaunting down a crowded street in Saint-Tropez, entrancing visitors in local shops and cafes with her natural energy and sensuality. Bardot has already initiated a “mass tourism with a vengeance” according to *Paris Match* in 1956, the year *And God Created Woman* was released. While Varda captures the historical diversity of the area in the pastiche of architectural styles and shop signs in English, Italian, and French, along with the area’s literary and artistic importance, she clearly conveys the message that it is the exotic landscape of the coast that now beckons tourists, and equally important, the Riviera has the capacity to transform their lives. The Côte d’Azur is portrayed as representing a collective dream, a reassurance that “Eden exists.”

In his study of modern France, John Ardagh, author and journalist for the *Times* (London), noted that in the French were adopting a more modern concept of leisure that was increasingly given the value of work. Family vacations with relatives in rural areas changed as new government programs promoted holiday travel for youth geared to recreation and nature. According to Ardagh:

Certainly it is a reaction against urbanization, to which the French are not adapting easily. Sociologists are therefore unsure whether the frenetic urge to escape to a new life is a token of healthy adventurousness or of maladjustment. One of them, Michel Crozier, blames the holiday mania on the rigidities and tensions of French society and office life where, he says “no one is truly at ease or in his right place, and so the French *need* holidays more than, say, the Americans.” Many Frenchmen are thus looking not only for change and relaxation on holiday, but for a social liberation they do not find in their own lives...<sup>10</sup>

As a result of this trend, the Côte d’Azur saw a five-fold increase in tourists from the 1950s to the early 1960s.<sup>11</sup> In 1950, Gérard Blitz seized the opportunity presented by this new tourist trend and founded the first Club Méditerranée on Majorca, promising guests the four “Ss”: sun, sea, sand, and sex—the success of his packaged holiday adventures lay in their blend of cosmopolitanism and primitiveness. Government’s support of leisure time for young urbanites provided added incentive with the guarantee of a three-week vacation in 1956 (increased to 4 weeks in 1965).<sup>12</sup>

The artists of the Ecole de Nice embraced the city’s legacy of modernism, especially that of Matisse, but they rejected attempts to revive the pre-war Ecole de Paris. Yves Klein, Martial Raysse and others recognized the importance of the renewed image of the Riviera, a sensibility they knew well as inhabitants of the Côte d’Azur. As Klein described it,

Although we are always, we of the School of Nice on vacation, we are not tourists. That’s the essential point. Tourists come to our countryside for vacations. We live in the land of vacations, which gives us this spirit of nonsense. We amuse ourselves without thinking about religion, art or science.<sup>13</sup>

Raysse echoed Klein when he stated,

We are not artists... we live on vacation. We have never worked in our lives. I don't know what society is, I prefer to go for a stroll. I make love with nature, with the dime stores, with my friends, and if people give me money in exchange, that's very well. We are eternally on vacation; I am a sculptor the way I have blue eyes.<sup>14</sup>

The image these two artists present was a calculated hyperbole. Both were sophisticated in their knowledge of modern art—Klein knew many of the leading vanguard artists in Nice and Paris through his mother, the abstract painter Marie Raymond who gained renown in post-war Paris. Raysse's parents worked at the ceramic workshops at Vallauris, made internationally famous by Picasso, and one of his early supporters was Cocteau. However, their comments are indicative of a social change in French society, an awareness of the impact of the Americanization on Parisian urban life with its emphasis on productivity and consumption; the separation of work and leisure was becoming increasingly pronounced. The Ecole de Nice of the late 1950s and early 1960s directly responded to the impact of modernity, often in its most positive light (tourism was one of its primary embodiments) and they embraced it paradoxically—with irony and even, at time, disdain, but also by reproducing it in their work.

Both Klein and Raysse exploited what sociologist Rob Shields calls a locale's "place-myths."<sup>15</sup> Shields has described how certain geographies produce stereotypical and clichéd images that attain a certain durability because of their widespread dissemination and repetitiveness. Whether in French or American films of the era (*La Baie des Anges*, *To Catch a Thief*, e.g.), books (Francis Sagan, J.M.G. Le Clezio) or the visual arts (Matisse, Picasso, Chagall, Bonnard, e.g.), the allure of the area with its blend of sophistication, freedom and sensuality captured a sensibility that was recognizable internationally. Klein defined art as health, freedom, and imagination. His theme was the dialectic between confinement and space. In his diverse body of work, which includes paintings, sculpture, installations, architectural proposals, concept art, theater proposals, and performance, Klein distilled his vision in the blue monochrome which derived from his experience of the Mediterranean sky as he experienced it lying on the beach in Nice in 1946—an elaborate anecdote he vividly conveys in *The Chelsea Hotel Manifesto* (1960).<sup>16</sup> Klein later called his artist friends of the Ecole de Nice "vampires of the sensibility of today's world."<sup>17</sup> And he often referred to this artist group as "gangsters" and "*tricheurs*," staple characters in *Nouvelle Vague* films by François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, for example.

Klein's *Antropometry* series introduced the figure into the context of the monochromes as a visualization of optimal human existence, often directly referencing the Côte d'Azur. In *Architecture of the Air* (*ANT 102*), 1961, Klein demonstrated his belief in the importance of physical freedom as a means to transform social interaction by eliminating walls and other restrictions such as clothing that confine human movement. By technologically harnessing natural elements, Klein envisioned a new sense of freedom that would allow the body to directly engage with the beauty of the natural, social, and technological environment. In *Architecture of Air*, female figures beckon the viewer to "beds of air," pressurized air walls and furnishings that regulate communal living spaces and assured optimal conditions of light and temperature for the body. This model of existence was based on weightlessness, which coincided with the adaptation of leisure activities as the primary occupation. In this state of being, he suggested, "pleasure prevails over the useful."<sup>18</sup> In the charcoal inscription, Klein described his vision as equivalent to an Eden-like paradise characterized by the landscape of the Riviera.<sup>19</sup>

Klein seemed intensely interested in the relationship between an experiential art and encounters that could be related to cultural tourism. As Pamela Lee has pointed out tourism is “a form of collision, a jarring of sensibilities whereby a new way of seeing the self emerges in a new environment.”<sup>20</sup> Tourist spaces are characteristically described as prescriptive and vacuous. However, as Dean Mac Cannell has noted, tourism provides a means of release from modern society that “cannot contain everything that it currently does contain;” it is a ritual which exposes the modern condition and the need for a space of emptiness.<sup>21</sup> Klein’s work is premised on his concept of *Le Vide*, which he demonstrated in his infamous Paris exhibition of 1958. The exhibition was elaborately staged and framed, but the empty white gallery space at its core exposed how our modern orientation is toward objects, images, and visual spatial cues, and the dramatic impact of empty space on physical, psychological and spiritual reactions.

Klein also appropriated readymade souvenirs and transformed them with his signature patented color, International Klein Blue. The choices of *Nike of Samothrace*—after which the city was named — indicated his loyalty to place, and Michelangelo’s *Dying Slave* attests to his classical concerns with beauty and cultural tradition. In Nice, classical sensibilities derived from its Mediterranean location, remnants of classical culture and language. The city’s cultural legacy merged with mass culture and kitsch in the 1960s as consumerism was rising rapidly in reconstruction France. Klein appropriated and reproduced these souvenirs in editions re-branding these images as his own products.

Martial Raysse’s work drew attention directly to the Côte d’Azur, in large part because of its emphasis on the consumerism of the Mediterranean leisure industry and his use of “solarized” color to capture the region’s visual aesthetic. Critic Pierre Restany described Raysse’s work in relation to the “taste, smell and feel” of the Côte d’Azur. Raysse’s nature prodigally pour forth the continual glitter of its tinsel riches, its pearls of neon, is decorative vegetation, the luxury of its villas, the mellow sensuality of its sunlight, the subdued blue of its sky and sea. This nature has been sophisticated to excess—what the travel promoters would call its enhancement—and here lies the secret of its real beauty. Enhancement transcends vulgar banality by means of color.<sup>22</sup>

Raysse appropriated images and products that popularized the allure of the Riviera, and he also adopted the signature use of color associated with Matisse, in particular. His work linked the refined and the banal in a manner that was unlike his contemporaries internationally. Raysse’s work can be described in the terms Dave Kehr used to define the shift in film aesthetics—the “calculated drabness” of early 1950s to a new “spirit of bright, sexy, youthful revolt” by its end.<sup>23</sup>

*Raysse Beach*, the artist’s 1962 installation, captured the sensibility of the Côte d’Azur in subject, vacation fashions and products, and use of color. Raysse’s work was distinctive in these respects from his French and American contemporaries. The simulacra that Raysse exhibited included a plastic swimming pool, plastic beach balls, dolphins and swans, industrially made grass, beach umbrellas, and a jukebox. Raysse explained in the brochure of his Iolas Gallery exhibition that the swimming pool “corresponds to sophisticated and expensive taste and not to the ordinary needs of life.”<sup>24</sup> At the entry to the installation, the artist installed a sign advertising *Raysse Beach* in neon, a medium that became of his signatures during the until the end of 1960s; he further enhanced the multi-sensory environment with the installation of space heaters to intensify warmth. The installation was framed with full-scale photo-reproductions of models in swimsuits to which he attached sunglasses, mirrors, and plastic flowers. Raysse described the environment as “the ideal life, the eternal and beautiful dream, eternal youth, and eternal vacation.”<sup>25</sup> By recreating the ambiance of the Nice area with its internationally recognized signs—beaches, cover girls, and fashions – he identified a means to communicate

internationally, while also distinguishing himself in France and beyond from the aesthetics of Paris.

Artifice was an essential quality of his vision; Raysse was concerned with aesthetic issues such as taste and beauty. The issue of cultural "taste" was the subject of debate among French intellectuals in light of Americanization. From the French perspective, American culture was vulgar; Raysse countered the view that there was a clear cultural distinction in taste by demonstrating that the Côte d'Azur, long associated with an international elite sensibility, shared this trait. And it was this quality that made it so appealing, especially to the youth of France in the 1960s. Raysse's work mirrored the moment in real and symbolic terms. He formulated a theory that provided a basis for his work, which he referred to it as "hygiene of vision," a cleansing of the visual experience that would enable the viewer to recognize the marvelous nature of the new. Raysse engaged the spectator with images and objects that conveyed the gloss of advertising as a means to communicate an experience; that experience had the potential of altering, ideally transforming, viewers' perceptions of the modern world. The spectator was seduced into an encounter characterized as a form of "redemptive hygiene," a theme that had broader social resonance in re-construction France.

Kristin Ross demonstrated that the massive desire for cleanliness in the personal and public space characterized the Americanization of postwar France.<sup>26</sup> She also pointed out that cleanliness was associated with purging the country of the stains of the Occupation, a form of moral cleansing. This drive precipitated an exponential increase in the consumption of household appliances, cleaning products, and packaged goods that epitomized the newly sanitized domestic environment. Household management techniques and advertisement of new appliances, especially refrigerators, epitomized this campaign as Ross elaborated. Raysse appropriated this advertising ironically when he stated, "I wanted my works to possess the serene self-evidence of mass-produced refrigerators...to have the look of new sterile inalterable visual hygiene."<sup>27</sup>

In *Prisunic, Hygiene of Vision No. 1* (1961), Raysse accumulated packaged foods as if viewed from a well-stocked kitchen cabinet. What is striking in Raysse's accumulation is the impact of packaging and labels. Products like OMO detergent (an advertising award winner) and Dubonnet are distinctly French; other products like Buitoni tomato paste in the center, marked Paris-New York-Rome, indicate the international distribution of food products. In contrast to wartime periods of deprivation in Nice, the infusion of mass produced food products increased the importance of advertising in a competitive market. Likewise, Raysse described his work and that of artists associated with the Ecole de Nice as "the manifestation of consumer society in the artistic level."<sup>28</sup> He often chose items such as suntan lotions, bathing caps and sunglasses, which exuded a French cache in the most stereotypical way and his films, made in 1961 and 1962, show the artist strolling in the aisles of the local *Prisunic* (an inexpensive department store) in a hallucinatory state of pleasure under stark florescent lights.

For his November 1961 exhibition in Milan, with Niçois artist Arman, he exhibited an advertising display titled, *L'Etalage hygiène de la vision* (1960), comprised of various cleaning products and a photograph of a smiling model seated at its apex wearing a real plastic shower cap. His work from this period relied on the appropriation or recycling of plastics of all sorts connected to the female or domestic space. His work maybe considered a visual counterpart to Roland Barthes' essay on plastics published three years earlier; Barthes describes the allure of extruded plastics, "ubiquity made visible" and its transformative quality, "a magical substance which consents to be prosaic."<sup>29</sup>

The link between the artificial and the woman became more pronounced in September 1961 when he exhibited a publicity display titled *Hygiene of Vision No. 7* (1960), dedicated to “Amber Solaire,” a line of seasonal make-up. This assemblage includes a photograph of a fashion model with the “face of a dream” seated in a beach chair atop trays of beach products such as suntan lotions, beach hats, and swimming caps. “Amber solaire” was a new product line inspired by the palette of Gauguin. In *Les Lettres Françaises* (April 1960), the lead article, “Le Printemps...et Gauguin,” states that fashion will be influenced by art – especially the works of Gauguin, a popular exhibition on view in Paris that spring.<sup>30</sup> Harriet Hubbard Ayer called her make-up line “Amber Sun.” She was just one of several designers, including Elizabeth Arden and Fernand Aubrey, who created the solar make-up palette for the summer of 1960. In their advertising, they stressed luminosity, exoticism, and the “face of a dream.”<sup>31</sup> Raysse was drawn to advertising as a means to communicate through cliché.

The photo played for me the role of a connection, which in its beginning took the shape of stereotyped faces of the young women in advertisements, leitmotiv of our visual culture. Through these faces, a first type of real communication was established using readymade formulas.<sup>32</sup>

In his exhibition *Mirrors and Portraits* at the Dwan Gallery in 1963, he “solarized” the women’s faces with screened or spray painted colors that mimic the garish colors of Technicolor film or the colored light wheels found in Riviera dance clubs of the period. He further adorned them with plastic accoutrements or neon—transforming them into generic advertising. Unlike Warhol, who began to make screen-printed paintings of celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy in 1962, Raysse was primarily interested in the standardized female image.

Women’s fashion magazines of the 1950s often featured models wearing seasonal fashion ensembles before alluring backdrops, especially chic Mediterranean beaches and Alpine ski resorts. Raysse understood the role fashion played in supporting the tourist experience. In tableaux such as *Souviens-toi de Tahiti* (1963) or *Soudain l’été dernier* (1963), Raysse connects stereotyped woman with stereotyped locations. The illusory image is brought into real space with the attachment of objects such as sun-hats, beach balls and umbrellas that jut out from the life-size assemblages. Tahiti Beach, one of the fashionable tourist beaches in San Tropez, is an inescapable reference to Gauguin’s exotic paintings, and to Matisse’s cutout. In contrast to the far off exoticism of Gauguin’s paintings or the collage fragments of Matisse’s memory image, Raysse’s photo-based technique is hyper-realist but equally remote. Like fashion magazines, Raysse treated the woman and landscape as an ensemble. In his words:

Here on the Côte d’Azur color is everywhere. Look at the beach. There is a woman under a mauve-green umbrella wrapping her self in a white towel with red polka dots. The landscape is a living picture...<sup>33</sup>

Raysse created a paradise distinct from that envisioned by Klein; his is inseparable from the ensemble of products and locations that created it. Raysse also succeeded in reinforcing the classical and trope of the woman and nature; in his construction both woman and nature are boldly artificial. They are both perfect vehicles of reproducible desire; a system of signs linked to escapism. Their fictive exoticism has precedent in Gauguin’s Tahitian paintings; Gauguin lured the imagination of the French to a paradise outside the Hexagon. Raysse, by contrast, is fully ensconced in the tamed and glamorous environment of tourist beaches, photographer’s studios, and department stores. His paradise is, by comparison, a real fiction entirely comprised of superficial appearances. Raysse exemplifies an aesthetic of the Riviera in the pre-1968 era that is neither Parisian nor a product of America. It is at once French and American but, more precisely, it is a manifestation of internationalism—mass culture, kitsch, consumerism—derived

from the synthesis of French modernism produced along the Mediterranean and tourism best epitomized by the Côte d'Azur in the 1960s.

On the occasion of the 1991 inauguration of the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain in Nice, Claude Fournet declared the city has become France's southern capital. He described Nice as the model of cultural and historical pastiche—Nice succeeded because it maintained its link with geographic beauty and continued to cultivate its attraction to artists and tourists.<sup>34</sup> Klein and Raysse captured the sensibility of the Riviera at the moment when artistic pluralism triumphed over national styles, and portended the trajectory of visual pastiche that characterizes contemporary global art. That is, at this early stage, these artists situated themselves in the space between the legacy of modernism with the attendant belief in an art that can transform perceptions of society and the critical perspectives that necessarily attended its aftermath.

## NOTES

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3. James D. Herbert. *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1992).
4. Herman Lebovics. *Mona Lisa's Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 118-119. Also see: John Ardagh, *The New French Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg 1968), 120.
5. "A Talk with Gilles Jacob," conducted by Mary Lea Bandy and Laurence Kardish, *Cannes: Festival International du Film* (NY: Museum of Modern Art 1992), 11.
6. Ardagh (1968) 117.
7. Dave Kehr, "A Critic's View," *Cannes* (1992), 22-23.
8. Mary Blume. *Côte d'Azur: Inventing the French Riviera* (NY: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 141.
9. Agnès Varda. *Lieu dit La Côte d'Azur* (Paris: Les Éditions du Temps, 1960).
10. Ardaugh (1968), 282.
11. *Ibid.*, 181-183.
12. *Ibid.*, 340.
13. "Klein, Raysse, Arman: des Nouveaux Réalistes," interview with Sasha Sosnovsky (1960), reprinted in *Yves Klein*, exh. cat. March 3–May 23, 1983 (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne), 264.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Rob Shields, *Places on the Margins: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991) as quoted in *Visual Culture and Tourism*, edited by David Crouch and Nina Lübbren (Oxford and New York, 2003), 4-5.
16. "The Chelsea Hotel Manifesto, *Yves Klein: Sponge Reliefs*, exh. cat. (NY: Gagosian Gallery, October 3-28, 1989), 20.
17. Sosno, 1960 interview with Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, and Arman, published as "Klein, Raysse, Arman: des Nouveaux Réalistes," in *Yves Klein* (Paris, 1983) 264.
18. Yves Klein, quoted in Pierre Restany, *Yves Klein: Fire at the Heart of the Void* (New York: Journal of Contemporary Art Editions, 1992), 100.
19. The inscription on *ANT 102*, *The Architecture of Air*, c. 1960, is written in two columns beginning on the right side. It reads as follows:

La climatisation de l'atmosphère à la surface de notre Globe/...La conclusion technique et scientifique de notre civilisation/est enfouie dans les/entrailles de la terre et assure/le confort par le contrôle absolu du/Climat à la surface de tous/les continents, devenus vastes/salles de séjour communes...C'est une sorte de retour à l'eden/de la légende. (1951)/...Avènement d'une société nouvelle, destinée à/subir des métamorphoses profondes dans/condition même. Disparition de l'intimité/personelle et familiale. Développement/d'une ontologie

impersonnelle./La volonté de l'homme peut enfin/réguler la vie au niveau d'un/'marveilleux' constant;l'homme libre/l'est à tel point qu'il/peut même l'éviter!/Occupation: les loisirs?...Les obstacles autrefois subis dans/l'architecture traditionnel sont/éliminés. Soins du corps par des méthodes/nouvelles, telles 'le lit d'air.'" This *Anthropometry* is not signed or dated. In the Houston catalogue the date is listed as 1961. In the Pompidou catalogue, the date is c. 1960.

20. Pamela M. Lee, *Site Seeing: Travel and Tourism in Contemporary Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art 1991) n.p.
21. MacCannell (1992), 1-2.
22. Pierre Restany, *Martial Raysse* trans. Neil A. Levine (NY: Iolas Gallery, November 24–December, 1964), n.p.
23. Kehr, (1992), 21-22.
24. Martial Raysse, *Martial Raysse* (NY: Alexander Iolas Gallery, November, 1962).
25. Ibid.
26. Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonialization and the Reordering of French Culture* (MA: MIT Press, 1995), chapter 2 (passim).
27. Raysse quoted in Sasha Sosnovsky, "Tendances du Nouveau Réalisme niçois," *Sud Communication* (1961).
28. Martial Raysse, "Writings by Martial Raysse" (1967), *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1968), 401.
29. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* trans. Annette Lavers (NY: Hill and Wang 1972), 97.
30. Hélène Cingria, "Le Printemps...et Gauguin," *Les Lettres Françaises* no. 821 (April 21-27, 1960), 9.
31. Ibid. "visage du rêve" was also the name of a face powder.
32. Jean-Jacques Lévêque, "La Beauté, c'est le mauvais goût," *Arts* (Paris) (June 16-22, 1965), 39. Also see: Martial Raysse (Paris 1992), 48. "La photo a joué chez moi le rôle d'un relais qui, à ses débuts, a pris la forme de ces visages stéréotype des jeunes femmes des réclames, leitmotiv de notre culture visuelle. Au travers de ces visages, un premier type de communication vécue s'établissait au-delà des formules jusque'alors utilisées."
33. Martial Raysse, as quoted in Otto Hahn, "The Painter of As If," *Arts Magazine* (September-October 1965), 30.
34. Claude Fournet, "Chroniques Niçoises: Genèse d'un Musée," *Chroniques Niçoises Genèse d'un Musée tome 1: 1945-1972* (Nice: Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, 1991), 15.

## CONSUMING SUBJECTS AND AFFECTING OBJECTS

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Narcissus turned toward the surface of the water to contemplate, touch, and couple with the object of his obsession. Oblivious to the pious and proper vertical trajectory and spiritual aspirations of ascending subjects, he became entangled by the web of the earthly and was corrupted by the imperfect libidinous desire of the flesh.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Narcissus collapsed his desire into the pictorial surface, and as retribution for his love of the fictional, he was doomed to destruction.

Pygmalion's ivory girl, the object of his own manufacture, bred scopophilia. The pleasure of the gaze was limited, hollow, and empty. Fearful of bruising his ivory girl, unable to lie/unite/cleave unto/melt within her arms, he seemed doomed to the fatalistic disease of desiring subjects. Yet, his obsession with this sexual fantasy was rewarded by Venus, for she transfigured the ivory into flesh. The veins began to throb under the sculptor's thumb; she blushed and responded to his will.<sup>2</sup>

Narcissus and Pygmalion, agents in their own disillusionment, collapsed the ethereal into the tangible, the spiritual into the material and yearned for the transubstantiation and domestication of miracles in use.<sup>3</sup> Residing within Guy Dubord's "Spectacle Realm,"<sup>4</sup> these narratives promote the absolute denial of life wherein the shape of a fallacious paradise, the play of the reverie, is no longer one projected vertically unto the heavens, but horizontally into earthly matter itself. Such material reconstructions, or shroudings of the ideal, uphold the world as representamen and the spectator as a physiological apparatus primed for the consumption and fetish of objects.

The spectator-consumer's agency in the destabilization and mobility of signs and codes is fundamental to a modern subject-centered epistemology. Instrumental were the rise of the commodity culture and the realization of a capitalist economic order at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As consumable commodities became the centerpiece of everyday life and the focal point of all personal and cultural representation, spectator-consumers became alienated from these objects' production, their labor value, and were subsumed by the rhetorical pleasure offered by such purchasable objects.<sup>5</sup> As observed by Thorstein Veblen in 1899, "Commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity."<sup>6</sup> A new cult of connoisseurs among the mercantile elite began to display their vicarious consumption of primarily useless goods and their attempt to fix and demonstrate their status as modern sovereign consumers.<sup>7</sup>

Members of the Society of Dilettanti (founded 1732),<sup>8</sup> were such self-proclaimed arbiters of cultural forms. Forever seeking to maximize consumption as indicators of status, they traveled to see, consume and translate for personal glory, renowned objects.<sup>9</sup> Study abroad tours to the sites and museums of Italy allowed dilettantes to demonstrate their delight in the fine arts, yet the quest for intellectual stimulation could not compete with their cravings for sensation and fantasy play. Tobias Smollett in his *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), likened Florence experientially to the Lycaean and the groves of Academus where "a stranger of a visionary turn would be apt to fancy himself in a palace of the fairies, raised and adorned by the power of enchantment."<sup>10</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Winchelsea likened the Uffizi to a paradise that leaves the viewer "quite confused and amazed with the profusion of things."<sup>11</sup> Even into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Walter Benjamin characterized grand tours as "theatrical and enlightening

pilgrimages to the gods' private abode with the viewer as an interloper in this divinely inhabited space."<sup>12</sup> Though fine for penning in their letters and publication in their journals, such contexts for spectatorship modeled on external referents ignore the autonomous perceptions which conceptualize consumption in more visceral and situated ways.

Johann Zoffany's painting of the *Tribuna*, commissioned by Queen Charlotte in 1772,<sup>13</sup> incorporates portraits of twenty-two men including members of the Society of the Dilettante. They are depicted as connoisseurs-sovereign consumers of the prized icons/commodities of museums, the merchandisers of the most elite objects of European society.<sup>14</sup> In creating the painting, Zoffany acted as a vicarious consumer of museum objects, placing in his shopping cart those art works of personal interest and delight. Works from private, public, and commercial galleries across Florence were redistributed and rescaled to fit within his meticulously duplicated octagonal gallery. In the tradition of late 18<sup>th</sup> century conversation pieces, Zoffany focused on the body language and direction and control of the movements of the men's eyes to scan the multitude of objects and locate stimuli of potential interest.<sup>15</sup> Whatever fails to visually or emotionally satisfy is refused, avoided, or overlooked. That which stimulates a sentimental craving for sensation holds the gaze and affects a behavior in accordance with the subject's personal predilections. Timely is Sir Joshua Reynolds' summation of spectatorship in his *Fourth Discourse* (1771):

Gentlemen, the value and rank of every art is in proportion to the mental labour Employed in it, or the mental pleasure produced by it.<sup>16</sup>

This empowerment of the spectator as an instrument gauging the valuation of art was in part due to the modern subjective revolution in art criticism and aesthetic philosophy. In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant defined taste as the ability to make a judgment of pleasure without self-interest in the existence of the object and as an intellectualization deriving from the faculty of knowledge, the imagination, the poetic faculty, and from reflection.<sup>17</sup> However most importantly, this intellectualization is grounded in internal perceptions of sensibility and feeling as colored by the faculty of desire. While acknowledging the theoretical contemplation of things and their inner being and law, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his lectures on the philosophy of art (1820-30), privileged a sensuous apprehension of objects, such as art, which affect desire-relations dictated by particular impulses and subjective interests.<sup>18</sup> Art, like any form of visual culture constructed to be-looked-at, exists for spectatorship. Yet art has no use value apart from its ability to trigger sensations or stir the mind of the consuming subject.

This reevaluation of modern aesthetics and evolving prominence of empathy theory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century privilege the nature of sentiments prompted by works of art and the psychological relationship of the appearance of things in the world with the bodily sense of participation.<sup>19</sup> There results an instinctive surge of "youthful enthusiasm." Robert Vischer observes in *On the Optical Sense of Form: a Contribution to Aesthetics* (1873), that physically, "there is a twitching of limbs, a timorous yearning, a gesturing, and a stammering concluding in the projection of the self as in a dream."<sup>20</sup> Subject and object merge in the sentient imagination in a sympathetic response, which generates an attentive feeling or empathetic sensation. The collapse of the desiring self into the artwork is characterized as "a wrapping of the self within the object's contours as in a garment."<sup>21</sup> Theodor Lipps (*Empathy and Aesthetic Pleasure*, 1905), adds that the self involuntarily surrenders, free or uninhibited, easily or arduously in the manifold activity.<sup>22</sup> There is a stimulation of energy, a sense of freedom, a feeling of pleasure. Lipps writes: "I enjoy myself in a sensuous object distinct from myself—an objectivated self-enjoyment."<sup>23</sup> Lev Semenovich Vygotsky further elaborated that "The enjoyment of a work of art reaches its peak when we choke from emotion, when our hair stands on end because of fear, or when we can't control tears of sympathy or pity."<sup>24</sup> Such a self-enjoyment comes forth "spontaneously when

such apperceptive activity is demanded or elicited.”<sup>25</sup> Thusly, the artwork “can find and help us to feel what is human in all that, the positively human—vitality, strength, power of volition, etc.”<sup>26</sup> However, at what cost? The bodies-on-view are intextuated. Objects are emptied of their concrete substance and subjected to a labor of signification.<sup>27</sup>

Returning to Zoffany’s conversation piece, how did this painter illustrate art functioning, as in the language of Vygotsky, as “a resonator, amplifier, or a transmitter for the infections of feelings?” Toward the back of the gallery to the left, Valentine Knightley gazes fondly at the *Faun* and admires the playful gesture, expression, and muscular definition. In the left foreground, Richard Edgumbe, aged 18, follows along in his guidebook the description of poetic adolescent love depicted in the innocent coupling of *Cupid and Psyche*. Earl Cowper, Sir John Dick, the Earl of Plymouth, and Lord Lewisham gather around Raphael’s *Madonna and Child* held by Zoffany himself. Here a most precious commodity is being offered for commercial acquisition. In front of his traveling companions, Earl Cowper shall demonstrate his status as the ultimate sovereign consumer. At center of the composition, Sir John Taylor and Sir Horace Mann, along with a local painter and a custodian of the gallery, dispassionately scan the voluptuous figure within Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*.

However, the cold reserve of the Englishmen, as characterized by Addison, dissipates as they turned to the *Venus de Medicis*.<sup>28</sup> From left to right, the Earl of Winchilsea, Mistery Wilbraham, Watts, Doughty and the elder Wilbraham are reduced to the level of voyeurs entirely activated by their own erotic responses. Only James Bruce, at far right, appears immune from her charms. In journals, spectators were described as “kindled as they gazed” and “compelled into Venus’ thrall.”<sup>29</sup> William Beckford wrote that he had marveled at the “warm ivory hue of the original marble” and the “softness of the limbs.”<sup>30</sup> And even earlier in the century, Smollett commented on “the surprising and heart-warming femininity” and “exuberant allure of her flesh.”<sup>31</sup> Such infections of feeling were considered so improper or anti-intellectual that Laurence Sterne in 1768 condemned Smollett for having “fallen foul upon the goddess and using her worse than a common strumpet.”<sup>32</sup> Typical yet even more hyperbolic and pathetic is the following verse:

When approached, the marble dame  
Gives not astonishment, but flame;  
So just, so fine, so soft each part,  
Her beauties fire the lab’ring heart.  
The gentle risings of the skin  
Seem push’d by muscles mov’d within:  
The swelling breasts, with graces fill’d  
Seem easy to the touch to yield &c. &c.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to Pygmalion’s, these spectators’ sentimental cravings for the flesh of the *Venus de Medici* are neither transfigured by the beneficence of Venus nor by pious aspirations. In their act of consumption, “it does not matter whether the object is imagined or actually perceived; as soon as the idea of the self is projected into it, it always becomes an imagined object” suspended between the subject’s dream and neurosis.<sup>34</sup> Symptomatic of Freud’s pleasure principle, (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920), rather than maturing to an adult ideal, the spectator-consumer reverts to a child-like hedonistic, id-driven disposition where unsatisfied desires arising from frustrated realities fuel reveries and fantasies. “Aesthetic pleasure becomes the highest or purest form of pleasure just because it supposes reception and gain” without any material investment in the object.<sup>35</sup> Thusly, such objects have been transformed into commodities in their most extreme fetishized forms. Glorifying in Laura Mulvey’s ‘to-be-looked-at-ness,’ they have become emptied of their concrete substance of labor and transfigured into a coded abstraction.

In post-modern frames of reference, the complex dialectic is an injunction to purchase, an inducement to be, have, and appear. Termed by David Hawkes in his *Ideology*, as the “era of the Image,” post-modern culture promotes the collective sharing of simulacra to enable and celebrate the spectacle.<sup>36</sup> To return to Dubord, and what would be his condemnation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century materialist culture, the spectacle of the commodity-as-image has mediated all societal relations, shaping and determining the fabric of our everyday lives. This value bearing object (the standardized sign, the exchangeable signifier) becomes the only arbiter for social relations—a vacuous abstract medium that increasingly distances the social body from any recoverable human relation.

The contemporary parallel to Zoffany’s conversation piece is the dialog of marketing exemplified in fashion photography. Desiring machines direct the individual, collective, and social realities by choreographing the semiotic readings.<sup>37</sup> When the subject is amenable and well versed in the discourse (as a sovereign consumer), the prepackaged signage (for example, in respect to Dior/couture/model/sensuality/ fetishism/narcissism/vampirism, etc) is readily and wholly consumed. Thusly, the subject becomes trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, and systematized aspect of the object and buys into the commodity as the collapse of desire into the pictorial surface; it had all been preordained in the sphere of production. More extreme than in the construct of Vygotsky, the play, fantasies, and reveries become so enmeshed with life-as-lived that in this simulation, the image or model is more real than the real, and the model, as well as the spectator, renounce all autonomy in order to identify with the general law of obedience to the desiring machines.<sup>38</sup>

Versace SpA has employed images such as Claudia Schiffer modeling bedding from 1994, as being central to its promotion of consumption in the fashion system. Yet even though the photo accurately portrays an objective form, as decried by Jean Baudrillard this is “an anti-nature incarnate” for it is a reflection of the “human artificial bound up in the stereotypes of models of beauty.”<sup>39</sup> The earthly body is negated and subjected to networks devised by the fashion system. The spectator-consumer becomes trapped in the perfection of the idealized, abstracted, airbrushed form. This fetishized fascination for beauty activates the subject “to dream in a state of wakefulness,”<sup>40</sup> to experience euphoria, and buy into the illusion, as a shareholder buys into a company and assumes a level of ownership in the dream of being, having, and appearing. The image thusly attains its currency within the system.

The earlier, modern will for action is supplanted by a post-modern empathy suspended between what Merleau-Ponty defines as the subject’s “being-to-the-world” and the subject’s own psychic interior. Has the subject become so amenable to the semiotic folding and unfolding, wrapping and unwrapping instigated by these networks that his perception of meaning and reality has been lost in the play of surfaces? As long as the subject and model function as a BwOs,<sup>41</sup> as assemblages of organs, processes, pleasures, passions, and behaviors, they will be amenable to the immanence of desire, resistance of transcendence and caught in the preprogrammed stratifications, layerings, and overcodings of the images/objects they covets. Baudrillard observes:

There is no longer any mirror looking glass in the modern order, there is only the shop-window—the site of consumption, in which the individual no longer produces his own reflection, but is absorbed ... into the order of signifiers.<sup>42</sup>

Gazing into this illusion, the subject does not see the self, but is absorbed and abolished into a Freudian oceanic phase of ego. And so, what happens to our post-modern Narcissus and Pygmalion? Narcissus’ demise, his loss of self, is due to his incorporation into the dream-image

he so desired. Unable to enjoy without possession, he leaned forward to grasp the beauty oblivious to the image as a production of the desiring machines of the Olympian gods and the physics of the natural world. As he tumbled into the water overcome by the network of signifiers, he became one with the world. Pygmalion was not only wrapped in his fiction (or 'entangled' as defined by Gilles Deleuze), but like Narcissus, was lost in "a dizzying feeling of ungrounded exhilaration in which meaning and reality became lost in the play."<sup>43</sup> The artist-subject additionally forgot the nature of the material production of his labor and was trapped in the factitious and encoded aspects of the sensual nude.

The ivory girl (the couture model) is a metonym for the "pornography of all functions and objects in their readability, their fluidity, their availability, their regulation in their forced signification, in their performability."<sup>44</sup> Yet unlike the post-modern subject, Pygmalion's psychic interior was not doomed to a fate of irresolution or destruction. Rescued by Venus, the statue was absolved of its fate as spectacle and its autonomy as an object in its fetishized form. Therefore, the converse of Dubord's First Thesis is actualized. Rather than "All that was once directly lived has become mere representation," for Pygmalion, the representamen was made concrete and verifiable.

*Perhaps as our students exclaim ad nauseum:* "It does nothing for me! It's all about me!" The aesthetic/cultural/experiential transition from objecthood to subjecthood originating with the evolution of capitalist markets and commercial marketing strategies privileges the consuming subjects' psychological relation with an outside stimulus at the expense of the object's material integrity. Rather than the mirrored face of Narcissus floating on the water, glimpsed in the shop window, or scanned in a commercial advertisement, what is seen is the face of Dorian Gray: a modern/post-modern/commercialized image which resonates, amplifies, and transmits the libidinal and egotistical desires of the subject, an image which gives the customer what he wants, a fetishized commodity which stimulates the flow of energy, activates the impulses, and pleases as the spectacle.

## NOTES

1. See Clive Hart and Kay Gilliland Stevenson, *Heaven and the Flesh*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1995).
2. Account from Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, trans. R. Humphries, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U. Press, 1995), 241-3.
3. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers, (NY: Hill and Wang, 1972), 1957.
4. Guy Dubord, *The Society of the Spectacle (1967)*, trans. D. Nicholson, (NY: Zone, 1994).
5. See Karl Marx, *Capital; A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. Moore, (Chicago: Kerr, 1906-9), 3 vols.
6. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899)*, reprinted in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn Lee, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).
7. Also see Jim McGuigan, "Sovereign Consumption," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, 294-9.
8. Cecil Harcourt-Smith, *The Society of Dilettanti*, (London: MacMillan, 1932).
9. William Edward Mead, *Grand Tour in the 18th Century*, (NY: Blom, 1972).
10. Tobias Smollett, *Travels*, ed. F. Felsenstein, (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1979), 233-4.
11. See Oliver Millar, *Zoffany and his Tribuna*, (London: Routledge, 1967) for contemporary travelers' descriptions of Florence.
12. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. H. Zohn, (London: 1973).

13. See Millar for complete discussion of Zoffany, the commission, and contemporary critiques of the painting.
14. Smollett iterated that such tourist sites “will please a connoisseur much more than a common spectator,” where connoisseurs are translatable as sovereign consumers of visual culture. Smollett, 234.
15. Ralph Haber, *Contemporary Theory and Research in Visual Perception*, (NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), 4.
16. *Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses*, (Chicago: McClurg, 1891).
17. Wilhelm Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, (London: Swam Sonnenschein, 1910), 22.
18. *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. B. Bosanquet, (London: Routledge, 1905), 308ff.
19. Richard Etlin, “Aesthetics and the Spatial Sense of Self,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 56:1, Winter 1998, 5.
20. Vischer, *On the Optical*, reproduced in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, trans. H.F. Mallgrave and I. Eleftherios, (Getty Center: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 25.
21. Vischer, 101.
22. Lipps *Empathy and Aesthetic Pleasure*, trans. K. Aschenbrenner, Reprint in *Aesthetic Theories: Studies in the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Aschenbrenner and Isenberg, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), 404.
23. *Ibid.*, 403.
24. Vygotsky citing Rank and Sachs, *The Psychology of Art*, trans. *Scripta Technica*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 73.
25. Lipps, 406.
26. Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, trans. M. Bullock (NY: International Universities Press, 1980), 5.
27. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. C. Levin, (St. Louis: Telos, 1981), 93.
28. For the out-of-character responses of the Englishmen see Paul Francis Kirby, *The Grand Tour in Italy, 1700-1800*, (NY: S.F. Vanni, 1952), 135.
29. *Ibid.*, 136.
30. *Ibid.*, 135.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Laurence Sterne, *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, 1768, (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2003).
33. Wright, *Some Observations Made in Traveling Through France, Italy... in 1720-22*, 407.
34. Vygotsky, 73.
35. Otto Rank, *Art and Artist*, trans. C. F. Atkinson, (NY: Agathon Press, 1975), 107.
36. See Christoph Lindner, *Fictions of Commodity Culture*, (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 11-15.
37. Elisabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U. Press, 1994), 168.
38. Lindner citing Tim Woods *Beginning Postmodernism*, 144. See relation to Dubord’s Thesis #61.
39. Baudrillard, *For a Critique*, 94.
40. Vygotsky, 74.
41. Grosz, 120, 168.
42. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 192.
43. Lindner, 150.
44. Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. Schutze, ed. S. Lotringer, (NY: Autonomedia, 1988), 130-131.

## **MODERNISM, FORMALISM AND WAL-MART**

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As Andreas Huyssen states, “Mass culture depends on technologies of mass production and mass reproduction and thus on the homogenization of difference”.<sup>1</sup> However, should a fine artist feel the need to capitalize on relatively new tools when such processes are still somewhat unpredictable and traditional, dependable, and proven methods exist? The advantage in respect to digital and film photography is convenience, speed, and flexibility. While all three benefits raise concerns, the last raises perhaps the most controversy in relation to ethics and photography’s “honesty”.

With the continual technological development associated with digital photography and the incessant downsizing of film photography, one will eventually have little choice but to choose digital. Herein lies the issue. All forms of photography, fine art, advertising, snapshot, etc., will originate with the digital camera and the ample software programs that allow the common, uneducated consumer artist to manipulate a second-rate image with the use of filters and montage. With these techniques it will become easier for the masses to undeservedly title themselves as “artists.” Thus, a necessary delineation between modern, high art production and consumer driven production must be drawn.

Also, before proceeding, a distinction needs to be established between modern and post-modern aesthetics. Huyssen defines modernism as the historical avant-garde, art for art’s sake. Prompted by theories such as Kant’s “Disinterested Viewing” as well as Fry and Bell’s “Significant Form,” modernist art exists for the elite connoisseur who possesses the mental capacity to appreciate and contemplate Fine Art. The appreciation of such definitions is appropriate in respect to photography of the Appalachian area, where photography exists primarily for the masses and the photographic industry has been overtaken by the conveniences offered by Wal-Mart, resulting in a marginalized group of elite fine art producers struggling for recognition.

When Kant defines Interested and Disinterested Viewing, the distinction is clear. He characterizes Interest Based Viewing as “the satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object”.<sup>2</sup> While Interested Viewing and Disinterested Viewing both share a sensation of pleasure, the disinterested viewer is markedly more enamored with the “formal subjective purposiveness” of the object and its purely aesthetic existence.<sup>3</sup> In simpler terms, Interest based viewing is concerned with the viewer’s preoccupation with content while Disinterested Viewing is marked by the viewer’s ability to look beyond the content and contemplate the work for its application of aesthetics and design elements, a higher form of intellectual engagement.

To continue, Significant Form, as defined by Clive Bell is achieved through a particular combination of lines and colors, certain forms and relations of forms that stir our aesthetic emotions.<sup>4</sup> Without this relationship, a supposed work of art is simply not a work of art, lacking the imagination that separates mere representations of reality from true, creative art.<sup>5</sup> According to Fry, True art avoids romantic overtones that usually serve to bait the common viewer (the Wal-Mart masses), resulting in the work appealing to connoisseurs who possess a refined aesthetic sensibility.<sup>6</sup>

Bell states that to appreciate a work of art the viewer should bring to the transaction a cultivated sense of form and color, as well as knowledge of three dimensional space.<sup>7</sup> When one applies this theory, for example, to common vacation photos, the principle is strained at best. This is what Fry and Bell refer to as Descriptive Pictures. Fry is careful to distinguish that while these images might move us emotionally, or even convey a sense of formal significance, they fail to move us aesthetically. Because it is not the forms in the images that move us, but rather the information and ideas, they are not True art.<sup>8</sup>

By 1955, Walter Benjamin, influenced by the evolution of mass production and reproduction, observed art's new universal approach and the emergence of the commodified art form as eliminating class-bound art appreciation and consumption.<sup>9</sup> However, ironically it would be modernism's mechanical reproducibility that would ultimately lead to its demise as the masses' yearning for accessibility and homogeneity glorified in the Dada and Pop movements, thrust art production toward the digital technology of today.<sup>10</sup> Artists of the Dada and Pop movements created as a means to subvert and undermine commercial society, yet their creations are easily recognized and appreciated by mass culture with their dispassionate images of everyday life, which also reflect the consumers' homogeneous trains of associations.

Yet before venturing into the post-modern and projecting further into the future, one must probe the obvious shift from elite, pedestal art to art fueled by the commercial interests and pressures of the masses. Huyssen contends that this high/low dichotomy evolved in the late 18th century with the growth of the reading public and capitalization of the book market, as well as the development of the modern art market.<sup>11</sup> He continues by stating that the postmodern first took shape with the notion of Pop and what ensued was profane, concrete, and suitable for mass reception, eliminating art's distance from the world.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Benjamin admitted that Dada was instrumental if not responsible for annihilating the modernist view of an autonomous, eternal art, stating, "mechanical reproduction emancipates art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" and ultimately "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition"; yet he is careful to add that a work of art and its aura are related and "never entirely separated from its ritual function."<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps Huyssen most accurately affirms the conflict between fine art and mass culture, "As modernism hides its envy for the broad appeal of mass culture behind a screen of condescension and contempt, mass culture, saddled as it is with pangs of guilt, yearns for the dignity of serious culture which forever eludes it."<sup>14</sup> Thus today's art culture appears hopelessly divided. Fine artists will continually deem themselves superior and advocates of mass culture will continue to indulge the economy. But, how modernistic and pretentious can a work of art be if ultimately it was created with the intention of profit? Huyssen points out that no matter whether Modern or Post-Modern the individually produced work of art is wholly reliant upon the distribution system with the reception taking place within the culture industry. Huyssen quotes Berlin's SDS, "The culture industry sees the legitimation of producing art only in regard to art's exchange value, not in its use value. In other words, the objective content of art works and their enlightening role become irrelevant in a system based on profit maximization."<sup>15</sup> This statement returns us to Benjamin's theory of tradition and the subsequent loss of tradition through the use of mechanical reproduction. Benjamin believes that society functions on its drive to "get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."<sup>16</sup> Yet it is this drive toward reproduction that detaches the work from its aura, the authentic essence of a thing that speaks to its conceptual origination. Mechanical reproduction sacrifices uniqueness for a plurality of copies, or in one word, commodification.

For the photographer, the capacity for mass reproduction and seemingly endless profit exists, prompting a decrease in the preciousness of the image. However, a detachment from tradition in

any capacity, particularly during the time of Benjamin's publication, 1955, is hard to appreciate. During this era, effective narrative and traditional darkroom processes were still in widespread use and color film was just beginning to become affordable. Thus a detachment specifically from the tradition of photography during this time was not concurrent with his writing.

However, with the photographic population succumbing to the seduction of easy money, photography seemingly abandoned its critical, analytic content, escaping the age of Stieglitz and Evans, ultimately collapsing any distinction between fine art photography and advertising and reaffirming the interchangeability of art production and commercialism.<sup>17</sup> This moment also marks a new synergy between photography and commercialization, a bad marriage between art works and commodity.

These concepts and uncertainties of a more real reality prompt one to arrive at the dilemma of what is and is not fine art, particularly photographic fine art. Photography's credibility has rested soundly on the legs of its sole purpose to document reality as it exists and the authenticity of its product, just as one is granted the otherwise impossible opportunity to be in the surf at Normandy with Robert Capa or at home with Sally Mann and her children. With the exception of Uelsman's fanciful darkroom creations, little can be done under safelights to convince a viewer of an alternate reality. In her essay on the digitization of photography, Anne-Marie Willis references Debord, stating that the more clearly we can see, the more we will know; thus explaining society's urge to grasp, store, and access appearances. She continues that this yearning triggered a movement toward greater naturalism, speed, and simplicity of production, evident in the technological advances from still to moving film, from silent to talking, from black and white to color, and ultimately from film to digital.<sup>18</sup> Yet the latter has progressed with more urgency than the former due to the desire to create a reality more intensely interesting than the factual due to mass culture that coerces society into believing the unabiding citizen is committing an injustice by not partaking in the fruits of technology. However, just as the consumer crops and edits post-shutter release, the trained photographer crops and edits before the image is made, leading the viewer to hopefully come to the conclusion the photographer intended, based on the skill of the artist. Furthermore, certain time exposures can produce images that appear otherworldly, perhaps including figures that melt and fold into one another, leaving the viewer with the impression of paint rather than silver. Yet all of these effects are based and founded on skill, an understanding of the image-making tool, and of the time invested in the process, not time invested in front of a computer screen sampling different filter effects. More frighteningly, we are on the cusp of a reinvention of history through filters.<sup>19</sup> Yet, within these stark prospects lies the delineation between the elite artist and the consumer. With the computer as photography's future prospect, the truth in photography and its claim to be an independent art form is dwindling.

With regards to mass culture's commodification of photography, what remains of art's most chemically precise technique has been simplified for the sake of convenience to a pathetic, saddening level. According to Benjamin, "The greater the decrease in social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public."<sup>20</sup> Photography has evolved into an art form that everyone can partake in, and by embracing the freedom to participate in an activity, through the supply and demand of disposable cameras, inexpensive and poor quality film, expedite processing at convenience centers, and the ever present desire for the perceived easy-to-use digital camera, the consumer artist seemingly loses respect for the art form and the artists who professionally and intellectually practice it. In contrast, painting is still considered a revered art form due to the fact that only a select percentage of individuals can create successfully produced paintings capable of being appreciated. Therefore, painting is still an art that is seemingly class bound. Rarely does one overhear the locals of West Virginia discussing a Rousseau, yet, on the other hand, it would be

common to be offered snapshots of a recent family vacation. Ultimately the democratization of photography has done much more to hinder it as an art form and hint at the redefinition of the medium as true fine art.

I could teach a small child to successfully use a disposable point-and-shoot camera, but that does not demonstrate that the child is a show-worthy photographer. In the same respect, an individual can create a digital image in their camera, download it into Adobe Photoshop and manipulate it until the original image is no longer recognizable and call it art, but is it really art? Moreover, is it still a photograph? If an individual combines multiple images to create one realistic, yet untruthful photograph how is the average citizen to distinguish? Those who require manipulation for the sake of demonstrating technological proficiency to justify an image are not artists and apparently incapable of producing elite art.

Finally, all of these arguments, both positive and negative, cause one to arrive at one key question, how will and should photography be taught to future photography students? How long will it take for the wet darkroom to become completely obsolete? Furthermore, how close is the death of film photography? Frankly, it seems a tragedy that future photography students may not have the opportunity to step inside a darkroom and watch their photo appear for the first time in the tray of developer. As long as Ansel Adams and Cartier-Bresson remain at the center of photography curricula students shall learn, understand, and appreciate the processes and the time invested in creating such images. Technology, as society, shall always progress and digital photography shall continue to overtake film; it is only a matter of time. Yet, just as one is taught to respect and learn from their elders and those who have experienced more than them, the same applies to photography from Appalachia.

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## **ANARCHY ABOVE *THE GATES***

**Angelo Marino**  
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Christo stated when he came to the United States in 1964 that he was amazed at the thousands or sometimes hundreds of thousands of people walking the streets of New York City. It inspired Christo to design an installation that would directly relate to the human scale. The project would develop over a period of 26 years and be realized in February of 2005 as *The Gates*. The installation consisted of 7,503 identical units that traced twenty-three miles of pathway through New York City's Central Park. It was on display for fifteen days at which point everything was dismantled and all materials recycled.

Central Park was the inspiration for the overall project as the title *The Gates* reflects the original design of the park. During the park's construction in the mid-nineteenth century, Olmsted and Vaux had named several of the 60 entryways specifically as "gates," such as the "gates of the immigrants" and "gates of the soldiers." Christo's appropriation of the terminology while paying homage to Olmsted also highlights the character and the location of the park. The original design was called *The Thousand Gates*, which, aside from a few minor modifications and an increase in units, would ultimately evolve into the project realized in 2005.

Christo observed "[Central Park] is rich with different types of vitality all around it from north, south, east, and west, and also by this incredible, surreal situation that the park is framed by concrete blocks...it acts like a giant pillow against the concrete structure of the city."<sup>1</sup> And so Christo's idea for a gated walkway was to "emulate the uniformity of the city"<sup>2</sup> and engage a dimension of the park that had never been achieved. The original intention was only to 'activate' a small section of the park that would accommodate 1000 of the eventual 7,500 units. This space would be 'framed by the corridor of portals'. Such walkways ideally paralleled the city's geometric grid pattern and simultaneously highlighted the delicacy of the park, situated at the epicenter of New York. The painterly saffron color was chosen as the work was originally planned for installation in the fall and would present a delicate play of color against the seasonal palette. The timing eventually shifted to February, when the trees are bare. The viewer would grasp the vastness of the installation and better understand the walkways and Olmsted's original aesthetic of a promenade with its lyrical arabesque patterns. Christo said that, "the project will allow [the viewer] suddenly to see this incredible network of walkways popping through the trees, becoming like a golden chain (Fineberg, 151)."

I had the privilege to be one of the 600 volunteers hired to assemble, and ultimately, unfurl *The Gates*. My experience began in a warehouse in Queens where I, and the other paid volunteers, received a tutorial on how to assemble each individual unit. It was here that I hoped to have my first interaction with Christo and grasp the intention of the project; instead, I, as worker, was directed only as to the methods of execution. Throughout the entire process little discussion focused on the aesthetics or meaning of *The Gates*. All discussion was grounded in the logistics of the project. The project was orchestrated more so as a construction site than a venue for an artistic vision or aesthetic debate.

Construction began on Monday, February 7th. I was part of a group of 7 who shared an affinity for Christo's oeuvre. This group was responsible for the construction of 99 of the 7,500 units that were located on the east side of the park just beyond the Conservatory. Each unit was designed and constructed the same as every other. The design was planned so that construction was efficiently executed. The units were modular, much like Christo's umbrellas of 1991. The

legs of each unit were situated on large steel bases on either side of the pathway. It was my responsibility to install a plate atop each base that would ensure a level platform upon which each structure would stand. After the base had been “leveled”, the rest of the group would carefully construct each unit, and then the group as a whole would erect the final structure. The unit would stand with the fabric wrapped in a cocoon to be unfurled the coming Saturday. The routine was the same for each unit of workers.

Christo and Jean-Claude had said before that the volunteers were their ambassadors; therefore we were to adhere to very strict guidelines, the most important being that no element of the project was to physically interfere with the park. The original plan was rejected in 1981 on the grounds that it would damage the park’s landscape. So it had come to be a stipulation in the agreement with the Central Park Conservancy that no physical alterations be made to the park.

The modular steel bases were not in the original plans for the project; it was the initial intention that the bases be drilled into the ground, similar to what was used for *Running Fence*, but the design evolved so that the bases were solid steel blocks, weighing roughly 500 pounds, resting on the pathway. No trees were to be tampered with either. If need be, a unit would be moved (sometimes only inches) so it would not touch any part of a tree. The units were to be clean and precise in both construction and location. If there were any variance between the individual units, the project would not encapsulate the ideal for which it was intended, the celebration of aesthetic repetition and homogenization.

Christo and Jean-Claude, emerged at the beginning of the sixties, when European and American artists refocused their attention on epistemological questions, by thinking about how we know what we know. Their work focused on social issues, though not directly apparent, but inherent within all of their projects. *The Gates*, just like their other installations, relied for its success on human interaction and reaction. When Christo had completed *Running Fence* in 1976, he gauged its success on “the three hundred thousand cars who visited *Running Fence*, in a way that half a million people in Sonoma and Marin Counties were engaged with the making of the work of art for three and a half years ... [it] caused a big discussion in which everyone was discussing what is a work of art (Fineberg, 130).” This element in *The Gates* parallels *Running Fence*; it engages all who interact with it and it is they that help complete the work. *The Gates* engage the viewer to experience the in corporeality of the sublime. It is a reflection of a profound reality. What *The Gates* embodied was a beautification of unification. It is an entelechy, a collection of individual units, identical yet separate, and assembled into a whole. *The Gates* is not complete without each individual unit being introduced to the landscape, and it is the collection of many that defines the singular, surrealist entity.

The assembly would transform the otherwise ordinary Central Park landscape into a phenomenological world that activates an experience of pure being and, as Christo said, to “show the ignorance of man over nature (Fineberg, 141).” That ideal makes Central Park essential to *The Gates*’ construction. It is a park, created at the heart of the urban construct dedicated to capitalist supremacy. It is framed by the metaphoric concrete blocks and gateways named for the working classes. The surrounding concrete wall, symptomatic of the subjugation of nature, offsets its beauty. Thusly, the city masks and denatures a profound reality; in that it hinders the growth/expansion of nature into the city. Nature is to be tamed/contained, just as the human awareness of a transcendental reality is constricted by the power of capitalism.

Humans are turned into consumers, programmed to buy. We do not entertain the thought of unity through design, as we are capable of being and operating as a single entity to transform the sublime into the ordinary. The city is a simulation of reality, superficiality. *The Gates* are an awakening; it is art taken out of the traditional context and placed into that, which contradicts

our standards of beauty. Today it is not within the psyche of New Yorkers, or Americans to realize the interconnectedness of man and nature. As Jean Baudrillard said, “we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning.”<sup>3</sup> We speak a language that has no depth, one instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten. The language to appreciate *The Gates* may be lost and the message of the project ultimately confused.

For mainstream Americans, art is appreciated in museums; it is set in a specific context, which is specially designated for appropriate viewing. “It relies on the museum, or gallery for its visibility,”<sup>4</sup> the context defines the object. For the viewer to go beyond the wall that contextualizes the work is to detach from the subject and submit to what is “real”.

A particular conversation with two gentlemen in the park during construction reinforced the fact that all things beautiful are contextualized by their designated place and time. The men asked me what “all this” was for. I said that it was a work of art. The men laughed and responded that *The Gates* was not art. “We see art everyday.” They said, “We work over at the Whitney.” *The Gates* was not art in the eyes of many because it was not defined by a specific, traditional context. *The Gates* subverted the traditional context and the commodified values of capitalist society. It embodied another ideal of existence.

Many thought that the project was a waste of money and resources, that the money could be better used to feed hungry people or be put to “good use”. The 20 million dollars spent to fund *The Gates* was entirely from Christo’s personal finances, and the result of the installation was numerous, full time positions, for hundreds of people. It is also important to note that all the materials for the project had been recycled immediately after dismantling, as with all of Christo’s projects. Specifically with *Running Fence*, the material served as compensation for the farmers whose land accommodated the installation. It was utilized as “the cable and steel for their barns, gates, and fences, and the synthetic fabric to cover their hay, manure and machinery in the winter (Fineberg, 151).” Christo realized no monetary gain from the installation; his objective was simply to build something beautiful. Many of the projects’ visitors could not understand the rationale behind financing a temporary installation, but as Christo said, “it is absolutely irrational. And that disturbs, angers the sound human perception of a capitalist society (Fineberg, 12).” The concept of privately funding a work of art on such a grand scale as *The Gates* counters the contemporary American lifestyle; we are inherently programmed to consume. And given the grand influx of information, as Baudrillard had said, we acknowledge (but do not necessarily adopt) alternative ideologies. Because we are a nation that is intrinsically related to capitalism, we may not recognize the transcendent functioning of the object. It is supposed to be art for everyman, a philosophy rooted in the utopianism of a Socialist agenda, a design built as a symbol of unity and progression, to go beyond the constricted contemporary realm of thought. In an interview in 1982, Christo criticized the capitalist machine and how our understanding cannot grasp or truly appreciate the importance of art.

But Christo was not verbally able to successfully convey that which *The Gates* intended. Conceived in the late seventies, *The Gates* was a product of modern idealism, a remnant of the romanticized idea that through the prism of a particular school of economics, societies around the world would be taken in new, interwoven and positive directions.<sup>5</sup> It was an optimistic school of thought that carried the hopes of a homogenized society. People and things were interconnected, with art that becomes an act of revelation, an exaltation, an embodiment of universal truth.

*The Gates* was meant to engage the viewer in an experience of pure being. There are no markings on any of the individual units for they would taint the overarching aesthetic. As the

project was privately funded, there were to be no sponsors. Instead the purity of form supports the embodiment of a higher ideal, which goes beyond daily human concerns.

The behavior of the fabric and its rhythm above the heads of the viewer is perceived emotionally. It is the idea of color as a medium for realization, synonymous with the ideology of a Newman or Rothko color field. Rothko's goal was to make color both area and volume, emotion and mood, at once palpable and disembodied, sensuous yet spiritual, for color represents something larger than its own sheer physical presence. Rothko had come to think of color as the doorway to another reality. In regards to *The Gates*, color *is* both area and volume; it surrounds the viewer. The meandering saffron patterns morphed beyond the properties of pigment on a flat surface and embodied a universal ideology, the tangible reflection of a Rothko portal.

But what happens when a work conceived in 1979, and as Christo said, is bound to its primetime, its social, political and economic context? After that moment, there is the matter of deviation or change or deterioration on all levels. *The Gates* was not physically realized until 2005, twenty-six years after its conception. Therefore, does Christo's assertion define it as a failure? Is the concept outworn? Has the prospect of humans of the 21st century sharing a universal identity been dismantled and recycled. Is it fraught with a tension, which nostalgically romanticizes that which is lost through our jumbled language of today?

*The Gates* is an object of meditation; its significance comes from its power of revelation, set at a time when the civic realm was blanketed with corporate promotion, refocused on the purity of supreme abstraction. Designed to emulate a transcendental awareness, its concept was not valued by our contemporary society. It speaks the dead language of the modern. The post-modern worldview understands the marginalized and rejects the idea of homogeny. The modern mind was brainwashed, lost in the ether of abstraction. Today we acknowledge subjective diversity, the anti-metanarrative. The post-modern mind is overwhelmed by the crisis of cultural authority, and *The Gates* is only a distraction from the reality of today. It became that which it was trying to ultimately reject, a simulated, superficiality. *The Gates* is nothing more than propaganda, imposing the belief that humans can interact as units to complete a whole, to uniformly move forward as a people morphing into a golden chain meandering across an idyllic landscape that is pure, without flaw or difference, as Rothko had realized in paint.

Is it possible that such an ideal could ever be successful? The post 9-11 world only decreases the project's already diminishing worth. New York, under siege expects a different agenda, acknowledging the subversive voice. There is no universal mentality, and the promotion of such is a hindrance to our cultural self-definition. We are unity through difference; that is our reality. It is a human condition that will not allow for a utopia, one world without conflict, designed with precise planning and execution.

Therefore, the closest we come today to adhering to Christo's vision is the temporary, romanticized, false reality of what is not a possibility. It is *The Gates* that is now the simulation, simulacra that does nothing but promote a lost dream. It hung above our heads awaiting its demise, to be dismantled, recycled and regurgitated from the system that it furtively tried to reject. It shall be acknowledged as nothing more than a very pretty, now gone installation that will provoke future minds only to think what it looked like, not what it embodied, nor its impact, its language.

For art to have an impact it must emulate the behavior and mind of the society for which it was created, a work that stimulates the viewer in its appropriate context. A work of art can be

symbolic of progress, but it is only achieved when the indexical signs of the viewer are receptive to change.

There is no element of progress defined in Christo's landscape, only the reflection of a lost dream. Its meaning was not understood by the public, as the failure of *The Gates* is observed in the responses it elicited. People valued it because it was pretty. One woman referred to it as the prettiest curtains she's ever seen. Typically, the viewer fell short of perceiving any transcendent significance in the work. The contemporary rationalizing American psyche did not acknowledge what it was meant to embody. Only few, like the Whitney men, understood what it was and claimed it as insignificant.

It is not in our character to adhere to a credo that guides the behavior and ideology of a culture into a singular, refined, and unified entity, as *The Gates* tried to emulate. The American thought process, as a whole, is anarchical, a conglomeration of ideals that are in constant conflict, all vying for the betterment of our nation and ourselves. And our beliefs are congruent with our methods of perception. It is not "art for everyman"; it is art for some, and a waste for others. *The Gates*, albeit a beautiful thing to observe, sadly meant nothing, a poignant reminder that we as a species are not capable of thinking "together". It was a temporary escape reflecting a passé mentality. True beauty is to be found naturally, it need not be imposed on the viewer as human constructs of towering skirts of saffron, feathering in the winds of a more progressive, insensitive, and un-philosophic world.

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## **WITHOUT A PASSPORT/SANS PASSEPORT**

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The City of Ottawa, Canada, operates three public art galleries with a series of changing, juried exhibitions. Some of the exhibitions are proposed by embassies. Ottawa is, after all, the capital of Canada and we have the usual complement of foreign representation in our town of approximately 750,000 people. Other exhibitions are proposed by artists (who are many) and independent curators (we are few).

In the last five years, I have curated three group exhibitions for the City. The first exhibition, *Common Ground*, showed the work of 18 artists, all women, ten from Lawrence, Kansas. The rest were all from Ottawa. In that exhibition, I asked the artists to work from what they did the first week following 11 September. *Common Ground* opened in May 2002.

“Without a Passport/Sans Passeport” is the second of a projected series of three exhibitions I have been working on for the last six years. All concern immigration in North America. In the first of the series *Lines of Descent*, I put the work of four artists into the context of their childhood memories of seeing examples of traditional crafts in their parents' homes. Each of the artists bore the names and faces of their forebears, but the artists no longer knew the village stories of their parents and grandparents. Nonetheless, all of the artists were using fine, hand-crafting techniques that could be traced to their ancestry. The artists had all been born in North America. *Lines of Descent* opened in October 2004. The third of the series, *I'm Here. OK.* is only in its earliest stages of development.

*Without a Passport/Sans Passeport*, the second of the immigration series, opened May 2005 in the City of Ottawa's Karsh-Masson Gallery. Here, my concern is documentation, an anxiety the immigrant never sheds—no matter where is the borderline. .

To be “without a passport” or to have the wrong kind of documentation, be it too much or not enough, is unsafe. To be without a passport is to lack the state's assurance you are who you are. To be without a passport is to be unable to travel, to flee, to escape. The incorrectly or insufficiently documented live in a state of being, a state layered with possibilities—not any of them good.

All of the situations which form the content of the artists' work in *Without a Passport* have arisen from decisions of state made by unknown others: the people who sit at conference tables and decide where are the borders, who may cross, and who may live one place and not another.

In the work of Kenneth Enig, Eugene Rodriguez and Aaron McKenzie Fraser on the gallery's ground floor, the viewer's attention is drawn to tensions of documentation and control in the post-September 11 period. Uta Riccius reminds us in her storefront installation—the gallery's front windows—we have agreed to similar decisions in the recent past. On the second floor of the gallery, two installations by Norman Takeuchi and Kinga Araya I show us the effect on individual lives when the state chooses the identity label.

## **GALLERY WINDOWS**

In *Border Closed*, Uta Riccius fills the gallery's street-level windows with fingerprints and maps smudged against the glass. The maps are useless. The winding streets will not take you from

there to here. The way is blocked. The fingerprints? Evidence of a “human touch?” Yes. They are the smeared marks of people who cannot get out.

*Border Closed* establishes an analogous relationship between the fingertip whorls of a human hand and the meandering streets of a very old town. The maps the artist uses are those of three ancient cities artificially divided in the second half of the last century—Berlin, Nicosia, and Jerusalem. In 1944 in a plan proposed by the British, Berlin, the capital of Germany, was divided into four “sectors of occupation”—French, English, American, and Soviet. In 1964, Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, was similarly divided. A United Nations forces general drew a “green line” on the city’s map. Nicosia is still divided. And, in 1948 the Old City of Jerusalem was divided east and west when British rule was terminated. Its four traditional neighbourhoods remain—the Armenian, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim quarters—but the city is divided and is being cut yet again. Its barricaded streets have been part of Jerusalem for thousands of years.

There are built separation barriers everywhere—Europe, North America, Asia—each war, each rebellion, each aggression begetting yet another set of people “without a passport,” people who stand on one side of a wall, but not the other. Ordinary caution suggests one plan carefully when leaving home. Returning could be difficult. Borders can be closed.

## **Floor 1**

Separation barriers are not a new idea. The Romans built Hadrian’s Wall to keep out the Scots. Imperial Chinese built the Great Wall to keep out the Huns. Today, the international airport acts as a separation barrier to keep out the undocumented, the improperly identified, and to isolate the suspicious. If our plane lifts off the ground with us on it in a timely fashion, we are grateful. After all, we who are “in transit” might have been taken aside by the state and transported to some other place.

Changing airlines within Canada at Hamilton Airport, photographer Aaron McKenzie Fraser was questioned closely by a worried Canada Customs agent. Fraser was carrying a number of cameras with him. One, a miniature digital camera, looked like trouble. The agent was suspicious. Fraser’s explanation was not convincing: “It is a camera, it really is.” Customs agents do not like to be challenged. In an inspired impulse, the photographer grabbed the camera from her hands and, before the agent could stop him, he took her photograph. When she saw her own image, the agent waved him through.

Aaron McKenzie Fraser’s photograph of the customs agent shows us a perfectly ordinary human being—someone like our neighbour, or an aunt, a sister. In the airport, however, she wears the uniform of the state and has authority over our property and person. In the gallery, *Hamilton airport Customs* is displayed with wall text from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Articles 13, 14, and 15 set out the fundamental right of every human being to travel, to seek asylum, *and to choose a nationality*. Not one of us has ever had those fundamental rights anywhere.

Kenneth Emig wonders why we make it so easy for people to track our whereabouts—with or without authorization. We carry around cellular phones; we fill our hours with text messaging and e-mail; we use debit cards instead of cash. Under the label “connectivity,” we swaddle ourselves in layers of surveillance. We even buy clothing that can transmit our whereabouts via satellite to someone listening at a tracking station. Benetton and Gillette, for example, embed remote frequency identification computer chips (RFIDs) into their products. Call it “inventory control” or “targeted marketing,” the outcome is the same: surveillance.

In *Listening*, a sound sculpture of space and time, Kenneth Emig draws our attention to the satellites that crowd the skies above us, and the covert nature of their data collecting capabilities. On one wall, the artist has hung a satellite dish. Inside, outside, in and around the gallery, he has hidden small microphones. As the visitor draws near the dish, she hears sound being voiced somewhere else, words are heard as they are spoken by others unseen. The visitor who “listens” is now an omniscient “ear.” In *Listening*, Kenneth Emig makes us all complicit in his stratagem.

*The New Rome* by Eugene Rodriguez is beautiful. From a distance, the work gleams richly. Its folds of silk organza are soft, their embroidery finely worked. The robes are floating on air. How lovely. Draw nearer. It becomes apparent the artist has locked the fabrics into place upon a support of metal, an armature. Look again. Now the viewer can see the embroidery fixes Exacto blades onto the silk Beautiful, and horrifyingly dangerous.

Rodriguez’s sculptural construction is inspired by a detail (Napoleon’s coronation robes) from a painting. Commissioned by the state, Jacques Louis David’s *Le Sacre* (1805) is an official record of the imperial state legitimating itself.

In *The New Rome*, the imperial robes fall onto the floor, puddling around the artist’s own parody of the Great Seal of the United States. Rodriguez has added a tri-lingual warning (French, Spanish, English): “No entrance without imperial passport.” He has, however, turned the bald eagle’s head toward the olive branches. Until 1945, the seal usually showed the eagle facing left, toward arrows of war.

War or peace? What image shall the state present to the rest of the world?

In Eugene Rodriguez’s oil painting, “Exhausted”, one sees two finely dressed, very tired 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocrats. They have collapsed in ungainly manner onto chairs. Why the exhaustion? Have they just finished carving up the world? Apparently. What were their “weapons of mass destruction?” In the 18<sup>th</sup> century? The blunderbuss.

Armed squads of volunteer militia, extralegal bands of vigilantes, patrol the American borders—north and south. What are their weapons? Whatever they can get their hands on. There is no way to know in either the United States or Canada how many “out-of-status,” undocumented immigrants are here. Where are they all? Working. Working off the books.

In an artist’s hands, political parody comes from deeply felt anger and the search for a way out. How do we escape the armature, the metal cage, the exhaustion?

## **Floor 2**

The decisions taken at Yalta by Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill created the minefields and barbed wire Kinga Araya grew up with in Poland. The borders were closed—for most. Nonetheless, throughout the Cold War, some—not many—were able to leave the Eastern bloc nations. How did they do it? Did they climb over walls? Or tunnel through? Did people walk carefully, anonymously, into a crowd, then keep on walking? And, when we leave the land of our birth, what do we find in the new world?

Kinga Araya’s *Identity Card* is a photographic transfer of a photocopy of the passport with which the artist left Poland. The passport was stolen. The blurred text of the surviving photocopy is in Polish, French, and Russian. It is a useless document. The land of origin is blurred, and the document defunct. Nevertheless, one has to keep moving. One must be prepared. Keep the copy;

it might be useful.

The artist has made a beautiful ladder and three beautiful pairs of sandals. *Untitled (Glass Ladder)* and *Discipline* (three pairs of sandals) are wonderfully made of glass. Why did she make them of glass? Is that all she had to work with—the sand swept back and forth from the sea’s edge? The ladder is crated for safekeeping. It is useless. One cannot climb over any wall using a glass ladder. The ladder will break. One dare not even change a light bulb using a useless ladder of glass. The room remains dark. One cannot walk through a minefield in glass sandals, or go dancing.

Useless ladder, useless sandals. What can you do? You are in exile. You adapt In Kinga Araya’s three short videos, the artist shows us how painful adaptation can be. In the new land, one might grow new limbs or spill one’s guts (in multiple languages); but, the hard truth remains. The emigre is in exile—in two countries.

The streets were never paved with gold for anyone. Still, one might hope the children, or their children, would one day “fit in.” History suggests some will not.

Who we are is shown in how we speak and how we move—or how we look. During WWII, the government of Canada, invoking the War Measures Act, ordered the removal of 22,000 from their homes in British Columbia. The people selected to lose their homes were all of Japanese heritage. More than 17, 000 were either Canadians who had been born in Canada or Canadians who were naturalized citizens. Among the 22,000 were artist Norman Takeuchi and his family.

“A Measured Act” by Norman Takeuchi commemorates his family’s ability to endure a time when nothing made sense, when nothing could be done, when all one might hope to do is remember, to remember all of it clearly. Most people were given no more than 24 hours to gather a few things to take with them. Some photographs, a tea kettle, that was all. The government issued them their identity papers—papers saying they were now classified as “enemy aliens.” Those papers were critically important and could not be lost. They were needed for their travels. *The people were then rounded up and shipped by railway box car to Hastings Park, British Columbia. There, those to be transported further were herded off to cattle barns for reassignment elsewhere. Some waited weeks.*

The people were told they were going to places called “Tashme,” “Slocan,” “Lemon Creek,” and “Angler.” Who had heard of these destinations? Tashme did not exist on any map. It was a fabricated name. The other destinations were all “detention camps” with barbed wire separation barriers. The year was 1942, the country where this all occurred is Canada.

In *A Measured Act*, Norman Takeuchi names five paper kimonos after the places where the people were taken. The artist has made each kimono to scale. If they were cloth, they could be worn. He is using the kimono as a vehicle to tell how the government carried out its act of removal. The colours of the kimonos are those of midnight on a calm sea. The designs appear to be floral, they are not. Each design is drawn from newspaper stories, photographs, and headlines. Everyone knew what was happening. Few protested. No other Canadians of any identifiable group were so detained by the government in wartime.

Walk up to the first kimono, and look at it. Look at this work and remember.

Of these events, Norman Takeuchi writes: “I was only five then and, therefore, have only faint memories of what happened, but the events of that time still haunt and sadden me.” Among the things the artist does remember are small shelves where people stored their few personal

belongings. The artist has drawn paper images of these articles. The soya sauce bottle and tea kettle are all gone now, but... “By creating this assemblage of paper,” the artist writes further, “I have made concrete what for so long remained ghostly.”

## **IN CONCLUSION**

In the work of all six artists, the exhibition visitor encounters thoughtful, disciplined responses to the tensions and dangers created in an arbitrary time of exclusion and inclusion. For many immigrants and the children of immigrants, any question of identification is potentially dangerous. All know the anxieties produced when questioned: *where do you come from? no, where do you really come from?* For the *very* secure to be “without a passport” is not a state of affairs easily understood. In the wake of September 11, however, even the very secure have begun to look more carefully to their birth certificates and passports.

Walk through Ottawa’s streets. It is obvious many of us have come from everywhere else—every relocation complicated by the need for “correct” documentation. In Ottawa today, 20% of us were born outside of Canada; in Ottawa, today, our third-most-spoken language is Arabic. We do not, any of us, live in happy-go-lucky times.

The title “Without a Passport” derives from a Living Theatre Workshop I attended nearly forty years ago. One of the exercises centred on the chant: “I am not allowed to travel without a passport.” I know that is so.

## **ARTISTS’ PROFILES**

### **Kinga Araya**

Born in Poland, Kinga Araya is a conceptual artist with finely honed existential sensibilities. Her interdisciplinary artwork investigates the phenomenon of being displaced from one’s homeland, of walking and talking in multiple voices (and sometimes with multiple limbs). The artist has exhibited work throughout Canada, the United States, Poland, and Spain. She began her studies in art history at the Catholic University of Lublin, in Poland. Kinga Araya left her homeland in 1988, eventually making her way to Canada. She holds a PhD in visual arts and critical theory from Concordia University, Montreal, and has just been awarded a post-doctoral Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities for 2006-07 at the University of Pennsylvania.

### **Kenneth Emig**

In contact improvisational dance, the dancers are partnered, but there is no music, no backbeat, just ambient sound. Contact dance is a disciplined medium for the limber and curious of mind. Artist Kenneth Emig is both contact dancer and sculptor. Like dance, Emig’s sculptural environments are interactive spatial explorations using optics and sound. Things are not always as they seem. There is more if the viewer will look again. The artist brings to his practice of sculpture and dance more than 15 years professional experience in audio and acoustic design. He is a founding member of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology and, in his free time, he works at the National Research Council of Canada. Kenneth Emig was born in Toronto to parents who are part of the recent European migration to Canada.

### **Aaron McKenzie Fraser**

Aaron McKenzie Fraser is a photographer. He was born and raised in the Maritimes to a family with roots so deep in Atlantic Canada, his mother cautioned him when he moved to Ontario: do

not become “like those Ontarians.” There is little danger of that. Artists are seldom part of the crowd. Whatever the group, artists stand off to the side—even in Ontario. One can see more that way. In the last four years, Aaron McKenzie Fraser has mounted five different solo exhibitions in the Ottawa area, in addition to participating in twelve group shows. He was named “Best Ottawa Photographer” in 2005 by the *Ottawa XPress*. Fraser’s subject matter is people, people in their work settings, and a “concern for the old and worn.”

### **Uta Riccius**

The ability to read a map is a culturally specific skill. Those who map are those who identify, label, and control what is to be known and what is to be overlooked and forgotten. Born in Ontario, schooled in both Canada and Germany (Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, and Concordia University, Montreal), performance artist Uta Riccius has been looking at maps critically for most of her life. As often as not, the artist’s choice of medium has been interactive public street performance or fibre—fibre knotted, hooked, knitted, and woven into form. Riccius’s sculptural work is part of numerous public and private collections in Canada and Europe. The artist has exhibited her diverse cartographies in Germany, the United States, Mexico, and the Netherlands. Uta Riccius teaches art students at Heritage College, Gatineau.

### **Eugene Rodriguez**

San Francisco artist Eugene Rodriguez is a third-generation Latino-American. He knows exactly where his forebears crossed the Mexican-United States border into the northern lands. Texas, to be precise. Those stories have fed into his work and teaching for many years. Rodriguez uses installation, sculpture, painting, and video to limn the story of the people who came to do the work, the people who are still, at best, politely overlooked in the United States today. Rodriguez has exhibited his work throughout the United States, Hungary, Germany, Mexico, and Italy. This is the first time he is exhibiting in Canada. Eugene Rodriguez’s art has been reviewed in *NY Arts Magazine*, the *Village Voice*, *Artweek*, and discussed in scholarly studies of Chicano cinema and GLBTQ visual art.

### **Norman Takeuchi**

In 1995, artist Norman Takeuchi saw an exhibition of magnificent kimonos by Itchiku Kubota at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Up to that point, for more than thirty years of artistic practice, as Takeuchi writes, his own Japanese heritage had “played little part” in his art. Everyone knew, for example, but few dared speak of the forced relocation in 1942 of 22,000 Japanese-Canadians. For Takeuchi, the shape of the kimono became the means to see what was being wilfully hidden. The artist’s paintings and pastels have been shown in exhibitions throughout Canada and in England. His work is part of the permanent collection of the Canada Council, the Carleton University Art Gallery, the Ottawa Art Gallery, and Mitel Corporation. Norman Takeuchi was born in Vancouver in 1937.

## GREENBERG ON KANT ON MODERNISM IN THE ARTS

**Daniel Farrell**

**The Ohio State University**

In what follows I want to revisit and try to rehabilitate the characterization of Modernism that Clement Greenberg suggested in 1961 and then rather abruptly retracted in 1979, a few years before his death. I'm no friend of attempts at defining retrospectively-named artistic movements—Greenberg did in fact call his characterization a “definition”—and I'm especially doubtful about the good sense of attempting to define a term like “Modernism.” But I do think there was something valuable in what Greenberg had to say in his early paper, even if, as we shall see, what he had to say was more *useful* than *true*, and even if, as I shall try to show, it is useful in helping us think about only some and certainly not all Modernist art. I'll try to show wherein this usefulness resides and why I think Greenberg was wrong to repudiate these early ideas.

### I

Greenberg writes as follows in his 1961 essay:

I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of ... [a certain] self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher [Immanuel] Kant. Because he was the first to criticize the means of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real modernist.

The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but [in order] to entrench it more firmly in its own area of competence. Kant used logic to establish the limits of logic, and while he withdrew much from its old jurisdiction, logic was left in all the more secure possession of what remained to it.

A bit later in his paper Greenberg refers to the self-critical tendency he's talking about here as “internal criticism,” which he contrasts with the “external” criticism that he believes was characteristic of the Enlightenment before Kant. External criticism, it appears, is criticism as we ordinarily think of it in the intellectual world: “critique” or critical analysis of received ideas and the institutions that embody them. Internal criticism, apparently, is *self*-critique: critical analysis of the person doing the critique and of whatever faculties or facilities he uses in that critique.

This distinction is clearer when applied to Kant, and his enterprise in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, than when it is applied to the arts in the period we now call “Modernism”; but it's important to try to get some idea of what Greenberg is talking about, in the latter case, if we are to give his views about Modernism (his early views, that is) a fair hearing. As applied to Kant, the idea of internal as opposed to external criticism is fairly straightforward, it seems to me: instead of using reason (Greenberg says “logic,” but I think “reason” is the better word) to critique various *other* human activities and institutions, and to tackle various philosophical problems more generally, as his Enlightenment predecessors had done, Kant instead began his own philosophical work by using reason to critique reason itself—to assess its capacity to do what others were using it to do, that is to say, and to inquire carefully into both its legitimate role in human enquiry and its particular limitations.

What, then, was internal criticism *in the arts*? Greenberg is clearest when he talks about the application of this notion to painting, which most commentators have assumed was his principal interest in this essay, but his point is quite clearly supposed to be applicable to the arts generally. And, at a first pass, his point seems to be this: an artist is engaging in internal criticism, *qua* artist working in a given medium, when he looks critically at himself, and at his medium, and asks a series of questions about what he takes himself to be attempting to do with that medium, and why, and about what he takes the potential of that medium to be, so far as creativity is concerned. At the same time, he is asking, as well, what he takes the limitations of that medium to be and what, if anything, he thinks that medium can do that is unique to itself—that is, that cannot be done in any other medium.

As I've indicated, Greenberg is perhaps clearest, about what he's getting at here, in his discussion of internal criticism in the world of painting. He believes that Modernist painters, much more than painters in any other era, took the time to step back from their art and ask whether what they'd been taught or had otherwise come to believe about painting, and what it was all about, was really true—for example, that painting is about representing the external world in some way and that central to doing this was learning how to introduce perspective or three-dimensionality into the picture-plane. Put more positively, and in the terms suggested above, they stopped to ask themselves what painting was all about, in their view, as an art form, and why anyone would ever want to engage in it. And they asked, more specifically, what their “tools” were as painters, or what exactly they were working with, materially, and, given an answer to this question, what opportunities for real creativity those tools offered to someone who chose to use them as the tools they actually were (that is, without subterfuge or self-deception, and without using them for tasks for which they are not especially well-suited and are certainly not uniquely well-suited). Particularly important in this last respect, he argued, was the question, asked by these artists of themselves, of whether, given his tools, and what they were capable of, there was anything the painter could do with his work that was unique to painting and not capable of being done by any other art form.

The answers that Greenberg claimed the relevant painters came up with are well-known, at least among art critics and art historians, and were eventually satirized, rather savagely, if somewhat sophomorically, by Tom Wolfe in his 1975 essay “The Painted Word.” Very briefly, what Greenberg thought internal criticism of painting, as conducted, consciously or unconsciously, by real (Modernist) painters, led to was the realization that painting, as an art form, was not about perspective at all but, rather, about flatness—about working with one's other materials, that is to say, on a flat, material plane, with no attempt whatsoever to create the illusion of three-dimensional perspective, which latter was rather the province of the sculptor (and, perhaps, of artists working in various other media as well).

This, I should add—this stress on the alleged abandonment by Modernist painters of perspective, and the consequent substitution of flatness as the arena in which they would work—was only part of what Greenberg thought was the result of the internal criticism or self-critique in which he saw Modernist painters engaging. Just as important, in his view, though not as often mentioned by later commentators, was the obvious but crucial fact that what these painters knew they would be doing on that flat plane was working with paint. This, of course, meant they had to ask themselves what they saw themselves doing with that paint—that is, why they might want to put paint on a flat surface in the first place (as artists, that is, rather than, say, house-painters). And here one general negative answer they came up with, Greenberg felt, was that, given their rejection of illusion and, as much as possible, anything that was not unique to painting, these artists realized that one thing they certainly did not want to do was put the paint on that flat surface in a way that was designed to somehow disguise the fact that it was paint on a flat surface. Hence their decision, as Greenberg saw it, to renounce priming or

undercoating their canvasses in certain ways; to renounce application-techniques designed to disguise the fact that the paint was just paint; and to renounce, along with various other deceits, finishing glosses designed to serve the aim of disguising the fact that their paint was just paint.

(Interestingly, Greenberg says explicitly that the abandonment of “representation,” or what we would now call “figuration,” was not an essential part of the Modernist program as he saw it—that is, not a result of the internal criticism that he saw as central to the Modernist impulse as it attached itself to painting. Rather, figuration was abandoned in Modernist painting, in his view, to the extent that it was, because of the fact that realistic representations of elements of the “real world” tend to bring with them, despite the artist’s intentions, a clear suggestion, or at least a clear reminder, of three-dimensionality. And given that this latter was indeed centrally rejected by the self-criticism of the Modernist painter, the latter was inevitably led to “abstraction,” despite the fact that this was not itself required by the self-criticism that led to the rejection of three-dimensionality.)

## II

I’ve said I think there’s something of value in what Greenberg is saying here, even though I don’t think what he’s given us is anything like an adequate definition of Modernism, and even though, as I’ll explain in a moment, I don’t think that what he is saying about Modernist painting here is useful in thinking about all Modernist painting, much less in thinking about all Modernist art. What I have in mind, on the positive side, is this: if we assume for the sake of argument that at least some Modernist painters were indeed doing, consciously or unconsciously, something like what Greenberg is saying they were doing—namely, attempting to see what they could do with their other “tools” (e.g., paint and color and contrast and line, etc.) on a flat surface, with no attempt whatsoever to create perspective—and if we let this assumption affect our viewing of their work in a natural and obvious way, we will be led not only to look at their work in a new way, or, at any rate, with a very different set of expectations than we would otherwise have had, but also to think about and evaluate what’s going on on their canvases in a different way.

To begin with the first point, note that if we assume that Greenberg is right about the alleged Modernist (painterly) commitment to flatness, we will, insofar as we let our background assumptions inform our viewing practices, approach the work of the relevant artists in a very different way from the way in which we would otherwise have approached it. For, whatever else we do in viewing these canvases, we will, if we take Greenberg seriously, look at them, at least in part, not as attempting to do whatever the art of the previous three or four centuries was trying to do but, rather, as attempting to meet a very different and quite specific creative challenge: namely, that of using paint and color and line, etc., to create, on a flat surface, with no attempt at perspective or three-dimensionality, and no attempt to disguise the fact that paint is paint, a visual work that will be of aesthetic interest to a thoughtful viewer. [Note on Danto and how ‘aesthetic’ becomes inapt once we leave Abstract Expressionism and turn to Pop Art and the movements that followed it.]

This much, I think, is obvious. Nonetheless, it’s perhaps worth noting, though here I resort to anecdote and my own experience, that students who look again at, say, the work of certain Abstract Expressionists, after reading Greenberg and discussing his claims, generally have a very different experience with those works than they have had before reading Greenberg and discussing his claims. This, of course, if I’m right, is because they are now approaching these works with very different expectations and very different ideas about what the relevant artists are trying to do. And, if they (these students) are to be believed, they are now able to engage with these works in a way in which they simply were not able to engage with them before.

There is a less obvious point to be made as well, however. For, in addition to bringing different expectations to the relevant works, once they agree to accept, if only provisionally, what we might call Greenberg's "hypothesis" about flatness and treating paint as paint, these same students will now think about, and evaluate, what the relevant artists are doing on these canvases, with paint and color and line, etc., in ways in which, before reading Greenberg, they almost certainly would not have thought about or evaluated these works.

It's important to see that this second point, which I think is less often noted, even by Greenberg's supporters, is independent of the first, more obvious point, even though both points are of course importantly related. The first point is a point about getting the viewer to view the relevant works as deliberate attempts (whether conscious or not) to work on a flat surface without attempting to achieve perspective or three-dimensionality. And my suggestion is that it's already an achievement to get a relatively unsophisticated viewer to "look at" or "see" the relevant works in this way—that is, as deliberately eschewing perspective and deliberately avoiding certain ways of using paint. The second point, which assumes that this first step has already been taken, is a point about getting the viewer to assess what the artist has done, or failed to do, at least in part, in terms of his success or failure at doing something interesting within the constraints imposed by the commitment to flatness. And this is a point not just about getting the viewer to evaluate or appraise what's on the canvas, in terms of how well what's there succeeds in being interesting, relative to the relevant constraints, but, even before that, getting him to accept the possibility that a work might be of interest precisely because it has set itself the task of attempting to be of interest within those constraints.

Again, it's useful, it seems to me, to reflect on how Greenberg's ideas affect the viewing and evaluating habits of serious but, initially, at least, relatively unsophisticated viewers. At the first stage, as I'll call it, as described above, they've learned to see or think of the artist as deliberately working within the constraints of flatness and non-dissimulation (so far as the reality of paint as paint is concerned). At the second stage, having learned to do this, they are learning to look at what's on the canvas—typically, but not always, and not necessarily, according to Greenberg, non-figurative or "abstract" elements of color and line, etc.—and then to appraise it, in relation to the challenge described above: namely, the challenge, presumably accepted by the artist, of doing something aesthetically interesting with color and line, etc., on a flat surface and without dissimulation of the relevant sort. And if my own experience is any guide, students who initially found nothing of interest in the relevant works quite often succeed, after reading Greenberg, in finding a great deal that interests them in these same works.

### III

I've argued thus far that even if we are not impressed by Greenberg's definition of Modernism as a definition—as a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, that is to say, for the application of the relevant concept—there is something important and quite helpful to be learned from his suggested way of thinking of Modernism, at least for certain paintings from the relevant period. To be sure, thus far I've supported this claim only with anecdotal references to my own experience with intelligent but relatively uninformed students. But now I want to claim that Greenberg's suggestions about how to think about the relevant painters, and their work, are not merely a set of useful tools for helping naïve viewers appreciate the relevant paintings. On the contrary: it seems to me that his suggestions constitute, or at least clearly constituted, at the time he made them, a set of important insights into how best to understand, whether we are sophisticated viewers or naïfs, much of the work of the artists he had in mind: most explicitly, of course, Manet, and those subsequently directly influenced by him, and then, later, and very

emphatically, many of the so-called “Abstract Expressionists” of the so-called “New York School”. [Note on Kandinsky et al. in the early twentieth century.]

Greenberg’s achievement in this regard is sometimes obscured, I think, by the fact that he often wrote as though he meant to be saying that something very much like the “internal criticism” or “self-critique” he was talking about actually went on, consciously or unconsciously, in the minds of the artists he had in mind. In fact, as we’ll see shortly, the most plausible way of making sense of Greenberg’s only explicit reason for rejecting the view we’ve been discussing assumes that this early view is indeed making claims about the relevant artists’ (conscious or unconscious) intentions. But surely Greenberg’s view doesn’t have to be read as making such a claim, and surely it’s potentially an interesting and important view even if it’s not read that way. For what’s really important, it seems to me, in assessing the value of Greenberg’s early ideas about Modernism, is the question of whether he has given us, with those ideas, an interesting and useful way of thinking about the relevant work, and viewing it, even if we make no assumptions whatsoever about whether the relevant considerations ever actually entered into the minds and motivations, consciously or unconsciously, of the relevant painters.

How might one show that the answer to this question is “Yes”? One way, of course, would be to do, on a larger scale, and much more formally, something like what I’ve done on a very small scale and very informally above: provide evidence that in fact Greenberg’s suggestions have helped lots of people get something from works they would otherwise not have understood. Another way, though, which I cannot attempt here, would be to show, in a more theoretical vein, why it might be the case that Greenberg’s hypothesis has this effect, assuming it does: to show why, that is to say, Greenberg’s suggestions are so helpful, assuming they are, and thereby show that their ability to help viewers is not merely adventitious but, rather, arises out of the fact that Greenberg has in fact provided an insightful critical analysis that explains how works that are relatively uninteresting, on one way of viewing them, can become both interesting and very powerful, on another way of viewing them.

#### IV

Thus far, I’ve talked only about the value of Greenberg’s ideas about “self-criticism” for our appreciation of certain Modernist paintings. What about other art forms in the Modernist era? As we’ve noted, although Greenberg spends most of his time, in the essay we’re discussing, illustrating his “definition” of Modernism by reference to what the Modernist impulse meant for modern painting, he did say, or at least imply, quite clearly, that he meant his definition of Modernism to apply to all the arts that we would now say produced Modernist works. The question is: what could “self-criticism,” in Greenberg’s sense, possibly mean in these other media, and how plausible is the claim that thinking of products of these other media as having arisen out of a process of self-criticism can help us understand and appreciate those works in a way that other ways of thinking of them will not do?

A detailed answer to this question would take far more space than I have here. And what we would see, even with all the space in the world, is that, at best, Greenberg’s remarks apply to only some Modernist works in other art forms and certainly not to all. Still, it will be worthwhile, I think, to say at least a few words about how Greenberg’s ideas apply to other art forms, especially if, as I believe, they are just as useful there as when they are applied to painting.

Consider first, then, literature—the modern novel in particular. In “Chapter V” of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce imagines Stephen Dedalus, his alter-ego, in conversation with a fellow student at University College, a conversation in which the other student has been

hectoring Stephen about his non-involvement in various Irish nationalist and Roman Catholic causes and urging him to get involved. Stephen replies to his friend's remarks as follows:

When the soul of a man is born in this country, there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.

Much could be said about this response, but here I want to stress just one thing about it. It's not at all odd to imagine someone, artist or not, and, if the former, literary artist or artist of some other sort, saying he means to do his best to escape the "nets" or bonds of nationalist politics and some version or other of institutionalized religion. Nor would it be odd for someone, artist or non-artist, and, if the former, literary artist or otherwise, to say he means to do his best to escape the bonds of some particular language—a language which, perhaps, for historical reasons, is apt to limit his ability to progress in his artistic development. But surely it's very odd for someone to say, and especially odd for an artist who plans to work with language to say, that he means to escape the "nets" or bonds of language altogether. Indeed, it's hard to understand what it would mean for an artist working with language to escape the bonds of language in his art. And yet, as I've shown elsewhere, on one very plausible reading this is exactly what Joyce has Stephen saying here.

Fast-forward now to *Finegans Wake*. And instead of imagining yourself reading some part of it, imagine that you've set the text aside, in order to listen to a taped version of Joyce reading from it aloud. The selection you'd have to be listening to, since it's the only one Joyce taped, would be from the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" section of the novel. And what you would hear, unless you know this passage very well, will, I suspect, at first be more or less completely unintelligible to you. Indeed, it might very well remain unintelligible, at a certain level, no matter how many times you listened to it and no matter how often you went back to the text for help in making out what you're hearing. And yet—this at last is my point—I suspect you will have all the while been utterly enthralled by what you've been hearing. For what you'll have come to see, at least in part, is that the artistry of the *Wake* has more to do with sound than with sense, and that, while certainly still a novel, this work is a very different novel indeed from any you've ever heard or read before.

My point, of course, is to suggest that *Finegans Wake* is a wonderful example of a work that is best appreciated in light of Greenberg's idea of "self-criticism": far from merely accepting, and continuing to work in, the Romantic tradition he was heir to, Joyce has chosen, instead, to step back from his medium—he had already begun this process, of course, with the *Portrait* and *Ulysses*—and ask himself the sorts of questions Greenberg suggests are the defining questions of the Modernist artist. And the result is the extraordinary novel he called *Finegans Wake*.

I could go on, I believe, to illustrate my point here—about the relevance of Greenberg's "hypothesis" to Modernist literature—with any number of other Modernist works: works by Proust, say, or Musil, or Wolff, among many others. And similarly for works of Modernist poetry and drama. But space prohibits such an exercise here, as it prohibits an excursus into the realms of modern dance, music and architecture. My claim, which must remain unsubstantiated here, is that in each of these realms what I have called Greenberg's "hypothesis" about Modernism, and its essence, would help us engage with and meaningfully assess these works in ways importantly analogous to the way in which I've tried to show they help us engage and assess many works of Modernist painting.

## **MODERNISM AND THE END OF THE HISTORY OF ART**

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There are different strategies for characterizing Modernism<sup>1</sup> in the arts. Irving Howe states that the dominant motif of Modernism is ““Surprise, Excitement, Shock, Terror, Affront.”<sup>2</sup> Willie Thompson proposes that it is the repudiation of realistic forms of representation and accepted styles of art and architecture in favor of experimentation.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Huyssen lists the features of Modernism as “insistence on the autonomy of the art work, . . . obsessive hostility to mass culture, . . . radical separation from the culture of everyday life, . . . and distance from political, economic, and social concerns.”<sup>4</sup>

Another strategy is by art-historical periodization. Beginning with perhaps Manet, there was a break from the long tradition of historical narrative and other realistic paintings. A series of isms followed, beginning with Impressionism, moving through Fauvism, Cubism, De Stijl, Dadaism, Surrealism, and so on, and ending roughly with Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism.

While these approaches toward characterizing modernism are certainly useful—it gives one some practical recipes for classifying which works belong to which period—nonetheless, as a way to set off Modernism from its precursors and successors, it lacks a certain depth. It doesn't provide any clues as to why this transition took place and how its aesthetic led to what followed.

I suggest an approach toward characterizing modernism which, I will argue, has more explanatory power. The approach may be characterized most generally as the philosophy of the history of art. I don't claim originality here—this thesis has been suggested by Jean-Francois Lyotard,<sup>5</sup> Hans Belting, and Arthur Danto. What I DO propose to do is lay out the thesis more clearly and draw out its relevance to postmodernism. During the era of modernism, it was Clement Greenberg more than anyone else who developed a philosophy of the history of art. I begin with his position.

### **I. CLEMENT GREENBERG ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HISTORY OF ART**

Greenberg (1909-1994) sets out his reading of the history of Western art in “Abstract, Representational, and so forth” (1954).

From Giotto to Courbet, the painter's first task had been to hollow out an illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. One looked through this surface as through a proscenium into a stage. Modernism has rendered this stage shallower and shallower until now its backdrop has become the same as its curtain, which has now become all that the painter has left to work on.<sup>6</sup>

Modernism treats the curtain the same as the backdrop. “The picture has now become an entity belonging to the same order of space as our bodies; it is no longer the vehicle of an imagined equivalent of that order. Pictorial space has lost its ‘inside’ and become all ‘outside.’”<sup>7</sup> For Greenberg, this represents some sort of culmination in Western art, a breakthrough, a high point.

In “Modernism and Postmodern” (1980), he proposes that Modernism emerged in the middle of

the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “rather locally, in France, with Baudelaire in literature and Manet in painting, and maybe with Flaubert (1821-1880) too, in prose fiction.”<sup>8</sup> Modernism, he continues, “did not have a program.” It was NOT “an affair of ideas or theories or ideology.”<sup>9</sup>

In a late essay, “Modernist Painting,” he revises his reading of the history of art a bit, but without revising his view that Modernism represents some sort of culmination. In that essay, he reads the art of painting for “the last four centuries” as an attempt to “suppress and dispel the sculptural.”<sup>10</sup> What he means by this, is that painting ought to acknowledge its medium, which is to paint on a flat surface. He credits Ingres with taking a major step toward this project. He “executed pictures that were among the flattest, least sculptural done in the West . . . since the fourteenth century.”<sup>11</sup> On Greenberg’s reading, Modernism continued in this direction, but “made it more conscious of itself,” i.e., pursued this goal very deliberately.<sup>12</sup> Before the middle of the late nineteenth century, artists were not aware of the project they were engaged in, except in perhaps a very subliminal way.<sup>13</sup> The Modernists, by contrast, lifted the mental fog and became fully conscious of this project. Greenberg sites Cubism as another high point. “It eventuated in a kind of painting flatter than anything Western art had seen since before Cimabue—so flat indeed that it could hardly contain recognizable images.”<sup>14</sup>

Unlike some of the early formalists, most notably Clive Bell, Greenberg does not propose that Modernism broke decisively from the past. “Where did the Modernists get their standards and levels from? From the past, that is, the best of the past.”<sup>15</sup> Modernism “may mean devolution, an unraveling of anterior tradition, but it also means its continuation.”<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, he expresses the hope that Modernism has enabled us to have “a clearer understanding of the value of illustration as such.”<sup>17</sup> What Greenberg seems to mean by this is that what is valuable about the Old Masters is not the narrative stories and subjects of portraits, still-lives, and landscapes—but the formal qualities in these works of art. Greenberg makes this clear in another essay, “The New Sculpture” (1948; revised 1958):

A modernist work of art must try, in principle, to avoid dependence upon any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium. This means, among other things, renouncing illusion and explicitness. The arts are to achieve concreteness, “purity,” by acting solely in terms of their separate and irreducible selves.<sup>18</sup>

What Greenberg means here, I believe, is that if a work contains some representation, this is acceptable as long as it does not detract the viewer’s attention from the work as paint with color, line, and shape—that is, “the literal, sensational concreteness” of the work.<sup>19</sup> “Neither the representational nor the third-dimensional is essential to pictorial art . . .”<sup>20</sup> Although Greenberg normally does not use the philosophical language of essentialism and non-essentialism, there is a hint in this last statement that he is indeed an essentialist, that is, he holds that there is an essence of art, and the modernist movement has uncovered this essence. This is reinforced by a later statement in the same essay in which he states that “Rodin was the first sculptor since Bernini to try seriously to arrogate to his art some of the essential, rather than merely illustrative, qualities of painting.”<sup>21</sup>

Greenberg’s position that Modernism had finally uncovered the essence of art is clarified by some of his other statements on the history of art. In his 1944, “Abstract Art,” he proposes that an early revolution in Western painting (he does not indicate whether he regards it as the first) was the transition from “the hieratic flatness of Gothic and Byzantine [sic] to the three-dimensionality of the Renaissance.”<sup>22</sup> The problem in painting, he continues, was to “fit depth, volume, and surface” into “dramatic and decorative unity.”<sup>23</sup> The revolution occurred when,

“with the flexible medium of oil, the conflict between three-dimensional form and the plane surface was resolved finally by the annihilation of the second.”<sup>24</sup> Greenberg repeatedly refers to the project of Renaissance painters as the creation of “illusion,” the illusion of three-dimensional space, the “illusion of depth.”<sup>25</sup> But for Greenberg, this revolution fell short of capturing the essence of art because “pictures were organized too exclusively on the basis of the illusionist effect and with too little reference to the physical conditions of the art,” i.e., the painting is on a flat surface.<sup>26</sup> The Modernist revolution recognized the “physical nature of the medium and the materialism of art”—“pigment was sometimes applied so thickly that the canvas showed through, or it was piled in such impastos that the picture became almost a kind of relief.”<sup>27</sup> Greenberg credits the late phase of Cubism with finally “annihilating the third dimension.”<sup>28</sup> Those artists who “accepted in full the logic of cubism [sic] . . . became outright abstractionists, resigning themselves to the non-representational and the inviolability, more or less, of the plane surface.”<sup>29</sup> Greenberg closes this essay with a pronouncement on the significance of this revolution: “With a speed that still seems amazing one of the most epochal transformations in the history of art was accomplished.”<sup>30</sup> Thus Greenberg views this as some sort of culmination. “Let painting confine itself to the disposition pure and simple of color and line, and not intrigue us by associations with things we can experience more authentically elsewhere. The painter may go on playing with illusions, but only for the sake of satire.”<sup>31</sup>

In the 1960s Greenberg discussed another trait of modernism, and indeed sometimes suggested that it is the defining characteristic of modernism. “The essence of Modernism,” he wrote in 1965, “lies in the use of the characteristic method of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself . . .”<sup>32</sup> Greenberg credits Kant with the beginnings in modern times of this “self-critical tendency” in modern culture.<sup>33</sup> But I suggest that for Greenberg this trait is not disconnected from his essentialism. Indeed, it is the move toward nonrepresentation and flatness which allowed artists (painters here) to see and to acknowledge for the first time that a painting is paint on a flat canvas. “The Impressionists, in Manet’s wake, abjured underpainting and glazing, to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colors used were made of real paint that came from pots or tubes.”<sup>34</sup> Greenberg took this self-criticism to be principally about each of the arts finding what belonged to its own medium. “The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Therefore each art could be rendered ‘pure’ . . .”<sup>35</sup> I will suggest a bit later that this self-reflection which led to the acknowledgment that a painting is paint on a flat canvas led, in Postmodernism, to the virtual abandonment of painting. There is an irony here, for as we shall see in a bit, according to Danto the intense self-reflection of art on its essence is what led to the “end of art.”

To sum up this part, I take Greenberg tacit view of the history of art to capture something central to Modernism, namely, a philosophy of the history of art which states that art in the west was dominated by representation for most of its history, but that in the early twentieth century it made a breakthrough and found the essence of art. It uncovered the true nature of art which is not to be a window to the world and in this sense not an illusion, but to see the work of art as it is, paint on a canvas, or in the case of sculpture, three-dimensional forms. But like most philosophies of history which claim that some end has been reached, the problem is what to do with what follows. And this brings us to my claim that the “end of art” thesis clarifies the project of Modernism and the transition to Postmodernism.

## **2. ARTHUR DANTO AND *THE END OF ART***

In a paper published in 1984 and revised in 1997, Arthur Danto, acknowledging his debt to Hegel and following Hegel’s preference for trinities, proposes that there are three stages in the history of western art.<sup>36</sup>

The progressive stage is the claim that art is the progressive conquest of natural appearances. More traditionally this may be called the mimetic theory of art, that art is the imitation of nature and artists became progressively better at this task. Danto states that progress here is essentially “optical duplication—the painter commanded increasingly refined technologies for making paintings roughly equivalent to actual objects and sciences, decreasing distance between the actual and pictorial optical simulation.”<sup>37</sup> This stage in western art came to an end around 1905 with motion pictures. This new technology enabled the conquest of appearances. But much remained for art to explore—the inner life of humans.

The second stage occurred from circa 1905 to 1964.<sup>38</sup> After the rise of cinematography, painters and sculptors began asking what was left for them to do. A new theory of art was required, and indeed a new theory emerged in the form of the expressionist theory of Benedetto Croce and later R.G. Collingwood (1902 & 1936). Art is about expressing the inner life of humans, especially the realm of feelings. The theorists of expressionism granted that feelings are always about or towards some external object; but the expression of these feelings greatly affects the representation of objects. By the time this move toward expression reached its pinnacle with Abstract Expressionism, artists claimed that their works were about objectless feelings—pure joy, or depression, or excitement. And at this point,

the history of art acquires a totally different structure. . . . There is no longer any reason to think of art as having a progressive history; there is simply not the possibility of a developmental sequence with the concept of expression as there is with the concept of mimetic representation.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the history of art “sunders into a sequence of individual acts, one after another.”<sup>40</sup> “The history of art is just the lives of artists, one after another.”<sup>41</sup>

This brings Danto to his third phase in the history of art, the end of art. And here he appeals to Hegel’s notion that the goal of history is the complete self-consciousness, the self-reflexivity of Spirit. Danto’s secularization and demythologizing of this Hegelian theme is that art, in this last phase, has become completely absorbed with reflection on its own nature.

The [art] objects approach zero as their theory approaches infinity, so that virtually all there is at the end is theory, art having finally become vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought upon itself, and remaining as it were, solely as the object of its own theoretical consciousness.<sup>42</sup>

When this happens, art has come to an end, and what we now have, again taking a cue from Hegel, is philosophy in the sense that art has become entirely self-reflexive, concerned with its own nature. It has become “thinking about art” rather than art. But Danto hastily adds: “Of course, there will go on being art-making. But art-makers, living in what I like to call the post-historical period of art, will bring into existence works which lack the historical importance or meaning we have for a very long time come to expect.”<sup>43</sup>

This is where Greenberg’s essentialism and his progressive view of history—progressive in the sense that he reads all of history as pointing toward some goal, for him nonrepresentation and formalism—come together. Once art reached this point sometime in the 1950s or 60s, it reached a culmination. Art came to an end. From this point on, art has no grand story. But where does it go from there?

### III. POSTMODERNISM AND THE END OF ART

Well, it is POSTmodernism. But of course, this is not very helpful. Danto's philosophy of history provides us with an entry point. Art after Modernism is "art after the end of art."<sup>44</sup> It is, Danto continues, characterized by a series of autobiographical expressions, one after the other with no apparent direction. "Everything is permitted"—realisms, social and political criticism, explorations of the subconscious, expressionism, and so on.<sup>45</sup> "A number of styles" succeed . . . "one another at a dizzying rate. . ."<sup>46</sup> This should not be surprising if one accepts the idea that art has become post-historical, that it is no longer guided by any historical tradition and has no direction.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps the most widely identified trait of postmodernism is eclecticism. Indeed, this seems to have been one of the earliest usages of the term as applied to architecture.<sup>48</sup> But some recent painting also displays this mixing of styles. John Currin (U.S., b.1962), in his better works (and I think many of them are quite awful), combines traditional styles and subjects from the Northern Renaissance (e.g., Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Venus Standing in a Landscape*, c.1529) with kitsch.<sup>49</sup> Oleg Maslov (Russian, b.1965) and Viktor Kuznetsov (Russian, b.1958) combine a neoclassical style with frivolous subject matter. Wang Guangyi (Chinese, b.1956) combines Socialist Realism with Pop. David Ligare (U.S., b.1945) combines classical scenes with pop subjects (e.g., sandwiches by the sea). Carlo Maria Mariani (Italian) uses a Neoclassical style in an attempt to capture a timeless realm of beauty and perfection. This eclecticism is possible only within a framework which does not see any goal or direction to art, where art no longer has any significant history.

The eclecticism of Postmodernism is closely related to another of its traits—intense self-reflection. Greenberg, correctly I think, proposed that this is one of the principal traits of Modernism. But the Postmodernists push it further. Postmodernists borrow liberally from earlier movements, but do so in a very self-conscious way. This intense self-reflexivity is precisely what Hegel predicted about the transformation of art to philosophy. But Postmodern self-reflection is not quite what Greenberg talked about. For Greenberg, self-reflection (or what he more commonly called "self-criticism") meant the awareness that the essence of art is to be faithful to the medium of each art. For Danto, (the third stage) it is to reflect on the very nature of art—its essence, goals, boundaries, and value.

One form of this intense self-reflection is a return to classicism. David Ligare, John Currin, Ricardo Cinalli (Argentinian, b.1948), among many others, adopt a form of neo-realism. But it is a realism which borrows heavily from the history of art. Hegel would be delighted. It is too early to tell whether this movement marks a return to grand narrative or whether it is only another short-lived ism. But perhaps this is the first inkling that the postmodern end of the history of art is ending.

In the first part of this paper, I tried to show how the end of history motif enlightens Modernism. In this last section I have offered a few suggestions of how it also might help cast light on Post-Modernism. Many of the traits of Postmodernism can be clarified by the complete demise of any historical direction or pattern in the making of art. In the words of Hegel, art now is "outside the pale of history."

#### NOTES

1. Cahoon claims that Baudelaire (1821-67) was the first to use the term modernity (*modernité*) in "The Painter of Modern Life." In his introductory notes to Baudelaire's "The Painter in Modern Life," in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Cahoon (Cambridge, MA: Blackwells,

- 1996), 136.
2. Irving Howe, introduction to *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon, 1967). Quoted by Clement Greenberg in "The Necessity of Formalism," in *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*, ed. Robert Morgan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 45.
  3. Willie Thompson, *Postmodernism and History* (NY: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004), 132.
  4. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1986), vii.
  5. Lyotard catches this when he states that "simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." He then connects this movement to modern science, assuming that science proceeds without narratives. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge" (1979), in Cahoon, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, 482.
  6. Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and so forth," (1954) in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 136.
  7. Greenberg, "Abstract," 136.
  8. Greenberg, "Modernism and Postmodernism" (1980), in *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 26-27.
  9. Greenberg, "Modernism and Postmodernism," 27. Here Greenberg is disingenuous. He regards modernism as the highest achievement of art, and, like Hegel, sees all before as leading up to it. This position is certainly an "affair of ideas."
  10. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (originally in *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965): 193-201), in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Francina & Charles Harrison with Deirdre Paul (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 7.
  11. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 7.
  12. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 7.
  13. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 9.
  14. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 7.
  15. Greenberg, "Modern and Postmodern," 27.
  16. Greenberg, "Modern and Postmodern," 9.
  17. Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and so forth," 138.
  18. Greenberg, "The New Sculpture" (1948; revised 1958) in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 139.
  19. Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 139.
  20. Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 139-140.
  21. Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 140.
  22. Greenberg, "Abstract Art" (1944) in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 199.
  23. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 199.
  24. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 200.
  25. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 200.
  26. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 201.
  27. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 202.
  28. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 202.
  29. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 202.
  30. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 202-203.
  31. Greenberg, "Abstract Art," 203.
  32. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Modern Art and Modernism*, 5.
  33. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 5.
  34. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 6.
  35. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 5-6. What Greenberg proposes is that painting should acknowledge that it is flat and emphasize flatness, sculpture should acknowledge that it is three-dimensional and emphasize three-dimensionality.
  36. Danto is not very clear on whether he proposes stages in the history of western art (that philosophy of history of western art) or three models of art history. Like Hegel's Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic, Danto is, I believe, ambiguous about whether these are states or models or both. I will treat them as stages.
  37. Arthur Danto, "The End of Art," in *The Death of Art*, ed. Berel Lang (NY: Haven, 1984), 9.
  38. With considerable historical brashness, Danto chooses a specific year for its ending, 1964, because that was the year that Andy Warhol held one of his first major exhibitions at the Stable Gallery in

- NYC. Danto's choice of this date appears in his 1997 essay, "Three Decades After the End of Art," in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 35.
39. Danto, "End of Art," 24.
  40. Danto, "End of Art," 24.
  41. Danto, "End of Art," 25.
  42. Danto, "End of Art," 31.
  43. Danto, "End of Art," 31.
  44. Danto, "Three Decades After the End of Art," 4.
  45. Arthur Danto, "Introduction: Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary," in *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 12.
  46. Danto, "Introduction: Modern, Postmodern," 13.
  47. It may be noted in passing that some regard this dizzying succession as one of the virtues of postmodern art. George Dickie, defending the Institutional Theory of art, claims that one of the advantages of this theory—a theory which tries to take account of the postmodern scene—is that it has the potential to bring about a flourishing of originality and experimentation. George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). But this presupposes that creativity should be one of the primary values of art. Bruce Cole and others have pointed out that the emphasis on creativity in art is a very recent phenomenon, emerging as a primary value only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Bruce Cole, *The Renaissance Artist at Work: From Pisano to Titian* (NY: Harper & Row, 1983).
  48. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (NY: Rizzoli, 1977, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. 1991). Although he did not invent the term postmodern, his 1977 book is often regarded as having popularized its use.
  49. See Edward Lucie-Smith, *Movements in Art Since 1945*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 276.

## **BAUHAUS AND BIOLOGY**

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The Bauhaus is one of the icons of modernism, but biology is not the first thing to come to mind when discussing this major influence on modern art and design. However, two members of the Bauhaus faculty, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, both had a great interest in biology. In fact, they used illustrations from the same scientific encyclopedia as inspiration for their work. In turn, several other artists who were at various times associated with one or both of these artists—Max Ernst, Joan Miró, and Hans Arp—also used many organic forms in their work. In this presentation, I will discuss the biological interests of Klee and Kandinsky and how biological images were manifest in their art and that of their associates.

### **KLEE**

Of the two artists, Klee's interest in the living world was more long-term and wide-ranging. He kept a large collection of organic specimens, including plants, sea creatures, and insects (Güse, 1991). He even went to the trouble of pressing plant samples to create a small herbarium. Klee also dissected fruits and flowers, and cross sections of such specimens occur repeatedly in his work. In addition, he encouraged his students to take a close look at nature. When he was teaching at the Bauhaus, he brought in a selection of leaves, distributed them to his students, and asked them to draw a variety of leaf forms (Verdi, 1991). At first the students saw this almost as a joke: serious art students like themselves being asked to do an assignment usually given to grammar-school children. Then as Klee spoke seriously of leaf structure, and they looked more closely at the leaves, they realized that there was a great deal to learn there about seeing.

In a brief article entitled "Ways of Studying Nature," Klee (1991) wrote not only of looking at external structure, but of looking within as well. He meant this both literally and figuratively. He writes: "Man dissects the thing and visualizes its inside with the help of plane sections; the character of the object is built up according to the number and kind of sections that are needed. This is visible penetration, to some extent that of a simple knife, to some extent helped by finer instruments which make the material structure or material function clear to us" (p. 8). There are several examples in his work of such cross sections including the drawing, *Temperaments*. But Klee is also interested in another way of getting to the inner life of an organism. In the same essay he notes that the result of observation and dissection can be the ability "to draw inferences about the inner object from the optical exterior, and what is more, intuitive inferences" (p. 9). An Episcopal priest/cookbook writer named Robert Capon (1969) has written beautifully and lovingly of slicing an onion, and making close observations on the differences between cutting across the onion, versus from root to leaf end. If it were not for the odor, this would be a wonderful experience to do in either an art or a biology class, and would re-enact some of Klee's own exercises.

There are a number of examples of biologists who have also stressed the importance of seeing. After all, biology is the most visual of the sciences (Ritterbush, 1968a). The 19th-century zoologist, Louis Agassiz, was famous for the way he taught his students how to observe (Lane, 1945). He would give the student a pickled fish specimen.

Without dissecting it, the student was to closely observe the fish and then return to Agassiz for questioning. Inevitably, the student would be unable to answer the professor's questions and would be sent back for more observation. This would often go on for days until the student finally had a sufficient grasp of specimen that he could answer Agassiz's questions. Years later a number of his former students were interviewed and they all agreed that, whether or not they pursued a career in biology, they looked at the world differently after this experience.

I do not know if Klee's students felt the same way, but I think close observation is so outside most of our experience that it is memorable when it does occur. Georgia O'Keeffe said that when she was in grade school, her teacher brought in flowers and asked the students to look at them and then draw them (Robinson, 1989). This lesson had a profound affect on O'Keeffe, and from then on she loved to draw flowers. This brings to mind a quote, attributed to Goethe, but so obvious and yet true that it has been repeated by countless others: you do not really see something until you have drawn it. Obviously Klee agreed with this adage and lived by it both in his own work and in his teaching.

## **KANDINSKY**

Klee did not only go to nature itself for his inspiration, he also went to printed materials, including the science volumes of the encyclopedia *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*. These influences show up especially in his work of the 1920s. Perhaps not coincidentally Wassily Kandinsky also owned volumes in this series, namely those on zoology and botany. Kandinsky and Klee became good friends while working at the Bauhaus. They lived in adjoining houses there from 1926 to 1933. While Klee's work always had organic themes, Kandinsky's art did not incorporate them explicitly until after his years at the Bauhaus. However, there is evidence that he was interested in such forms during the Bauhaus years, perhaps due to Klee's influence. In *Point and Line to Plane*, published in 1926, Kandinsky uses an illustration of blood cells taken from the encyclopedia, so he must have already been drawing upon it as a resource at this time.

After the Bauhaus closed in 1933, Kandinsky and his wife moved to Paris, and it is in his work from 1934 onward that biomorphic forms become more prominent in his art. Vivian Barnett (1985) has done an in-depth investigation into the scientific sources for Kandinsky's paintings and drawings during the Paris years from 1933 to his death there in 1944. His papers, library, and sketches are all in the archives of the Pompidou Center in Paris. Barnett went through the files he kept of images and other resources and found clippings with German text going back to the 1930s, before he left the Bauhaus. Among the articles on animals was one on deep-sea life from 1931 and another on diatoms, unicellular aquatic organisms. She also examined the books in his library including the volumes of *Gegenwart* which he owned. She found evidence that he did in fact use these books. Invitations to exhibitions in German—all dated 1932—mark a number of pages in the *Gegenwart* encyclopedia, again indicating that organisms were on his mind while he was still teaching at the Bauhaus. Also marked are images of worms and a cross section through a plant stem—suggesting that like Klee, Kandinsky was interested in the interior as well as the exterior of living things.

Barnett cannot document that Kandinsky ever visited the Natural History Museum in Paris, though through the centuries a number of distinguished artists, including Delacroix and Rousseau, found inspiration there. But she does think it's significant that Georges Cuvier founded the collection of comparative anatomy at the Museum and that

in Kandinsky's copy, the encyclopedia pages on comparative anatomy show "obvious signs of perusal (coffee stains) as well as a marker for the pages relevant to Cuvier" (p. 82). I can relate to the coffee stains; my books have many of them. I should also note that in my copy of Barnett's article this quote was underlined by my late husband, and he put an exclamation mark in the margin. I'm not sure if this mark is because of the reference to Cuvier—my husband was a French historian—or because of the idea of someone spilling coffee on a book, something Bob would have considered a mortal sin.

In any case, Barnett's research indicates that Kandinsky had a serious interest in biomorphic forms, an interest that extended back to the Bauhaus years, but obviously deepened while he lived in Paris. This was probably due less to the proximity of scientific institutions such as the Natural History Museum than to the presence of Surrealist artists who were also very much fascinated by biomorphic forms. In 1934, Kandinsky came to know several of these artists, including Arp, Miró, and Ernst, all of whom used such forms in their work.

## **SURREALISM**

When I first became interested in the relationship between images of cells in art and science (Flannery, 1998), I was amazed to find so many references to cells in the works of these artists, and it was only later that I learned of the importance of biomorphic forms in the Surrealist iconography. What attracted surrealists and others to biomorphic forms was the applicability of these shapes as symbols of life and of the forces of nature (Waldberg, 1965). For Surrealists, cells were the antithesis of the linear, angular, geometric world which represented mechanism and technology. The biologist and student of modern art, C.H. Waddington (1970), writes that Arp can be called a "biological constructivist" because of his heavy use of biomorphic rather than of the geometrical forms of the cubists. André Masson also saw biomorphism as an alternative to the regular forms of cubism (Rubin & Lanchner, 1976). For Kandinsky, the use of biomorphic forms was a statement against the technological evils of the modern world (Phillips, 1988). These forms had sexual and sensuous connotations and represented a vitalistic life force. What could be more representative of the life force than the cell itself? This idea is presented very forcefully in Philip Ritterbush's (1968b) *The Art of Organic Forms* in which he looks at the history of the concept of organic form in biology, art, and literature.

Each of the artists I've discussed used biomorphic forms differently. Arp's shapes are simply outlines, boldly drawn or carved in wood. Ernst uses several different kinds of cellular references including small multicellular organisms such as those pictured in *Graminacaeous Bicycle*. Miró, like Arp, employs amoebic shapes but also forms that resemble microscopic animals that you can see wiggling around on a microscope slide. All these types of forms show up in Kandinsky's work, but are transmuted for his own purposes and dressed in his distinctive color pallet. I think my favorite is *Ordered Arrangement*. To me it looks like an electron microscopic view of a nucleated cell, but with a lot more life than such images usually have. By the nature of the process used to create them, electron microscope images are always in black and white and are of fixed or dead specimens. This technology is a wonderful way to see the fine structure of the cell, but as with any imaging technology, it is limited. The limits here are the lack of color and movement, just those characteristics that make life so interesting. Kandinsky has replaced them and created a cell that does look alive, that is dynamic and exciting.

## SCIENCE AND ART

When I show my students a work of art such as Kandinsky's *Ordered Arrangement*, I make this point: that art can express things about life that science often can't. These two images, a work of science and a work of art, communicate different but complementary things; neither can tell the whole story. This is one of the reasons I use art in my science classes. Another is that such exercises break down barriers between disciplines. I teach nonscience majors. Some are majoring in fine arts or communications, but in many other disciplines as well. It makes no difference what their interests, they are all living in a world where art and science are both powerful and interacting influences. They need to appreciate these interactions. At the very least, they need to know that such interactions exist.

Klee and Kandinsky were creating art almost a century ago, when both science and art were different enterprises. Still, they could not do their art without learning about science, without observing the living world much as a scientist does. The longer I teach, the more I see the usefulness of teaching science as part of an interrelated web of subjects. It is impossible to appreciate evolution, for example, without looking into its history and into its relationship to religion and to social science. Art also comes in here because there are a number of iconic images, including some by the artist/biologist Ernst Haeckel, which are key to the appreciation of this theory. And as I hope I have illustrated, I find it hard to teach about cells, my favorite topic, without introducing Klee and Kandinsky.

## A FINAL STORY

I would like to end with a story that seems totally unrelated to the subject of my presentation today, but hopefully by the end you will see there is a point to telling it. This anecdote relates to the paper I presented at this conference last year. It was on the relationship between biology and jewelry (Flannery, 2005). The point I was trying to make was that jewelry can be a manifestation of a biological drive called biophilia which is defined as an innate desire to associate with members of other species (Wilson, 1984). Thousands of years ago, this urge was fulfilled on a daily basis because humans lived surrounded by plants and animals. Today, things are very different. Most of us have little intimate contact with the living world. I argued that, in this day and age, one way to feed the biophilic urge, at least slightly, is to wear ornaments that are representations of living things. This is why organisms like flowers and lizards and birds adorn so many pieces of jewelry. Among the examples I presented was a beautiful silver dandelion brooch with a "jewel" at its center: a shard of auto safety glass picked up in the street. It was created by Jan Yager, a Philadelphia goldsmith (Rosolowski, 2001). She also crafted *The Invasive Species Tiara*. While you may not want to wear this item to the grocery store, the individual elements can be worn as brooches, making it much more practical.

In any event, a couple of months ago, I received an email with the subject heading: Invasive Species Tiara. I almost deleted it as yet another example of spam with an odd subject heading, but the phrase rang a bell. When I opened the message, it was from Jan Yager. She had found my paper on the Web, in the *Proceedings* of last year's conference, and was thrilled that a "scientist" was citing her work. I was thrilled that a "real" artist was interested in mine. We subsequently had a wonderful phone conversation and have exchanged articles. Among the things I learned was how much observation of nature Yager accomplishes around her urban home and studio, and how inquisitive she is about

her observations. She does research on the plants she sees and collects, and was rather taken aback to find that scientists call the dandelions, purslane, and chicory that enliven her environs as “invasive” species. This is why she created a tiara, the ultimate in high-society jewelry, to honor them. She sees it as particularly and ironically fitting that this piece is designed to be worn by the most invasive of all species. She also told me that she had just completed *The Tiara of Useful Knowledge*, adorned with rye, potato, and clover, among others. Again, there are historical allusions in this work. The title comes from the charter of the American Philosophical Society, founded in Philadelphia in 1743 “for Promoting Useful Knowledge.”

I think the contact Yager and I have had has enriched us both. I know that it has been wonderful for me. I do not have much contact with artists, and it’s great to hear an artist talk about what nature means to her, how she sees the beauty of species that scientists call invasive, and how she creates beautiful works of art representing things we call weeds. My exchange with Yager, which I hope will continue in the future, is an example of the kinds of interactions that I want my students to know about: to understand that artists and scientists not only talk to each other but have a common language—the natural world—through which they communicate. Also, they both derive a great deal from these interactions. In our case, Yager feels that her work is valued in a way she might have been less aware of before. I know that I look at jewelry differently and have more appreciation for the layers of thought as well as craft that go into the work of an artist of Yager’s caliber.

Finally, it is important to note that it was this conference that made this interaction possible. I had been thinking about the relationship between jewelry and biophilia for some time, but it is not every conference would be interested in hearing a presentation on this subject. However, when I was considering a topic for this conference, it seemed a good fit. And the free availability of the *Proceedings* on the Web made it possible for someone like Yager to find it. It seems particularly fitting to mention this at the 20<sup>th</sup> of these annual conferences. I think this must have been the kind of thing that the original organizers had in mind and that present organizers embody, and I would like to thank the School of Visual Arts for enabling me to be part of this wonderful enterprise on so many occasions.

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## **EMIL NOLDE'S RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS OF 1909 AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERNISM IN GERMANY**

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In the summer of 1909, in remote northern Germany, the painter Emil Nolde made his first decisive turn away from an early impressionistic manner, marked by contemporary subjects, towards a dramatic, new expressionistic style in the form of four paintings based on biblical texts. From that summer until his death in 1956, he painted fifty pictures with religious subjects.<sup>1</sup> He himself referred to those of 1909 as “milestones” in his turn from “external optical charm” to “discovered inner worth,” and he implied that they played the same role in modern German art.<sup>2</sup> Recent scholars are inclined to agree: Donald Gordon, in his 1987 book *Expressionism: Art and Idea*, wrote that Expressionism in Berlin began with Nolde’s “initiative” that summer.<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the conference topic, I would like to reassess these works in light of conventional conceptions of modernist painting—but in two distinct ways: first, by considering the degree to which the paintings themselves actually correspond to these conceptions, and second, by examining the very odd manner in which theories of modernist painting later came to skew both the painter’s remarks and the critical and art historical literature on these same works.

Central to the theory of modernism in art is a notion of aesthetic innovation and novel means of expression. Often this is charted as stylistic progress conceived of as consecutive, nearly historically inevitable steps from naturalism to non-objectivity. Clement Greenberg, six paragraphs into his essay “Modernist Painting,” identified the first links in this chain: Manet, the Impressionists, Cézanne.<sup>4</sup> Nolde follows suit here: born in 1867, he was as close to the generation of Seurat and van Gogh (born in 1859 and 1853, respectively) as to his German colleagues in Die Brücke, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Erik Heckel (1880 and 1883). And like other Post-Impressionist painters, he used Impressionism—then still the main advanced style in Berlin—as a springboard to a yet more radical, abstract idiom. In fact, one significant aspect of his artistic activity during that summer of 1909, it seems, was his determination to paint his way out of the impressionistic style that had dominated his work since 1903. Just before writing of the first religious paintings in his memoirs, he described his dissatisfaction with his prior pictures, painted *plein-air* before the motif: “My method of the last year, to draw and paint in imitation of nature and to give it form...with the first stroke or the first color--was no longer sufficient for me....The means of the Impressionists seemed to me only a course to follow, not a goal that satisfied me.” He concluded that “Nature truly and exactly copied does not create an artwork. A wax figure confoundingly life-like causes nothing but disgust.”<sup>5</sup>

Based on the evidence of his pictures, we can take Nolde at his word here. He abandoned the “loose and shimmering” patchworks of color of the Impressionists, in the pursuit of what he called “concentrated simplicity” and “cohesion.”<sup>6</sup> This change in attitude likely originated in his first contact with the art of Henri Matisse earlier that year.<sup>7</sup> And with *The Last Supper* (U316)—according to him the pivotal painting—he not only broke away from his earlier style, but also established the model for two of the three other religious paintings of 1909. The transformation was sudden and stark: the open, loosely organized imagery and deep space of the landscapes gave way to a closed, compact composition of figures set tightly against the picture surface; the mottled surfaces of bright atmospheric colors became broad, flat, clearly defined planes of purer color in darker tones.

Yet, while milestones obviously chart progress in one direction—forward—Nolde’s paintings are decidedly equivocal—progressive in style, but retrogressive in subject matter. It is difficult to square their biblical and literary subject matter with practically any notion of modernist art. Obviously these canvases are not modern in the Baudelairian sense of imagery taken from contemporary life. They violate Gustave Courbet’s simple, forceful pronouncement on contemporaneity: “show me and angel, and I will paint one.” Furthermore, their progressive form aside, Nolde’s religious paintings can be said to function reasonably well within the millennia long Western tradition of Christian art.

Nolde described this paradox best himself. Commenting on twentieth-century art during a conversation of 1909, he stated: “One must not only believe in a new art and see it, one must also examine the old art with new eyes. I myself now see the old art with old and simultaneously with modern eyes.”<sup>8</sup> And so while modernism is said to have sprung from a radicalized consciousness that freed itself from all specific historical ties, Nolde looked to history—to “old” art—or inspiration.<sup>9</sup> His *The Last Supper* shares important pictorial elements with works by Lucas Cranach—for instance, panels of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, one of his most common subjects, with versions in Munich and Dresden that Nolde likely knew.<sup>10</sup> The two share the general disposition of the figures. Most tellingly, in both the frontal and profile heads are packed closely together into head clusters, with those at the corners obscured and fragmentary, and often with only their eyes depicted.

It is also worth noting that while modernism in art is often thought to be international in its thrust, Nolde, perhaps fascinated with romantic conceptions of race and Nordic heritage, turned to German sources. He conceived of his work as Germanic, once describing how he “loved passionately the old, pure German art for its harsh self-willed, spiritually perfect beauty,” and how he hoped “to give back to German art its Germanic character, which it had lost two and a half centuries ago.”<sup>11</sup>

And so it would seem that Nolde’s “milestones” are not so progressive after all—being neither contemporary nor secular in subject matter, nor international in outlook. Nor are they fully “modernist” in Clement Greenberg’s sense. According to him, a necessary corollary to the stylistic progress of modern art—toward abstraction and non-objectivity—was a simultaneous disdain for content: “Art for art’s sake’ and ‘pure poetry’ appear and subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like the plague.” More precisely, the content of modernist painting progressively “dissolve[d] completely into form,” with the result that a painting “cannot be reduced in whole or part to anything not itself.”<sup>12</sup> This formulation obviously disqualifies literary subject matter of any type.

Nolde, conversely, conceived of his rejection of the material world of Impressionism as an explicit embrace of what he considered its opposite: spirituality. To the comment cited above—“Nature truly and exactly copied does not create an artwork”—he appended the statement “Nature converted by the addition of one’s own soulfulness and spirituality raises the work to an artwork.”<sup>13</sup> For him, abstraction was by nature not primarily rational and constructive or aesthetic and sensuous—as Greenberg would have it—but intuitive and mystical. His radical simplification of natural forms was not simply for pictorial cohesion and more immediate visual expressiveness, but also part of a striving for spiritual essences. He sought, he wrote, “a deeper spirituality, religion, and inwardness.”<sup>14</sup> In retrospect, his attitude seems closer to that of Paul Gauguin and the Symbolists than to Cézanne, Greenberg’s pivotal figure. This new goal led Nolde to a simultaneous alteration in both style and subject matter: away from the contemporaneity of *plein-air* landscape painting and towards biblical narratives. In other words, instead of attempting to avoid subject matter like the plague, Nolde sought to reconcile traditional literary subject matter with progressive abstract form.

And this was not entirely the futile task that Greenberg might have envisioned. Rather, Nolde was relatively successful at this reconciliation—in fact, he devised not simply one, but two strategies to achieve it. First, his tripartite formula from that summer—biblical narratives, abstract form, and spiritual content—is notable: what he described, more or less, is a formula for icon painting. It is also significant that he singled out his first and third biblical pictures as fulfilling this formula, for he always described them as unique in their deeply spiritual subject matter and content. He wrote of “foundering in religion and emotion” while painting *The Last Supper* (the first), of “pulling” himself out of it with *Derision* (the second), then of going “below again into the mystical depths of human-godly being” with *Pentecost* (the third).<sup>15</sup>

Thus, for *The Last Supper* and *Pentecost* (U318), Nolde invented an abstract pictorial language of intense, inward spirituality. He distilled his images into nearly symmetrical, tightly grouped, closely cropped compositions of heads and figures organized into two rows parallel to, and directly against, the picture surface. The iconic formality is reinforced by the nearly exclusive use of strictly profile or frontal poses. All eyes are either closed or fixed open, yet unfocused—indicative of quiescence and intense inner workings. None interact. Anecdote is shunned, gesture and movement suppressed, and stillness prevails. In effect, Nolde reconciled the abstract and the literary by favoring the iconic at the expense of the narrative.

With this strategy, Nolde avoided the collision of the iconic and the narrative. Rather, his “concentrated simplicity” and “cohesion” reinforced his “soulfulness and spirituality” in a simple formula: naturalism equaled materiality; abstraction, spirituality. But nudging this new iconic mode toward the more discursive subject matter of *Derision* (U317) was a tricky proposition. The subject came from the Gospels, where Christ is struck and scorned twice: by the high priest, and in the praetorium. Note the literary details here. First, the helmets: they identify this as the latter scene. Then, the elements directly from the Gospel of Matthew: Christ is stripped to the waist, is crowned with thorns, and holds a reed in his right hand. But also note that these details are not given the sole task of carrying meaning.

At the heart of Nolde’s resolution of seemingly antithetical style and subject matter is a single device: dichotomy. This became one of the most significant mechanisms of meaning in his biblical pictures, in the form of broad contrasts of themes, types, colors, and modes. In *Derision*, a silent protagonist (Christ) endures the scornful laughter of his antagonists (the Roman praetorians). In developing this device, Nolde appropriated elements from two types of art. One was satirical prints: as a student he had copied works by Francisco Goya from the portfolio *Los Caprichos*.<sup>16</sup> In *Derision*, Nolde, like Goya, employed a language of types: the heroic—Christ—and the contemptuous—the praetorians. In a neat inversion, he attacks the latter, so that these deriders become the butt of Nolde’s—and our—scorn. Like Goya, he accomplished this with caricature. It became a common feature in his religious paintings, used to establish types, to belittle, and to draw distinctions.

His reason for employing caricature here seems straightforward. If abstraction roughly equals spirituality in his iconic mode, a foil—or a series of them—is necessary to represent its opposite in these more complex and discursive images. Formally, it is a convenient strategy: since caricature originated as a form of controlled regression from a naturalistic standard of style, it meshed seamlessly with Nolde’s new abstract language. Furthermore, the caricaturist attempts to reveal the man behind the mask of pretension—in his “‘essential’ littleness and ugliness”—and thus to “kill by ridicule.” He seeks the “perfect deformity” in order to show how a more cooperative nature might allow the corrupt soul to express itself.<sup>17</sup>

Of course *Derision* is not a work of satire *per se*—it lacks a concrete element or topical dimension. Satire never suited Nolde: rather than political or social, he was religious and moral in his inclinations. Thus, the element of satirical prints most attractive to him was the moral judgments at the core of their scornful amusements. So Nolde turned to a second source for his imagery—one that incorporated the language of satire, but within a religious, literary, and moral framework consistent with his new subjects: Northern Late Medieval and Renaissance art. Artists as prominent as Matthias Grünewald, in his *Mocking of Christ* (1503), and as obscure as Jan Sanders van Hemessen in his *Christ Scorned* (1544) had painted the subject of Christ scorned. In fact, both panels were in the Bavarian national collection when Nolde visited it just before 1900.<sup>18</sup>

In *Derision*, Nolde relied primarily on two devices to create his dichotomies—and to invest them with moral weight: first caricature, then type. The tormenters in this and later pictures share certain features, including gaping mouths and snagged teeth. Northern artists commonly used caricature in religious paintings as an outward marker of the moral corruption in the soul of sinners. And in this tradition, the countenance of Christ is often used as a foil for the aggressors, so that, as in *Derision*, he commonly has a tranquil, self-possessed demeanor. In other words, Nolde aped the northerners to make a distinction not only between the heroic and the odious—ala Goya—but also between the more fundamental spiritual states of grace and soullessness.

I stress Nolde's relative success at integrating abstract imagery and literary subject matter in order to emphasize that his embrace of such subjects was not a part of what Greenberg referred to as the "Alexandrine" condition of Europe at the turn of the century—in which culture slides into repetition and mediocrity.<sup>19</sup> Yet, remarkably, this process of integration and the literary dimension that it involved has seldom been examined—no doubt in part because the artist himself never truly acknowledged the role of the latter in these works. It may be that Nolde, initially imbued with a Symbolist ethos and its emphasis on content, eventually recognized the turning tide of opinion in critical circles away from literary content toward an emphasis on Clive Bell and Roger Fry's "significant form" and "aesthetic emotions." In his memoirs, decades after the fact, he wrote of the meaning of the religious paintings only in the vaguest terms, claiming that their "incomprehensible" "soulfulness and inwardness" were his highest aspirations, and that they had a "spiritual-soulful beauty."<sup>20</sup> But, in claiming so, he chose to ignore the pictures' biblical subjects. In fact, he once even dismissed the issue of a specific meaning in his religious paintings. Concerning their biblical and narrative elements, in a comment that seems intentionally evasive, he wrote: "Whether they were perceived biblically or religiously, whether as legends only, or painted as dramatic events of the highest tension, I do not know which was decisive. If I had not been able to paint them, all the most beautiful suppositions would be useless, and being able to, they were perhaps unimportant."<sup>21</sup>

But perhaps more importantly, Nolde's opinions on his religious paintings inform the critical and historical literature on him. In fact, many of the earliest writers on him sidestep the issue of the literary nature of the religious paintings; some even attempt to deny it.<sup>22</sup> Instead, they emphasize the putative northern or "Nordic" nature of the painter and his work.<sup>23</sup> This nature (insisted upon by Nolde) has a variety of implications, depending upon the writer, but almost always entails an inwardness—a tendency toward the mystical and toward irrational human faculties such as emotion, intuition, and instinct.<sup>24</sup> But many transform this "Nordic inwardness" into creative isolation, so that his work stems not from the inspiration of the past or literary texts, but from the depths of his creative personality. According to this scheme, Nolde remained inwardly self-contained, like a naive, self-creating force of nature. He formed and felt his entire artistic life's production already in his earliest sketches and etchings; all further work was the dynamic, organic expansion of this inner content.<sup>25</sup> In other words, if the art can not credibly be described as self-contained—in Greenberg's sense—best to declare by fiat the artist to be so.

Thus, these writers generally only engage the issue of form. In the religious paintings, to one, the inner, spiritual tension of the imagery originates primarily in the construction of warm and cold color contrasts, but also in other formal and pictorial oppositions. Another uses Nolde's heightened color to skirt the literary nature of the subjects—it raises the pictures above the literary and illustrational nature of black and white illustrations to “pure pictorial art.”<sup>26</sup> Werner Haftmann, writing in 1958, characterizes Nolde's work as thoroughly Nordic, achieved in isolation, and unswerving in its inner logic. Like others, he defers to Nolde's insistence that his religious paintings originated only in memories of his youthful experiences of the Bible. Their themes are religious, but only in the sense of the trance-like possession of the sacred.<sup>27</sup>

Even Manfred Reuther, the current director of the Nolde foundation, distorts the religious paintings by avoiding their literary sources. Despite its notable lack of a Christian subject, he asserts that *Free Spirit* of 1906 (U192) is Nolde's first religious picture, and that, free of all religious dogma, its meaning comes from a purely human dimension and a natural religiosity. He then extends this notion to all of the actual religious paintings, suggesting that their biblical subjects become merely surfaces behind which “deep layers of humanity shine forth.” He even asks whether these works should be called religious because of their subject matter or because of a fundamental religiosity inherent in them. To him the pictures are actually experienced as intensely “pagan” or “heathen.”<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult to know what sort of conclusions can be drawn about the broader phenomenon of modernist art and theory from this very specific case study. But it would seem that twentieth-century painting is more varied and complex than the narrow formalist theories of Clive Bell and Roger Fry or Clement Greenberg's concept of modernist painting would allow, and that it did not develop in the linear, historically inevitable fashion that the latter postulated. Important art was created at the fringes of, or with a total disregard for, this putative historical mainstream and these rigid notions of art. And, these formalist theories apparently not only diminished unduly the parameters of art to “significant form” and “aesthetic emotions” for many in the successive generations of twentieth-century Western painters, but their growing hegemony in art criticism over the course of the century also likely skewed the dialogue and even the historical record on current and earlier art in favor of these same narrow concerns.

## NOTES

1. See Martin Urban, *Emil Nolde, a Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings*, 2 vols. (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1987). The four religious paintings of 1909 are U316-319.
2. Nolde's memoirs are in four volumes: *Das eigene Leben* (Berlin: Rembrandt, 1931); *Jahre der Kämpfe* (Berlin: Rembrandt, 1934); *Welt und Heimat. Die Südseereise* (Flensburg: Christian Wolf, 1965); *Reisen, Ächtung, Befreiung* (Cologne: DuMont, 1976). See also: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1894-1926*, ed. M. Sauerlandt (Berlin: Furcht-Kunstverlag, 1927). This quotation is from *Jahre der Kämpfe*, p.107. All translations are my own.
3. Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 55.
4. Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in Howard Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1990), p. 13.
5. Nolde, *Jahre*, pp. 102-103.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-04.
7. Matisse exhibited at Paul Cassirer's gallery in Berlin in late 1908 and early 1909. A letter to Nolde confirms his presence there at this time. See *Emil und Ada Nolde-Karl Ernst und Gertrud Osthaus: Briefwechsel*, ed. Herta Hesse-Frielinghaus (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1985), no. 44, p. 47. For the exhibition, see Donald E. Gordon, “Kirchner in Dresden,” *The Art Bulletin* 48 (1966): 348; his *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 60; and Peter Paret: *The Berlin Secession* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 201, n. 3.

8. Hans Fehr, *Emil Nolde. Ein Buch der Freundschaft* (Cologne: Paul List Verlag, 1957), p. 46.
9. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," in Howard Risatti, *Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1990), p. 55.
10. One version was in Munich in the Alte Pinakothek during Nolde's days there in 1898 and 1899. See *Catalogue of the Paintings in the Old Pinakothek, Munich*, intro. Franz von Reber, trans. Joseph Thacher Clarke (Munich: Verlagsanstalt für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1890), p. 61, no. 56. It is no. 129 in Max J. Friedländer and Jakob Rosenberg, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, rev. ed., trans. Heinz Norden and Ronald Taylor (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University press, 1978).
11. Nolde, *Jahre*, p. 234.
12. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 5-6.
13. Nolde, *Jahre*, p. 103.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, pp.104-07.
16. These sketches are reproduced in Werner Haftmann, *Emil Nolde*, trans. Norbert Guterman (New York: Abrams, 1959).
17. Ernst Kris, and E. H. Gombrich, "The Principles of Caricature," in Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), pp. 189-203. See also Ernst Kris, "The Psychology of Caricature" in the same volume.
18. Nolde wrote of visiting the Alte Pinakothek in *Jahre*, p. 130.
19. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," p. 4.
20. E.g. "The soulful, spiritual life of the emotions, experienced creatively, brought forth art for me, when I was fortunate." Nolde, *Jahre*, p. 95. See also *Ibid.*, pp. 167-68, 195, 183.
21. Nolde, *Reisen*, p. 29.
22. E.g. Tilman Osterwald, who maintains that they are not Christian, but "heathen" and "born of the earth" in *Emil Nolde* (Stuttgart: Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, 1987), p. 23.
23. E.g. Max Sauerlandt, "Emil Nolde," *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, neue Folge, 25 (1914): 181.
24. See Carl Georg Heise, "Emil Nolde, Wesen und Weg seiner religiösen Malerei," *Genius* (1919): 18-32.
25. E.g. Max Sauerlandt, *Emil Nolde* (Munich: Kurt Wolff, 1921), pp. 18-20, 26, 58. He dismisses all influence on Nolde—including Munch and van Gogh (p. 41), and the Brücke artists (p. 24).
26. Sauerlandt, p. 36.
27. Haftmann, pp. 24, 38. See also Alfred Hentzen, *Emil Nolde. Das Abendmahl* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1964). He sees *The Last Supper* as a picture without precedent.
28. Manfred Reuther, "Emil Noldes religiöse Bilder," *Anstösse. Evangelische Akademie Hofgeismar* 25 (no. 4, 1978): p. 135.

## **SAM FRANCIS AND BEAUFORD DELANEY: TWO MODERN AMERICAN ARTISTS IN PARIS**

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Modernity in life found its full expression in abstract art, an invention that switched the "...channel from representation of the world more or less as we know it to something else." (Holland Cotter, *The New York Times*, August 25, 2006, E29) Early Western Modernism found its full development in abstract painting.

Sam Francis (1923-1994) and Beauford Delaney (1901-1979) whose careers overlapped in Paris between 1953 and 1961 were active in extending the mandate for an advanced art of originality, autonomy and authenticity using gestural, loose brushwork as part of the formal language of modernism. Allied in their abstract painterly means and abstract color, they painted sensuous surfaces that transformed different sensations of light on to canvas while also creating illusions of inwardly expanding space. Both had a lifelong involvement with light and color is at the center of their concerns.

Beauford Delaney saw Sam Francis frequently in Paris and would later tell friends that it was Sam Francis who most influenced his early French experiments in abstraction. (Leeming 115) Many perceptually distinguishable qualities exist, yet many visual similarities are evident. Delaney considered him a mentor even though Sam Francis was 22 years younger. (Leeming 171) Understandably, it would also seem that Sam Francis was influenced by the older artist's mature style. Personal and professional sympathies exist in their work. For both, painting was an act of faith. A spirit of optimism pervades their art, giving it a sense of coherence. They neither set aside the conventions of art nor did they feel bound by them.

It was in Paris where both artists developed their abstract expressionist styles, an approach generally identified as the pinnacle of modernism. In "Partisan Review" in 1940, critic Harold Rosenberg stated: "What was done in Paris demonstrated clearly and for all time that such a 'thing' as international culture could exist. Moreover that culture had a definite style: the Modern." (Rosenberg, "The Fall of Paris," in Harrison and Wood 542) Asked what the true meaning of abstract art is, artist Jack Tworkov said: "One answer could well be that Paris and New York gave birth to it in the twentieth century." (Tworkov, *Art in America*, September-October 1973, 68)

Their paintings were created out of sheer color, not color in a mediating role as something else, but as a resource. The concreteness of color rather than its illusionist potential became the subject, the essence of their art. Whether stylistically aligned with contemporary French art or the dominant strains of Abstract Expressionism, they did not reject the possibility of meaning in art. As direct intuitive contacts with reality, they created landscapes, interior landscapes that could be considered disclosures of the unconscious. Their concerns as artists and the central issue of their work involved looking beyond appearances.

Some paintings are monochromatic with dense, intricate surfaces. Others are made up of loosely connected irregular patches of color, dripped and streaked, exhibiting an immediacy and variation of touch in which the entire surface functions as something greater than its parts. As prime carriers of space and light, their canvases reflect the American tradition of space-creating patches of color as well as the use of the subjective color of European painting.

Each ordered his paintings in accordance with his own personal requirements. While their paintings were never divorced from life, their color allusions are compatible with flatness, one of the defining criteria of Clement Greenberg's modernism. The dissolving shapes and colors of their formless, non-directional all over compositions are held together as explorations of abstract relational possibilities. Each artist carried a number of colors in their minds that they liked for symbolic, emotional, economic and aesthetic reasons. Interestingly, their color choices were often similar: white, yellow ochre, terre verte, cobalt blue and cadmium red.

They also shared a common fate as part of the circle of American artists in Paris in the 1950s observing first hand, like numerous others living abroad, the profound shift in the relationship and attitude of Europeans toward American influence and tradition. That Abstract Expressionism became widely accepted was unexpected, considering the smallness of the American art world before the Second World War. A rather select audience challenged Europe, specifically Paris, as the center of creativity and a major realignment of power to New York City was the result.

There are many affinities between the two worlds of American and French art of the period, aesthetically and conceptually, but critics increasingly acclaimed the superiority of American art, proposing that Americans surpassed the French as modernists. "The New American Painting" exhibition and the Jackson Pollock retrospective shown simultaneously in Paris in 1958 revealed the "difficult and tentative dialogue" in which European painters were engaged, willingly or not. These exhibitions helped to shape international taste. (Sagner-Duchting 130)

The term Abstract Expressionism came into common usage in 1946. "Several of the interests of French modern artists...were taken up by the Abstract Expressionists and given a distinctly American inflection. (Leeja 15) The history of the art of the 1950s is linked to the national history of each country. Whether American or French, each saw it differently; the art was dominated either by the School of New York or the School of Paris. (Morton Feldman, 1965, *Art in America*, September-October 1973, 89) Be that as it may, the atmosphere of the work of art reflects the place in which it exists, what surrounds it. It is also valid to state that art had become less tied to place and more derived from experiences of the new art itself.

The Abstract Expressionist painter Jack Twokov summed it up this way: "The painter does not live in the studio only. Not all of the influences on his work originate there obviously. Outside the studio the painter's autonomy encounters challenges and resistance. The forces that impinge on him are not in his control and these have incalculable effects on the conditions which envelop and shape the work. The consciousness which is his in the studio is immediately modified when he steps outside." (Twokov 67)

Jackson Pollock claimed to hate anything that had to do with European art in general and with French painting in particular but it was the link to Europe that gave his drip paintings their place in MoMA. (Potter 273) Alfred Barr acquired Pollock's *One, Number 31 (1950)*, a 17' wide painting that joined the School of Paris to the New York School. Pollock's black on black paintings of 1951 and his *Easter* and *The Deep* were homages and crucial links to Parisian modernism.

The desire for Abstract Expressionism to be seen as an American manifestation of European avant-gardism was very strong. (Leeja 19) It was a style firmly rooted within a largely European tradition and American artists were still caught up in the need for European approval. Their free response to the aesthetic of modernism resulted in a new vocabulary of forms, an assimilation of style developed by French artists from Manet to Monet, Picasso to Matisse. "The New American Painting" was a continuation of what Paris had begun. (Ratcliff 25)

A painter with light flooded affinities to Pollock, Sam Francis was a second generation Abstract Expressionist. Dorothy Miller, MoMA's former senior curator of painting and sculpture chose Sam Francis, one of only two younger artists to be included in her "The New American Painting" exhibit that traveled to eight European cities. Sam Francis was partly responsible for the triumph of American painting. It is through his paintings that Europeans discovered Abstract Expressionist art. Fame came early to Francis. He had made an impressive reputation and was touted as the "hottest American painter in Paris." (Selz note 27, 245) By the mid 1950s he had achieved international acclaim. (Selz 51)

With variations on the themes of his elders, Sam Francis worked on monumental paintings. Sometimes he placed immense unsized surfaces on the floor and through his interest in bodily gestures, he achieved a synthesis of painting and drawing. His mural scale paintings dominated the space, creating literal environments larger than the field of vision. He conveyed the dramatic effect of the sensation of physically projecting the viewer's body into the unbounded fields of the paintings. A photograph of Sam Francis at work on the three panel Basel mural shows him atop a ladder as the whole is comprehended by grasping details, spatially at once, providing an instantaneous visual experience. The evident handling of paint, or facture, on these murals that took three years to complete corresponds to the gestural vocabulary of Monet or the Abstract Expressionists. The youngest of the American artists abroad, Sam Francis became the most renowned painter in Europe, the intermediary leading the way to Rothko, Still, Kline and Newman. (Plante 82) It was through his paintings that many Europeans were to discover Abstract Expressionism. (Sagner-Duchting 130)

While closely allied to the New York School, he was never fully in it. (Leeja 83) It is ironic that he was the artist who had made the strongest impression abroad to embody the Abstract Expressionist style, considering his absence from New York City. It has, however, been suggested that Sam Francis immensely compromised the "Americanness" of Abstract Expressionism by introducing the European element of taste, that his art of controlled elegance, his refinement of pictorial means, is perhaps a reason that he has been given less recognition in America than other Abstract Expressionists. Paris was still considered the Mecca for young artists in 1950 when Francis left America. (Lembark 16) He sensed an affinity with the great European tradition of modern painting which could be assimilated into his own heritage as an American artist. French painting had light, color and space (Selz 43)

Critics suggested that Francis was more Parisian than New York due to his direct response to Tachisme ("Tasche" means a splash or stain.) His expressive paint handling was decisively influenced by Art Informel. Francois Choay regretted the ambiguity that the inclusion of Sam Francis in "Pollock and the New American Painting" at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris caused. He claimed that the work of Sam Francis satisfied "...the requirements of a kind of charm, of prettiness, of decorativeness almost, and one feels the word tachisme was made for him." (Choay 164)

Sam Francis was discovered in Paris. (Hess in Babcock 174) It was in the same Parisian environment that Beauford Delaney emerged as an abstract artist. Delaney did his finest work there, thereby repositioning himself within the context of Abstract Expressionism. Beauford Delaney adopted a fully abstract style having absorbed significant aspects of contemporary French painting and incorporating them into his stylistic approach. Here he reinvented the language of his art as seen in his sustained achievement in the abstractions that dominated his most important exhibitions in Paris, at Galerie Paul Facchetti in 1960, Galerie Lambert in 1964 and at Darthea Speyer in 1973. Galerie Paul Facchetti was the first gallery in Paris to show Pollock, Tobey and deKooning. Of the many artists in the expatriate community, Delaney made

the greatest change in his art creating all-over paintings filled with energetic multi-directional strokes that became his signature style. (Leeming 127)

By 1954 Delaney had also exhibited in shows at the Musee des Beaux Arts and at the Salon des Realities Nouvelles at the Musee d'Art Moderne where he exhibited frequently in subsequent years. These exhibitions and the good connections that he had made in the French art world had "...somewhat solidified his position as a resident in Paris, not as a visiting New Yorker." (Leeming 126) By the time he had arrived, the brief historical moment of Abstract Expressionism was over signaled by Robert Rauschenberg's irreverent act of erasing the de Kooning drawing.

Well before Delaney had set sail for Paris, he was already a Greenwich Village legend. He lived on Greene Street near Washington Square Park, an area filled with contemporary artists. Around the corner was the school Subjects of the Artists as well as The Club, founded as a gathering place for artists. He would join them as they headed from their studios to hang around the Waldorf on Sixth and Eighth Street where tables were overflowing with artists, an eccentric "arty" crowd, many of them GIs. (Leeming 85)

Delaney was certainly not a stranger to the artists associated with the New York School. He was very much aware of the coexistence of different modernisms in the New York art world in the 1940s and early 1950s. He lived through the era when the original style of imageless, improvisatory painting had emerged and had begun to gain wide acceptance in the international art world. The Cedar Tavern, a blue collar bar on University Place off Eighth Street, was popular with neighborhood artists including deKooning, Pollock and Kline. Beauford Delaney and his friends would have beers at Ed Winston's, a favorite "watering hole" on 8th at University Place. Harold Norse who had become an intimate of the young James Baldwin in Greenwich Village recalled that at the San Remo in the winter of 1949, he and his friends who did not have the funds to go to Paris envied the expatriates and would huddle around, frustrated and suffocating in what he called their bohemian ghetto, reading letters by those who had. (Norse 183)

He was totally conversant with the principles of modernism thought to be the basis of abstraction. Delaney possessed a modernist consciousness and his work exhibits a certain historical continuity. He had created his first totally non-objective painting, *Cosmos*, in 1952. (Leeming 101) In establishing his relationship to his historical moment, Beauford Delaney revealed himself as a modernist in a note in his 1940 sketchbook: "The ideal of abstraction seems to underlie the whole modern art movement." (Leeming 76) The formal, technical and conceptual stylistic structure within which Delaney worked, his modernism, was the center from which his individuality as an artist was expressed. A fundamental tenet of modernism is the celebration of artistic freedom and the power of individual imagination. The value of individual freedom is encoded in Delaney's art.

As American artists living in Paris, they befriended artists in the expatriate community. Delaney seemed to more separate from French culture gaining support of a group of expatriate American artists, while Sam Francis absorbed it. (Plante 80) Encountering the work of other artists reinvigorated their own. Living, working and having their imaginative beings in their studios, they nevertheless took deep interests in people. While Sam Francis and Beauford Delaney, generally speaking, worked alone, friends and visitors were often on hand. Beauford Delaney also moved around in the company of friends. Sam Francis was a kind of Buddha-like figure who always seemed to be at the center of things because people simply gravitated towards him. (Kiki Kogelnik in Mossinger 8) Beauford Delaney's "...general Buddha-like

demeanor made him always the central figure in any group. (Leeming x) They knew each other well, gave one another solace and courage.

Whereas Beauford Delaney returned to America only once, to Knoxville, Tennessee, sixteen years after his arrival in Paris, and never saw America again, Sam Francis made numerous trips across the Atlantic. He was a very mobile artist who changed continents frequently establishing light-filled studios in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Berne and Santa Barbara. In 1957, Francis relinquished his permanent residence in Paris, but maintained a large studio on rue d'Arcueil in the 14th arrondissement within walking distance from the Hotel des Ecoles on rue Delambre, Delaney's studio during his first years in Paris, or Clamart in the suburbs where he spent time with James Baldwin or his last studio on rue Vercingetorix, also in the 14th arrondissement. Beauford Delaney's walking feats had become famous among his fellow Americans in Paris. On nearly every weekend of his first fall in Paris, for example, Beauford Delaney would traverse quite some distance from the Left to the Right bank to the American Express Office on rue Scribe next to the Opera to retrieve his mail. (Leeming 120)

They exhibited in some of the same galleries in Paris including Galerie Arnaud in 1956, Galerie Paul Facchetti in the 1960s and Galerie Breteau. As part of a whole community of artists anxious to discuss and show their primarily abstract art, their work shared common qualities distinguished by an international current of sensibility and energy. While not every similarity can be perceived as a fundamental commonality or every difference a strong break, their abstractions relate by the virtuosity of touch and color to other abstract artists conversant with the techniques of the mature Monet whose illusions of infinite, inwardly expanding space were depictions of light seen through the art. In 1953 Delaney and Francis both saw Monet's water lilies at the Musee de l'Orangerie in which his image is light. Monet made light the subject itself. His color, exuding its own light, is a single image, approached at a single glance. Sam Francis said "I make the late Monet pure." (Sweeney 17)

Creating new and original forms, their canvases are prime carriers of space and light. Beauford Delaney worked with the materiality of paint with color and texture applied in an abstract gestural style filling the entire pictorial space. His surfaces of brilliant colors with little tonal difference give the impression that all elements are interdependent and focus is dispersed. Sam Francis, on the other hand, opened up the canvas with colors suspended in space and connected by drips and trickles of paint.

Both artists saw color as a resource and reference. The coherence of the surface of a painting was accomplished with color. Both artists were equally sensitive to light, not only the play of light but, rather, its specific qualities. These were life long involvements. Engagement with painting was more than visual. More than a concern with surface, it was also a place of spiritual significance. The long held myth of modernism—that style rather than subject matter, form rather than content—confined the experience of looking at a painting to the experience of seeing alone jeopardized meaning in art.

The perceptual center to which each artist returned was the rejuvenating value of the process of making art. The metaphysical subject of modernism as an index of identity and change in which subjectivity emerges as the meaningful center of the art is the connection between their work. For Delaney and Sam Francis, modernist art's tendency to see art as an end in itself, as an autonomous, self-sufficient object only, left out any compelling need for interpretation. Thomas Hess wrote that "...traces of metaphysical divinity" were embedded in Abstract Expressionist paintings affirming an authentic sense of selfhood that embraced spiritual values. "Method became more like words of a prayer." (Hess in "Painting: Some Recent Directions" in *Art News Annual*, 1956, 92) A sense of symbolic presence was materialized in the art itself.

Clement Greenberg, more than any other art critic, championed many of the Abstract Expressionist artists and characterized the style "...as a means of uncovering and reducing art to the truth of materials, meaning that the essential subject of art is the medium itself." (Hess 92) Beauford Delaney and Sam Francis never wholly abandoned their ties to content. While the flat canvas and paint were absolutely fundamental to their artistic practices, the expressive dimensions of their work were never sacrificed. There are no points of reference to be translated into something else, no explicit inferences in their all-over paintings but correspondences between meaning and image exist and their breakthrough compositions between 1950 and 1957 invite comparisons. Both artists gave nature substance on canvas as filtered through the mind. Imposing a reconciliation of divergent realities, the interplay of the external world and the capacities of their creative minds, they transformed physical matter into tangible energy and light. For Delaney, "...what is real is not the exterior form but the idea, the essence of things." (Leeming 122)

As sensual presence and spiritual transcendence, both artists were concerned with light emanating from color. The shared concerns of which they are a reflection have to do with the dynamics of inner light. The finite limits of their paintings open up to an abstract language that presents the material structure of light coming from behind and filtering through the materiality of paint guided by the eye and intuition. Their paintings embody light as both a physical and metaphysical experience and their white paintings reduce the color spectrum to dully glowing hues reminiscent of Paris Light. That same Parisian light was incorporated in Ellsworth Kelly's white and pastel paintings. Joan Mitchell was also affected by that light and, while for her white had a series of negative meanings, her compelling brushstrokes, her gestural slashes pointed the way past Parisian cubism to new painterly possibilities.

The whites let more white enter. Hospitalized for two years and almost immobile after he crashed in a training flight, Sam Francis watched "...the sun dance as it streamed through the window, casting pools of light and shadow on the walls. He decided to become a painter." (Wieland Schmeid, "Rereading Notes on Sam Francis" in Mossinger, pages not numbered) Inspired by light, his paintings became interior landscapes rather than the interpretation of landscape as a sign. The correspondences between meaning and image that characterize his art as a record of subjectivity also engaged Delaney. On the verge of freedom from the material world, their paintings were open to variations within guidelines established internal to the work. Their colors became the colors of light.

For Beauford Delaney the substance of light in relation to spirit is most recognized in his use of yellow. (Leeming 78) From the window in his ground floor studio that looked on to a garden in Clamart, Beauford Delaney and James Baldwin would sit for hours meditating on the changing light through the leaves of a large tree. Baldwin was only sixteen years old when he met Delaney, who later followed Baldwin to Paris. For Delaney, light "...held the power to illuminate, even to redeem and reconcile and heal." (Leeming 129) Using light producing color, he moved closer and closer toward the constant, the original light coming from the canvas. His is an art of presence and his painting in France renewed itself through his own shaping consciousness in response to his life.

As was his custom in his Greene Street apartment (Plante 82) and the Grand Hotel on rue Delambre, Delaney covered the walls with white sheets of drawing paper to, one, cover the cracked walls and as a means of shedding "...a light that could bring vitality to his painting." (Leeming 53) To accentuate the light in his Clamart studio, he covered the walls in white sheets. The same whiteness was everywhere in his Vercingetorix studio where white sheets were used to drape over paintings and furniture and cover the walls. (Leeming 168)

The white wall is the main symbolic signifier of modernist architecture and the white interiors of modern art galleries have remained closely linked to modernism and modernity. (Paul Overy in *Cosmopolitan Modernism* 61) It also has strong roots in modern painting and sculpture from Malevitch's white on white to the works of Robert Ryman, Ellsworth Kelly and Agnes Martin. Thomas Hess referred to deKooning's white walled artist's loft as a "room as serene as the nave of a Cistercian chapel." As a haven of uninscribed whiteness, art historians have remarked on the meditative silence and venerable calm of Alfred Steiglitz's *An American Place* where Beauford Delaney was a frequent visitor and felt that the white and grey space was "serene with the spirits of indomitable spirits" who "live by sheer awareness." (Leeming 77)

Over time, Sam Francis opened up his canvases with colors displaced at the margins of his paintings giving emphasis to the frames. By leaving vast areas entirely bare, the large primed white fields in the centers give the impression of light emanating from the paintings. White luminous masses become an arena for physical activity and how paint exposed or eradicated the white became a subject. In discussing the white in his paintings, Sam Francis stated that "The white space in them is the fullness of them...It is a celebration of the fertility of the white space." (Michaud, "Conversations," note 36, 49) As for Delaney, "whiteness was a symbol of purity of expression." (Leeming 30) While Delaney favored more the dimensions of easel painting, large ateliers and spacious lofts allowed Sam Francis to create physically overwhelming large-scale works pursuing new directions while reinventing his personal abstract language. While each work of art was a new start, Francis developed possibilities in earlier work in somewhat different directions forming the stage for the next shift in process and emphasis through which fluent strokes revealed the immediacy of bodily gestures.

While not illogical, Clement Greenberg's inclusion of Sam Francis among his post-painterly abstractionists seemed at first surprising because of his association with American Abstract Expressionism and French Art Informel. Considered a "painterly" artist, the direction of his painting over the years, nevertheless, had been toward openness and clarity. Despite his continuing use of dripped and splattered free moving colors and brush gestures, his connections to the color-field painters are greater than his differences. It has been suggested that he even anticipated some of them in his use of extreme openness of composition as seen in his powerful vertical and horizontal edge paintings in which the geometry of the plane surface is reconsidered. (Arnason 678)

By way of conclusion, unities and differences as seen in the work of Beauford Delaney and Sam Francis reflect their personalities as elicited by aspects of reality. Sometimes defining, sometimes obscuring the concept behind the work, its content, their paintings always seem, however, to be about something. A concern for subject influences form. At times, as we have seen, their art is interrelated with formally distinctive limited elements selected from a variety of artistic devices. Their painted worlds of internally consistent rules are revelations of themselves as artists through a process of self-renewal. Formal concerns, creative instinct and personal meaning are made manifest in their outward expressions of abstract knowledge on the physical surface of their paintings.

Color and light are the identifying elements of their art. The organization of color is their means for realizing pictorial space. Their paintings seem to be poetic distillations that stir the mind's eye to focus on inner feelings presented in their immediacy. Encompassing coincidences, accidental drips, spatters and stains, their paintings call upon perceptual and conceptual skills in response to one another as artists and to people, relationships, events and places. One could say that their styles permeated each other as points of arrival and departure, providing creative

situations for change and newness. The rapport between the two artists changed the limits of their work. Each was attentive to the possibilities that existed in the work of the other.

The origins of their abstract marks might be obscured and even with attentiveness it may be impossible to isolate one inflection from its many sources, but they inspired one another to exceed expectancies. Linked by a sense of the “higher power of light” (Leeming) as a highly charged symbol of their responses to the world about them, they developed a new language of art that addressed the dramatic far-reaching cultural changes in their lives as expatriates. For a time, their art sustained a common direction and moved into new territories of interconnecting ideas. The shared modernist concerns of which they are a reflection suggest exciting possibilities for future scholarship in order to reveal the multiplicity of intentions underlying the stylistic means of Beauford Delaney and Sam Francis, two artists whose correlations of style take into account opposing elements as well as alliances.

Sam Francis was criticized for introducing the European element of “taste” to Abstract Expressionism (Smith 50) thereby compromising the rigor and rawness of the style and it has been said that Beauford Delaney’s abstractions were the only means for a black artist to cross the color line and achieve cultural assimilation. The aim of this research, however, is to locate these artists in the varied contexts of modernism and to indicate how their approaches to creating art may be integrated.

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## **IN THE MUSEUMS OF UNDERWORLD: DON DELILLO'S CABINETS OF WONDER AND HORROR**

**Carolyn Foster Segal**  
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[T]he collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. . . . [T]here is in the life of the collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order.

—Walter Benjamin

Unpacking My Library

Pause, for a moment, you wretched weakling, and take stock of yourself.

*The Cloud of Unknowing* (14th c)

[A]ll department stores will become museums, and all museums will become department stores.

—Andy Warhol

Even as plot and character circle and finally confront memories, ostensibly to move beyond them, the metaphor of the museum—as a shrine to the past—appears repeatedly in contemporary American literature.

Actual museums may appear as settings, where a character can go to appreciate art—or at least pretend to appreciate art to impress his lover. As the narrator of Martin Roper's *Gone* says, "We scour New York together: the Met, the Guggenheim, the Frick, the Morgan. We are in the downtown Guggenheim again, . . ." (86). In his spiraling-down journey in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield finds solace in thinking about the Museum of Natural History: "The best thing, though, in that museum," he explains, "was that everything always stayed right where it was" (121). The protagonists of Margaret Atwood's *Life Before Man* and Laura Furman's *Glass House* are realistic workers in imaginary museums. A real museum takes on the fun-house dimensions of a seductive nightmare in Steven Millhauser's "Barnum Museum": "We may doubt the museum, but we do not doubt our need to return" (91).

The museum becomes a metaphor for the bedroom, that repository of memorabilia, in Paul Auster's *Locked Room*. The film adaptation of Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* adds a line about the run-away mother's room—preserved by her brother and daughter—being a museum of the sixties. In Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, the narrator has come back to Toronto, the city where she grew up, for a gallery showing of her work; she begins her own "retrospective" of her life while staying at the cluttered studio apartment of her ex-husband (16). Home, we might say, is where they have to store your stuff when there's no place else for it to go.

Some characters create their own museums, as in William H. Gass's "Apocalypse Museum": clearly, the end of the world will find us, wherever we try to hide. For sheer horror in contemporary fiction, few other works come close to Lydia Millet's *My Happy Life*, in which the hapless yet blissfully unaware protagonist, left behind in an abandoned mental institution, recounts her life as she sorts through the collection she has stored in a shoebox.

These twentieth and twenty-first century museum tours and metaphors owe much to two nineteenth-century writers. In their poetry and fiction, Whitman and Twain, provide catalog after catalog of people, occupations, scientific discoveries, crimes, political hopes, and contents of

households—between them, the contents of a nation. Perhaps no one in the nineteenth century understood better than Twain the irony of the American vision, which gazes simultaneously forward and backward, an often damning mix of star-wars vision and nostalgia.

One early modernist writer who uses the metaphor of the museum is Edith Wharton. In *The Age of Innocence*, the doomed lovers agree to meet in secret at the Metropolitan Museum. There they wander into the Cesnola Antiquities Room, whose glass cases are filled with “small broken objects” (274). If Wharton’s novel encapsulates the opening of the twentieth century, Don DeLillo’s 1997 *Underworld* is a commentary on its closing. In this novel that catalogs the second half of the twentieth century, the trope of the museum is central. Here the museum is both personal and political—the site of inspiration, nostalgia, and shame.

Interestingly, with one exception, and that is a minor character’s exhibit savaged by critics, the works of art that figure in *Underworld* exist outside museums and galleries, and thus are theoretically available to everyone. The list of artworks combines fictional projects with the real and includes Klara Sax’s site installation of restored B-52 long-range bombers in the desert; Ismael Munoz’s New York subway graffiti and his Bronx wall of the dead, which commemorates children who have been killed by depicting them as angels; and Life magazine’s October 1, 1951 reproduction of Bruegel’s *Triumph of Death*, which showers down as confetti on J. Edgar Hoover at the famous Dodgers/Giants’ pennant game (Gardner). The idea of public access to art should remind us not only of the statements of Christo but also more generally of ongoing debates since the late nineteenth century about the purpose and nature of the museum. (There is an excellent discussion of the conflicting ideas of the museum as a place of education for everyone and the museum as an elitist temple in Lawrence W. Levine’s *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*.)

Here is a catalog of some of the other works of art and architecture that appear in *Underworld*: photographs of Branca and Thompson with U.S. presidents; photographs of gang members; pictures of movie stars; fighter plane nose art (77); a second Bruegel painting, *Children’s Games* (673, 682); 3-D slides of landscape features of “the great West” (493); the Fred F. French building, whose “mosaic summit” (374) might equally describe Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers, which also appear in the novel; parodies of tableau vivants in the depictions of Klara’s mother-in-law and the neighborhood butcher framed and backlit in windows; “chevrons and rosettes” and “oblong gods” on buildings made by anonymous stone carvers (385); the partially built World Trade Center, “already towering” (372); and Whistler’s *Arrangement in Gray and Black*, more commonly known as *Whistler’s Mother*, a reproduction of which hangs in the spare room of Klara Sax’s Bronx apartment (748). Again, in each instance, the emphasis is on art that is accessible (and that is made doubly so in two instances by the use of titles of paintings—*The Triumph of Death* and *Arrangement in Gray and Black*—as section titles; other section titles are allusions to music and film: Leopold Godowsky’s “Elegy for Left Hand Alone” —on his website, Gardner also notes Maurice Ravel’s *Concerto for Left hand Alone*, “commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, who had lost an arm in [WW I]” (Gardner)—and Cocksucker Blues, Robert Frank’s documentary about the Rolling Stones).

The list of public art should also include the billboard in the Epilogue, an advertisement for Minute Maid orange juice: “What a lavishment of effort and technique, no refinement spared—the equivalent, [Sister] Edgar thinks, of medieval church architecture” (820). Crowds gather to watch for the appearance of the face of the murdered street child Esmeralda. Finally, the photograph by Andre Kertesz on the cover of the novel—a picture that features the Twin Towers, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, and a soaring bird—itself deserves mention. A pioneer of photojournalism in Paris, the Hungarian-born Kertesz came to the United States in 1936; in America, he “freelanced for virtually all of the leading illustrated American magazines, with the exception of *Life*. The editors of that publication . . . told him that his photographs

‘spoke too much’” (Arnason 350). Here, in the cover art for both the hardcover and paperback editions, DeLillo makes one of Kertesz’s pictures public.

One other building that figures in the novel is Radio City Music Hall, with its mural “with a sort of Lost Horizon motif,” where Klara has gone for a private party featuring the debut of what is purportedly a lost film by Eisenstein about terminal warfare (423). Feeling bored, Klara takes her agent for a tour of the powder rooms to see the statuary. Built in the thirties, in the style of art deco, or what Klara calls “jazz moderne” (424), Radio City Music Hall was intended to be “a palace for the people.” As the current official web site for Radio City explains, it was to be “a place of beauty offering high-quality entertainment at prices ordinary people could afford. It was intended to entertain and amuse, but also to elevate and inspire” (“Building History”)—the description and the dilemma of the modern museum. Museums proper are dismissed in the novel: as one character says, “[I]n the 1950s, a museum was seven empty rooms with knights in armor where you had one sleepy guard for every seven centuries” (172).

Meanwhile, interior spaces that house collections for sale are viewed as “a little museum-like, with time compressed and objects arrayed of evolutionary interest”: that’s from a description of a store called “Condomology” (112). Other “museums” include the basement of collector Marvin Lundy, the man who attempts to trace back the lineage of the winning ball from October 1951, and the shop of Tommy Chan, another baseball memorabiliaist. No one is better than DeLillo at suggesting that the places where we shop and live are our museums. This motif runs through his 1985 *White Noise*, a little comic study of death, consumerism, and transcendentalism that is a sort of prelude to or ur-*Underworld*. Another metaphorical use of the museum in *Underworld* appears in a section on the screening at a private party of the Zapruder film, in which the underground movie of Kennedy’s assassination is compared to “some small private collection, the Zapruder Museum, one item on permanent display” (495); an idle conversation includes a joking reference to an imaginary “Museum of Dark Forces” (280); two mentions are made of a baseball aficionado’s widow who serves “instant coffee in cups from a doll museum” (176); and the imaginary stand-up routine that DeLillo creates for the very real Lenny Bruce includes a commentary on cold war mementos: “After the mass destruction of a nuclear exchange . . . they’re gonna wanna rebuild. And all this cold war junk is gonna be worth plenty, as quaint memorabilia. . . . All the stuff that’s stashed in the storage rooms and laundry rooms that are designated shelters. Drums of drinking water. Saltines. Chapstick, for the flash” (593).

Tommy Chan theorizes about the stock in his basement store: “These materials have no esthetic interest. . . . My customers come here largely for the clutter and the mess. It’s a history they feel they’re part of” (322). Chan’s comment is truer than he knows, for museums, ostensibly objective, are always subjective.

The connection between history as a construction and the metaphor of the museum is a recurring theme in the novel. Nick Shay, the novel’s protagonist and central consciousness, ruminates while running: the city planners in Phoenix, Arizona “segregated visible history. They caged it, funded and bronzed it, they enshrined it carefully in museums and plazas and memorial parks” (86). The novel also takes on—in fact, it does so from the first page, in the voice of the omniscient narrator of the long opening section, originally published separately as the novella *Pafko at the Wall* and re-titled *The Triumph of Death*, the idea that “Longing on a large scale is what makes history” (1). We should read this sentence in the context of a line from DeLillo’s 1988 novel *Libra*: “History is the sum total of all the things they aren’t telling us.” Nick, who left New York in an effort to cancel his own personal history/destiny as a minor crime figure, has spent his adult life attempting to understand his past. Like his author, although somewhat less successfully, Nick does not wish to conflate nostalgia and history. He owns one piece of baseball memorabilia: the ball from the famous pennant game, for which he

paid \$34,500 and which he keeps hidden on a shelf of books (132-33). If Nick collects anything, it is books; there are multiple references to his adding more and more bookcases to the rooms of his Phoenix home: “We have bookshelves built . . . and you know how time slips by when you are doing books, arranging and rearranging”; sounding like Walter Benjamin’s best disciple, Nick continues: “the way time goes by untouched, matching and mixing inventively, and then you stand in the room and look” (806). In fact, Nick mentions the specific title of only one book—*The Cloud of Unknowing*, which was written by an anonymous 14thc mystic. It’s a fitting title, given Nick’s reason for owning the baseball: “It’s all about losing. . . . It’s about the mystery of bad luck, the mystery of loss” (97).

The title is also ironic, given Nick’s work, for he, like Tommy Chan, is a theorist. A former Latin professor and corporate speechwriter, Nick is now a theorist—not only about his own life but in nuclear waste management, with its implicit pun of collection. In a novel filled with doubles and reflecting images—among them basements and underground bunkers and rooftops; Jesuits and the Mafia; winners and losers; east coast and west coast; assassins and secret videos; stand-up comedy and psychoanalysis; the U.S and the U.S.S.R.; and those two shots heard round the world, one in baseball and the other in atomic weapons testing, Nick Shay and Klara Sax are the outstanding pair of twinned opposites: both have, as Nick reflects after seeing Klara again after forty years, careers “marked . . . by methods of transforming and absorbing junk” (102). The difference is that, as Jerome Justice explains in his wonderfully titled essay “Surveillance, Paranoia, and Abjection: The Ideological Underpinnings of Waste Management in the EPA’s Measuring Recycling Guidelines and Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*,” Klara transforms waste and creates art. Nick brokers secrets (Justice 12). As an aside here, the ultimate example, of course, of the transmutation of waste into art may be Warhol’s *Oxidation Paintings*.

Klara has progressed from realistic easel paintings to working with “castoffs,” a methodology that earned her the nickname “the Bag Lady” (392), to using the larger cast-offs of the fighter planes for her site installation. When her first husband offers to take her to Europe, to tour its museums, her reply is noncommittal; she is clearly not interested. The next time we encounter Klara, it is years later. She has married and divorced a second time; now it is her “rooftop summer,” the source of inspiration for her installation project, which also carries suggestions of the controversy surrounding the Smithsonian’s *Enola Gay* exhibit (Luke 35-36).

If Klara achieves ascendance, Nick, in contrast, must make one final descent. If works of art in *Underworld* are big and public, its museums are private storehouses of personal and political secrets. The novel’s themes and tropes merge in the Epilogue, when Nick travels to Semipalatinsk in the early nineties for his job with Waste Containment and visits the “Museum of the Misshapens” and a neighboring radiation clinic, with their parallel catalogs of deformities. Both sites are based on actual places. Like its real-life counterpart, the novel’s museum is part of the Medical Institute, its display cases filled with examples of aberrations resulting from “five hundred nuclear explosions at the test site” (799). This is the only established museum that Nick visits in the novel, which covers over forty years, and the collection housed in this devastated area bears little resemblance to modern exhibitions or even to the orderly condom shop in Phoenix that Nick toured with Brian; it is far closer to early wonder cabinets.

The next stop in Kazakhstan is the clinic, where, Nick says, “[W]e’re not in a museum this time” (800), and where the host and his American guests watch disfigured children playing in the dirt. Nick thinks to himself, “the secrets kept in white-washed vaults—they’re all out here now” (802). The host, a former history teacher who wishes to start a post-cold-war business that will “destroy contaminated nuclear waste by means of [underground] nuclear explosions, tells him, “[D]on’t be surprised there will be tourists here someday” (791, 792). Current tourism guides for the Kazakhstan city—renamed since the early nineties and now called Semey—list

not only the medical museum but a doll museum (which may remind us of the one that supplied the baseball aficionado's widow with her coffee cups) and a Dostoevsky Museum as well (Hodge and Weinberger). Dostoevsky lived in exile in Kazakhstan for five years; the title of the novel he wrote during his stay was, fittingly enough, *The House of the Dead* (Righter).

In the end, the novel itself is a kind of alternative postmodern museum, a surround or frame for the unspeakable, which the writer must articulate, and DeLillo's museum is elegiac and instructive: a guided tour of *our* underworld, with its cabinets of wonder and horror—"the shadow facts made real."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Martin Aurand, Senior Librarian, Carnegie Mellon University, and Carolyn Nippert, Head of Information Services, Cedar Crest College, for their assistance in researching Andre Kertesz.

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## **NOT THINKING IN JAZZ: MUSICAL AND EXTRA-MUSICAL METHODS AND MATERIALS IN THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS**

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*MUSICAL INTERLUDE. Excerpt from Composition 45 by Anthony Braxton Creative Orchestra, Recorded live at Grober Sendesaal WDR Kohn 1978 HatHut Switzerland, executive producer Werner Uehlinger*

Only once in American music history has the term avant-garde been used to describe African American musicians and composers—that was the years 1957-71 wherein a huge debate was being waged in jazz circles by critics and other culture brokers on the merits of a music that defied style; a music known by a variety of names, including free jazz, energy music, black music, and the new thing. I've written elsewhere on this debate and how black artistic enterprise, experimentation and innovation were trivialized and explained away by the term avant-garde and subsequently lifted from the vocabulary that describes African American expressive forms. (Bakriges 2005, 2004) The purpose of our get-together this morning is to listen to some musical works from contemporary artists and suggest that avant-gardism can be used in black music criticism, especially in the field of jazz, known as the music of modernity.

African American vanguard artists name their music something other than jazz yet they insist that they come from a black music tradition that informs their work. What you have before you are just some of the names that African American creative musicians give to their work (Appendix 1). These musicians and their concepts have had more currency as composers, theorists, and performers in Europe and elsewhere rather than in the United States. Please notice in (Appendix 2) which covers the years 1966 to 1981, a period of intense scrutiny surrounding African American creativity and the construction of a jazz tradition. Nearly one hundred record labels originated in Europe in which to document the new music coming from the many American artists who, being denied entree to this construction of a jazz tradition, become transcultural figures. These artists are either in exile in Europe and elsewhere or else reside in America but effectively cannot perform here given the kind of music they play. Certain European cultural spaces provide these artists a safe haven and support systems in which to live and work. (Bakriges 2003)

Rather than “thinking in jazz,” these and other African American vanguard artists distill the essence of a black music tradition that transcends its seemingly inseparable link with popular music or the grounding of Black aesthetics solely in the vernacular. The development of an African American vanguard, with their heightened sense of aesthetics developed in their texts, scores, painting, dance and various other approaches to explaining a cultural history that informs their work does not get entered into any historical lexicon or cultural system. When there is talk about this vanguard it is reduced to either a music style byproduct of the turbulent Sixties or else as merely aping European modernists. I'm not talking here about deconstructing existing representations but including others as part of a people's intellectual history or in what saxophonist Albert Ayler referred to as “new truths.”

Let's listen to some music. This is pianist Cecil Taylor, born in New York in 1933. Taylor interprets musical form not as the mold or pattern into which the composer organizes thematic material but as “possibility.” (Bakriges 2001) Taylor wants “patterns and possibility to

converge” as a clear alternative to Western musical conventions and ideals. (Taylor 1966, np) Form is determined entirely by the interactive creations of the musicians. His self-described “constructionism” is a different creative process than how painter Piet Mondrian employed the concept in jazz inspired works like “Broadway Boogie Woogie” (1942). It is also different than Anton Webern’s structuralism, once described as the “striving for the summit of form rather than emotion. (Van Ess 358) Quite the contrary, Taylor’s primordial, mostly athenatic music flashes and bursts and appear imbued with emotion. Bassist Buell Neidlinger referred to these flashes and bursts as patterns of “compression” (acceleration or rushing) and “release” (establishment of a new tempo from which to accelerate.

[*MUSICAL EXAMPLE 2. excerpt from Enter Evening, in Cecil Taylor Unit Looking Ahead Contemporary (Blue Note, later Capitol) NYC 1966*]

This constructionist strategy is aimed at discovering what emotive and analytic parts of jazz history can be elicited from a stream of behavior; it is a process of abstraction in which .units of analysis—anything from musical technique to ways of composing—become apparent in the course of observation and description. He calls this process “unit structures.” His emphasis is on building a totally integrated melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structure through improvisation. In Taylor’s constructivist complex:

the emphasis in each piece is on building a whole, totally integrated structure. In doing this, we try to carry on—in ensemble as well as solo sections—the mood of a jazz soloist. I mean that principle of kinetic improvisation that keeps a jazz solo building. What makes jazz unique is the compression of that energy into a short period of time, and that, in turn, is a reflection of what the machine has done to our lives in metropolitan areas in America. (Spellman 38)

The saxophonist, trumpeter, and violinist Ornette Coleman, born 1930 in Ft. Worth, Texas, realized his music in other ways than modifying chord changes and changing meter. Not unlike blues instrumentalists, he sees harmony as static, ultimately imprisoning improvisation, and also ultimately as an “inversion” of melody. Harmolodics is his concept of music and sound that is an entire cosmology relating cultural and personal expression with the artist and listener:

[*Harmolodics*] means the rhythms, harmonics and tempos are all equal in relation and independent melodies at the same time.(Coleman np)

Don Cherry, so often Coleman’s close musical comrade, elaborates further on

Coleman’s concept:

[The harmolodic concept] is one of the profound systems today for both Western and Eastern music. [...] When we would play a composition, we could improvise forms, or modulate or make cadences or interludes, but all listening to each other to see which way it was going so we could blow that way. Ornette’s harmony would end up being a melody and the original melody would end up being a harmony. So he could continue on that way to write for a whole orchestra from the first melody which ends up being harmony to the harmonic melodies that come after the main theme. (Cherry np)

[*MUSICAL EXAMPLE 3. Excerpt from Coleman’s Dedication to Poets and Writers (string quartet only Ornette Coleman Town Hall 1962, Recorded live at Town Hall, NYC, ESP Disk/ZYK Music [GmbH] 1962*]

Harmolodics is a musical theory of egalitarianism. All instruments play in their “natural” key so horns don’t transpose in order to be consonant with strings players or keyboards for example. The concept does away with conventional harmonic structures. Instruments may play a melody in unison, but in different keys. For Coleman, their consonance or “unisons,” come not from patterns of agreed-upon chord changes, but from each musician’s focusing on the melody. Ensemble harmony evolves through the natural flow of the piece, a confluence, not through chordal cues.

Educator, painter, writer, instrument inventor and multi-instrumentalist Dr. Yusef Lateef does not believe that jazz is an appropriate term to describe black creativity in America. Lateef insists that a disclaimer be added to his segment as part of the jazz oral history project at the Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture:

Yusef Lateef’s appearance in this journal or in any other medium (written, audio-visual, etc.) does in no way imply that he is a jazz musician, nor is his music jazz. He is a musician, composer and educator. His music may be referred to as autophysiopsychic music. (Lateef 1996, np)

For over three decades Yusef Lateef, born William Evans in 1920 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, has been documenting his musical and philosophical journey through his own publishing and recording companies, Fana Music and YAL Records. From 1980-84 Lateef was as a senior research fellow at the Center for Nigerian Cultural Studies at Ahmadu Bello in Zaria, Nigeria. He has taught at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and was visiting professor at neighboring Hampshire College [1986-2003]. Having long objected to being called a jazz musician, he won a Grammy in 1987 in the “New Age” category for his Little Symphony. In fact, Lateef “once requested that his listing be removed from the Encyclopedia of Jazz.” (Blumenthal 25) He embraced Islam in 1948 through the Black Muslim movement in Detroit. Lateef was the first African American musician to use Indian and other Eastern instruments consistently in his work, beginning in 1957 with his Verve recording *Before Dawn*. (Wilmer 167)

Lateef’s musical architecture is determined through a method he calls autophysiopsychic music, or “music which comes from one’s physical, mental and spiritual self.” (Lateef 1979, 2) There are five elements involved in playing autophysiopsychic music. The five elements are “the soul,” musical form, the uniqueness of one’s “sound” and its vibratory effects, rhythm, and “emotional memory,” and there is a complete methodology that governs each element.

*[MUSICAL EXAMPLE 4. from excerpt Coltrane Remembered. Yusef Lateef, The World At Peace, Recorded live at the Jazz Bakery, Los Angeles 1995 YAL/Meta]*

Wadada Leo Smith was born in 1941 in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. He started out playing cakewalks on trumpet with his grade school band, later turning to rural blues from the repertoire of Howlin’ Wolf, Elmore James, and John Lee Hooker. He drew inspiration from his progressive guitar-playing stepfather, Little Bill Wallace, who introduced Smith to the “post-Mississippi” blues music of B.B. King and Albert King. A five-year stint beginning in 1963 with the Army put Smith in contact with musicians from Egypt as well as contemporary jazz, including the music of Miles Davis, Booker Little, Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry:

That’s when I first began to understand the relationship of the newer music that was happening. That’s when I heard Ornette Coleman. The same time I bought his book, I put together my own little group with a drummer, bass player and

myself. We worked around through that music, sounding like Ornette Coleman and others. (Smith 4)

Although multiphonic, microtonal, and percussive work on brass instruments was in evidence in the work of Duke Ellington's trumpeter Cat Anderson, Wadada Leo Smith is credited by the Australian writer/composer Roger Dean for developing the embouchure for both conventional and split-tone playing on both trumpet and flugelhorn. (Dean 89. 95) Pianist Anthony Davis, Leo Smith's collaborator on his own under the ensemble name of New Delta Ahkri, calls him "one of the unsung heroes of American music." (Shoemaker np) Smith's "ahkreation" and "rhythm units" are alternative methods of structuring improvisation which he has been refining for nearly four decades. Now called "Ankhrasmation," this system is used in his classes at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia.

[*MUSICAL EXAMPLE 5. Excerpt from Reflectivity: In Memory of Edward Kennedy Ellington. Leo Smith Reflectivity New Delta Ahkri, Recorded live at the Educational Center for the Arts, New Haven, Kabell 1974.*]

Developed well before his conversion to Rastafarianism and his name change to Ishmael Wadada in the eighties, Ankhrasmation analysis is a method of analysis of melody, harmony, and rhythm intended to reveal the "fundamental structure" of a musical piece. Smith's method "deals with the principles of structural-progression and its activity, and seeks to reveal the fundamental structure that unites the improvised music-object." (Serafin np) Like saxophonist Anthony Braxton and others, Smith has developed a systematic notation for analyzing creative world music, which he refers to as "music created in the present." Smith elaborates on this term, "creative world jazz:"

It represents a certain historical experience that African Americans had in America, and as a result of that it has influenced the entire world. (Smith 1995, 97)

Within Smith's system, all of the elements of the scored music are controlled through symbols designating duration, improvisation, and "moving" sounds of different velocities.

This paper contends that most current versions of African American music history don't speak to its wider embrace, especially in the field of jazz, often considered as the music of modernity. In fact, my writing over the years has suggested that there is a parallel narrative within modernism itself that tracks a unique brand of African American creative expression that has not been fully explored in American music history. African American vanguard artists speak musically and extra-musically about how they both use "the tradition" and evolve it, exemplifying how "the wing praises the root by taking to the limbs," as poet Henry Dumas writes in "Black Trumpeter."

Cecil Taylor defended his music to an audience attending a 1964 panel discussion at Bennington College on the topic "The Shape of Jazz to Come:

I'm asking you to accept me on my terms because I am standing and I have experienced certain things that I want to be evaluated on historical facts. I say that as long as history books in America don't give us that historical fact .... my life is not a matter of theory. My life is a matter existence. Nothing is granted me. The only thing that is granted is that which I work for, and they don't grant me anything. I take it. I make it. That's the whole point. The jazz

musician has taken Western music and made of it what we wanted to make of it.  
(Taylor 1999)

Taylor's art becomes his evolution, and the results suggest that music can provide an alternative form of history. For at least the past fifty years African American avant-garde artists have sought to re-name, or at least obviate the importance of using the term "jazz" by using individualized terms and a personalized musical meta-language. Jazz musicians in the aftermath of the bebop movement have explored innovations in composition and performance in co-operatives, guilds, special events, and cultural institutions. I think there is compelling evidence to suggest a parallel modernist narrative for African American expression that has either been aborted or insufficiently treated. We need more and better historical work in Black aesthetics to explain the ulterior causes or the nature of feelings of pleasure and pain, beauty and virtue. It is important not to be reductive or to use any musical style as a kind of racial shorthand. The writings and various discourses from George Russell, Bill Dixon, Wadada Leo Smith, Marion Brown, Yusef Lateef, William Parker, and Glenn Spearman, among others, have either been uneasily positioned within African American music programs and musical pedagogies or have been quarantined and largely ignored by those engaged in constructing models in music education or music production. Looking at the work of these vanguard artists—their relationships to place and to various cultural agencies and associations—reinforces this notion of a constriction or lacuna in the study of modern African American music.

## **WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE: WOMEN, MUSIC AND CULTURE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD**

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Classical music has its own culture, its own DNA, its own view toward what living composers are, and it also has its own activity of repetition.<sup>1</sup>

No, women have not produced great music, not even remarkably good music. What is the reason? [...] the question is promptly answered by saying that they have not been given the opportunity, or that opportunity has not yet been theirs long enough to show their full capabilities. ...<sup>2</sup>

The attitude in the 70s was that I didn't need to be paid, because I had a well-paid husband ... the paid commissions tended to go to men because they had families to support.... Even now [that] I have a family to support, the attitude lingers on and people are surprised when I point out that I can't *afford* to compose.<sup>3</sup>

“Where have all the young girls gone? ... Taken husbands every one.... When will they ever learn?”<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that academic feminism in its present form could not have taken shape without the advent of Postmodernism. Feminism also shares with postmodern scholarship an intense interest in culture and the ways in which its ideologies may be reproduced or contested through representations such as works of art. This exploration has been a highly visible activity in feminist musicology, or in studies of the musical representation of women, paradigmatically in opera. Feminist musicologists regard themselves as contributors to a common interpretative undertaking as much as beneficiaries of earlier achievements of postmodern thought. Ellen Koskoff, in her foreword to *Music and Gender*, provides a useful summary of what she calls the three waves, or overlapping historical periods, of feminist music studies that have emerged in recent years, each marked by different research and analytical paradigms. Koskoff calls the first wave “women-centric scholarship.” She sees the second wave as “gender-centric scholarship,” which began to refashion the question of women’s music, framing it within the broader context of gender relations. These studies “examined various societies’ gender arrangements and gender styles, seeing music creation and performance as contexts for reinforcing, changing, or protesting gender relations.” Then the third, most current wave of literature began, heavily influenced by postmodern scholarship in feminist theory, gay and lesbian studies, cultural and performance studies, semiotics, and psychoanalysis, and these studies have sought to understand the links between social and musical structures and the ways in which each can be seen as embedded within the other (x).<sup>5</sup>

The Postmodern era, which gave rise to musical opportunities for women, was a period of vast experimentation, coupled with developments and advances of the discipline. Women began to dominate music higher education programs’ enrollment figures in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Organizations such as The League of Women Composers, American Women Composers, and the International Congress on Women in Music were formed to build the body of work by celebrating and encouraging the activities of women in music. Companies specializing in the publication of music by women such as Arsis Press and Hildegard Press were established. However, just as the “glass ceiling” exists in the boardroom and women eschew the corporate ladder for the “mommy-track” women in music confront and overcome similar career-related obstacles in

order to be successful in their profession. This paper explores the contribution and impact of Postmodernism and feminism on the growth and development of American women composers.

A portrait of a civilization is painted with many brushes – depicting its history, geography, politics, sciences, religions and arts. When a significant portion of the population is omitted, a skewed picture emerges. Women composers have been absent from survey books about music until recently; where they are included, their numbers and information about them remains scanty. Despite the recent expansion of attention in journals, dissertations, general books, and biographies, women musicians, especially composers, remain distinctly marginal. Women were denied public musical education to that for men until the twentieth century; opportunities for hearing their own music were also restricted; their works were rarely acknowledged or anthologized. Despite this, more than 6,000 women who composed music since the ninth century have now been identified. Their music has withstood the test of time, and is now in the process of rediscovery.<sup>7</sup> Historically, women composers have created music for the private, low-culture traditions of music-making within families and local communities. This type of low-culture music has been available to everyone regardless of class, race or sex, but its genres are not considered representative of the real or ‘pure’ aesthetic value of music. Music created for private, domestic consumption has occupied a very different place from the public music created by, and for, socially powerful individuals and institutions. The choice of compositional genre becomes a choice influenced not only by educational and ability orientation, but also by social and political factors.<sup>8</sup> High culture, public music plays a complex role in contemporary society, but its status and authority remain largely unquestioned. This categorization plays an important role in women’s marginalized access to musical composition as a means of intellectual authority. For example, there have been women composers whose work has achieved remarkable levels of dissemination and popularity without their music ever receiving ‘official’ recognition because it is perceived as “low culture,” simple or commonplace. Two of the most widely known songs of the twentieth century: *Happy Birthday* and *Rock-a-bye Baby* were written by female composers (Mildred and Patty Smith Hill – *Happy Birthday*; Effie Canning – *Rock-a-bye Baby*).<sup>9</sup> A number of aesthetic and scholarly developments pertaining to art music have coincided with women’s visibility as composers. These include:

- A growing recognition that music is sociohistorically situated
- A break with tonality
- Experiments with new power relationships vis-à-vis sound
- The introduction of alternatives to binary oppositional pairs and hierarchical patterns of structuring and understanding music
- A reevaluation of the circumstances surrounding the canonization of works
- A reconsideration of domestic spheres like the salon as sites of radical music making
- Computer and electronics technology and its ability to close the gap between composer and listener
- An expansion of the boundaries of art music to include folk, pop, jazz, etc.
- An increase in written and verbal discourse on music by composers themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Music is a nonverbal art form that appeals to both our emotions and our intellect. Music is a vast archive of the nonverbal wishes that have been passed down from generation to generation.<sup>11</sup> A composition begins with the composer’s need to organize a set of sounds and disseminate it to others. So, composing music is both a worker’s craft and a personal expression. Some obstacles women face trying to earn recognition in the industry include:

- Music curricula that does not shed light on women composers, resulting in no heritage
- Lack of precedent (role models)

- Fundamentals such as musical techniques, and methodologies are not promoted
- Difficulty in getting the necessary promotion for new works
- “Old boy” network of older composers who promote younger, traditionally male composers
- No pressure in music composition for men to share power with women because it is a private, low profile activity.
- Jealousy and cruelty are not unusual in any of the arts. But, in music, wicked tongues and devious behavior are common.<sup>12</sup>
- “Museum mentality” toward new music
- Musical composition is an antisocial occupation – composers are routinely alone in a room with sounds.
- Composers are clannish and tribal. For example, if a postmodernist writes a song for Eminem his credibility is ruined.
- Economics
- Necessity of a mentor (apprenticeship) to assist a novice composer focus and provide vital networking opportunities. A mentor, too, should teach music, not give out endorsements.
- Egocentric and narrow-minded associates and colleagues, who can also be loving teachers and protective allies.
- Pain of being a composer; having your work ridiculed; depression; jealousy and anger.
- Distinguishing between gifted and merely talented individuals.
- Personal pedigree – conservatory training, liberal arts college or university, self-taught
- Historically, women have been accepted and considered as performers, not composers.
- Few publishers promote women composers’ works

Given this list of obstacles and the absence of recognition or economic reward, why would anyone in possession of their faculties want to be a composer? These people have an obsessive, fanatic relationship to sound. They are compelled to create music and music fills a void for them. It defines their existence and is truly their way of life. For some, music is viewed as medicine for the spirit. The only practical career option is to teach, because few composers are employed exclusively in composition.<sup>13</sup>

According to Charles Jencks, Postmodernism is *double coding*: a combination of Modern techniques with something else ... to communicate with the public and a concerned minority ...”<sup>14</sup> Postmodernism in music is shaped by many factors, including technology (telephone TV, computer) that provides instant access; Marshall McLahan’s “global village” and our concept of culture. As a result there is growth in the quantity and variety of music available to us that have become part of a vast electronic network, it is less unique and particular, and it no longer has well-defined place, cultural function or focus. American composers have a central role in breaking down barriers between different types of music and culture. Composers today exhibit a bewildering diversity of means, roles, states, techniques and styles, but they are united in a marriage with the profound abstractions of musical sound which are continually shifting.<sup>15</sup> By avoiding elitism and taking a more democratic view, Postmodernist composers attempt to promote through their works vernacular traditions, “crossover” styles and “cultural convergence.” It is possible to gain insight into this phenomenon and to test this view by examining the careers and musical output of two postmodernist female composers: Joan Tower and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

Hailed as “one of the most successful woman composers of all time” in *The New Yorker* magazine and the subject of television documentaries on PBS’ WGBH television station in

Boston, on the CBS network program, *Sunday Morning*, and MJW Productions in England,<sup>16</sup> Joan Tower (b. 1938) spent her childhood in South America, where she developed interests in rhythm and percussion. As she prepares for her 70th birthday in 2008, Tower is looking forward as much as she is reflecting on a career that already spans more than five decades. Her catalog is comprised solely of instrumental compositions. Her works emanating from the 1960s are serial, influenced by contemporary composers Milton Babbitt and Charles Wuorinen. With *Black Topaz* (1976) her style evolves and exhibits the influences of composers Oliver Messiaen and George Crumb. Tower spent 15 years performing as a pianist with the Da Capo Chamber Players, an ensemble she founded in 1969, and works written for the group such as *Hexachords* (1972), *Amazon I* (1977) and *Wings* (1981) reflect her experiences as a performer accustomed to close interaction with a small ensemble. Many pieces have been commissioned works composed for specific performers, such as *Night Fields* (1994) which was written for the Muir Quartet. Chief among Tower's orchestral works are *Sequoia* (1981) and *Silver Ladders* (1986). Both are self contained pieces that can be described as accessible, rhythmic, and full of colorful orchestral effects. Tower's bold and energetic music, with its striking imagery and novel structural forms, has won large, enthusiastic audiences. *Sequoia* quickly entered the repertory, with performances by the St. Louis, New York, San Francisco, Minnesota and National Symphonies. Ms. Tower's extremely popular five *Fanfares for the Uncommon Woman* which pays homage to Aaron Copland, have been played by more than 400 different ensembles.<sup>17</sup>

The first woman ever to receive the Grawemeyer Award in Composition in 1990, Tower was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1998 and into the Academy of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University in the Fall of 2004. In January 2004 Carnegie Hall's *Making Music* series featured a retrospective of Tower's work. Most of the works featured on the series were then recorded for August 2005 release on the NAXOS recording label. Joan Tower is the first composer chosen for the ambitious new "Ford Made in America" commissioning program, a collaboration of the American Symphony Orchestra League and Meet the Composer. In October 2005 the Glen Falls Symphony Orchestra presented the world premiere of Tower's 15 minute orchestral piece. The work also was performed by orchestras in every state in the Union during the 2005-06 season. This is the first project of its kind to involve smaller budget orchestras as commissioning agents of a new work by a major composer.<sup>18</sup> Tower's music is published exclusively by Associated Music Publishers, a division of the Music Sales Group of G. Schirmer Inc.

According to Tower, society has two problems in terms of the classical music business. One is a PR problem. If you sell a name long and wide enough, everybody thinks that's the genius factor, which is wrong because it may not be. The real thing is can they evaluate that? Do they actually know that Itzhak Pearlman is a fantastic violinist or are they just sold that quantity? And that goes for dead composers also. That's number one. Number two, we're in a society that likes blacks and whites – quantities that are very defined. We don't want to take risks too much. We want to know what's happening. We want to know where our money's going. We want to know that we're going to hear a famous person and that they're going to play a famous piece. We don't want to go to hear an unknown soloist, we don't want to go to hear an unknown composer. Why?? I think people have lost touch with what it means to evaluate music and performers. Even our conductors have lost that ability, at least as far as new music goes. Also, the public is not compelling orchestra administrators, conductors, or soloists to invest time in new music. Tower states that she is more interested in writing for people who are interested in her work, foster a collaborative approach to the performer-composer relationship, and are committed to performing new music. Programming decisions can produce obstacles, too. On most of the orchestral concert programs, the premiere of a contemporary piece becomes a survival test because it is performed first. The logic is, if the new piece is not well received, the second part of the program can be salvaged by performing masterworks of the standard

repertoire. She also believes that working musicians should think more about the compositional process when performing. “In the 19th century, ... composers and performers were ... the same people ... making musical choices.”<sup>19</sup> Some fine composer-conductor-performer examples include Richard Strauss, Hans von Bulow, Franz Liszt, and Gustav Mahler. Says Tower, “Some players who are composers play very differently than the ones who are not.”<sup>20</sup> Tower also points to fewer composers entering the field. “I think there are too many performers coming along...in terms of what jobs they can get. ... Maybe it’s that [composers] don’t have enough opportunities.”<sup>21</sup> When considering new opportunities for women composer, Tower feels that she and Ellen Zwilich are blazing a lot of trails, especially in the symphonic world. “Ellen and I are forging yet new ground, which is very good because it means it’s opening some doors for some women. It’s just reminding people that there are women who can compose and here’s what they can do and you can buy their records. I think that’s real important. ... I’m very happy to be doing that for other women. I help women as much as I can in my own capacity... but there’s a problem with women because they don’t have a lot of role models certainly, especially among dead composers, and they don’t have enough of a support system within their own community ... so they have to forge their way very much by themselves and some of them just don’t have the strength to do that.”<sup>22</sup>

## **ELLEN TAAFE ZWILICH**

In 1983 Ellen Taafe Zwilich was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in music for her *Symphony No. 1*, first performed in 1982 by the American Composers Orchestra under Gunther Schuller, her mentor. Zwilich was the first woman to receive that honor.<sup>23</sup> The publicity engendered by the prize enabled Zwilich to earn a living exclusively from composition. An American composer and violinist, Zwilich studied with John Boda at Florida State University then moved to New York to study violin with Galamian. As a member of the American Symphony Orchestra under Stokowski, she acquired training in performance and orchestration. She enrolled at the Julliard School where she studied with Elliot Carter and Roger Sessions and in 1975 became the first woman to take the DMA in composition.<sup>24</sup> Zwilich’s music first came to public attention when Pierre Boulez conducted her *Symposium for Orchestra* at Julliard in 1975, but it was the 1983 Pulitzer Prize that brought her instantly into the international arena.

Since her earliest mature compositions, Zwilich has been obsessed with the idea of generating an entire work from its initial motives. She produces music with “fingerprints,” music that is immediately recognized as the product of a particular American composer who combines craft and inspiration in reflecting her optimistic and humanistic spirit in her compositions.<sup>25</sup> Concise, economical and clean in texture, her music might be classified under the rubric ‘neo-classic’ were it not for its very ‘neo-romantic’ expressive force. Zwilich’s music had already begun to change from the jagged melodies, atonal harmonies and structural complexities of the *String Quartet 1974* to a simpler, more accessible vocabulary focusing on communicating more directly with performer and listener. In the mid-1980s the motivic material itself becomes simpler, its development more audible, its melodic treatment more long-breathed and its harmonic context increasingly tonal. In later works, Zwilich has used traditional motivic materials within standard multi-movement structures, supported by recognizable thematic material. Orchestral works such as *Symbolon* (1988), which was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic and conducted by Zubin Mehta and recorded on the New World Label; *Symphony No. 2* (1985), premiered by Edo de Waart and the San Francisco Symphony; and *Symphony No. 3* (1992), written for the New York Philharmonic’s 150th anniversary; are characterized by grand gestures, tonal centers defined by ostinato and pedal point, along with forceful unison passages. The richly hued intensity of her orchestral works, reminiscent of Shostakovich, makes her music popular with both audiences and performers. Zwilich also forged new ground by writing a series of concertos for the more neglected orchestral instruments, including trombone, bass trombone,

oboe, bassoon and horn. She also wrote a *Double Concerto* for violin and cello. Like Tower, Zwilich enjoys creating works with a specific performer in mind. As the first occupant of the Carnegie Hall Composers Chair (1995-99) she composed the *Violin Concerto* for Pamela Frank and *String Quartet No. 2* for the Emerson Quartet. She also designed and hosted an innovative concert and interview series, *Making Music*, devoted to living composers.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Zwilich has received the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Chamber Music Prize, the Arturo Toscanini Music Critics Award, an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship, four Grammy nominations, and has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She holds the Francis Eppes Distinguished Professorship at Florida State University. Zwilich's music is widely known because it is performed, recorded, broadcast, and listened to and liked by all sorts of audiences. She is doubtless one of America's most frequently played and genuinely popular living composers, possessing the ability to combine purely technical excellence with a distinct power of communication.

These women share some interesting career-related similarities. For example, both women are pedagogues, holding prestigious teaching posts—Tower at Bard College and Zwilich at her alma mater, Florida State University—and do not have to rely on composition as their primary income stream. Both are married and financially secure. Both women's early career initiatives were championed by male composer-conductor mentors; both women have negotiated exclusive business relationships with music publishers and record labels; both women are instrumentalists.

Some final thoughts to consider. Last night I dreamt that the conductor of the [Vienna Philharmonic](#) was a woman. I dreamt that all composition students had to study the works of Ruth Crawford Seeger, and that Thea Musgrave was considered the most important composer of her time. I dreamt that Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre was more known than François Couperin, and that her books were obligatory for all cembalo-students. I dreamt that all music-history books had been rewritten, and that there was no difference in historical treatment between male-or female composers. I dreamt that the main Square in London was called: Fanny Hensel Square. I dreamt that at all Universities there were at least six woman-professors of Musicology and Composition.

Regrettably, this was only a dream. Yet, women composers and their colleagues have made significant progress, considering the number of their works that are now regularly being performed, the books that are being published about Women in Music, and organizations like the International Alliance for Women in Music work diligently to promote and assist women in the industry. Even so, we cannot deny that most orchestras and music-institutes are directed by men, and the boards of International Music Festivals seldom have women as members, let alone as chairpersons. We cannot deny that the same old music-history books are still being used, with all the omissions. So much remains to be done, mainly in educating people.

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