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The "Culture Industry" and Commodification of Art

Maria Edwards

Many would agree that during the last few decades views of the United States have often revolved around the idea of consumerism, and not without reason. One must bear in mind that America was the trend-setter in many aspects, yet, as we shall see, it was not immune to influences from the rest of the world. What is particularly intriguing is the way consumerism has affected art; looking at contemporary art, the uninitiated would very often find themselves wondering whether what they see is indeed art, and if so, they may ask themselves "Why?". The reasons for this are simple: art has totally collapsed into the sphere of life to the point that today the world of art has conflated with that of commodities, in both of which everything relates to money. In Europe, two Frankfurt school thinkers began to talk about such phenomena as early as the 1940s. It is interesting to trace how such ideas were reflected in art at the time, how they came to be actualized in the United States, and the effects that such transformations had on the contemporary world of art, and if the situation has changed over the years. If one is to look at art as the reflection of society, it is necessary to understand how the art market operates, what determines the value of works of art, and what compels people to buy art.

With these issues in mind, I plan to situate the current conditions in the art world as part of the global economy, where the institution of art has collapsed with the institution of money. The usual example given of this conflation of art with commodities is the art of American artist Andy Warhol's from the 60s and 70s; I will argue that the beginnings of this collapse can actually be traced back to Europe in the late 50s and early 60s, with the art of Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni. Using Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the "culture industry," I will attempt to show how it is reflected in art, in particular, by examining the growing commercial aspect of art, and its conflation with the purchasing of goods by specific customers. I will examine how and what has changed (if anything) since the late 1950s and how the prices and market for art are today controlled by a few branded entities that cater to a certain elite, which

I will argue, is another manifestation of the "culture industry." I will also briefly touch upon the issue of the reasons why would one buy art at exorbitantly high prices, using some of the ideas of Christopher Lasch. Ultimately, I will attempt to show that works of art today are nothing more than objects, with no inherent value other than the monetary one ascribed to them. Art has collapsed, it has been flattened, leveled with everything else around us, including us, as a result of the "culture industry."

In order to understand the conflation of art and money I will begin by examining the theory of the "culture industry" as proposed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkhemer in the last chapter of their 1944 book *Philosophical fragments,* which was later known as *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* In the last chapter of the book, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass deception" the Frankfurt school philosophers argued that society is ruled through a "culture industry," which includes the media as well as art. They saw the "culture industry" as totalitarian and all-encompassing, for, they argued, it had commoditized everything, including art, human beings, even human individuality, all of which have been standardized and objectified. Adorno and Horkheimer rejected notions that culture is the expression of society; for them, it was not generated by society, but imposed on it for the purpose of total control.[1] Furthermore, they insist that even though the system of the "culture industry" originated in liberal industrial countries, it exists and is created in the economic area and is powered by the laws of capitalism.[2]

Adorno and Horkheimer offer a model of how modern society operates: within the cap of the "culture industry" society is divided into consumers and producers, or bourgeois and proletariat, elite and masses, with an enormous gap between the two groups. The scheme is very simple: producers produce the culture and morality for the consumers, the consumers consume it. Thus, the "culture industry" creates illusory differences, such as those between avant-garde and kitsch, between connoisseurship and expertise and common knowledge. It is through this illusion of difference that the "culture industry" is able to maintain social harmony. However, "culture distributes its privileges democratically to all... and both [consumer and producer] content themselves with the production of sameness."[3] What makes Adorno and Horkheimer's social model different from that of Marx is the fact that that the proletariat is controlled by culture, not labor. Furthermore, they offer a revision of the Marxist dialectic, according to which progress emerges out of struggle and conflict. Adorno and Horkheimer propose that progress is only illusory, for everyone operates under the influence of the "culture industry," the powers of which are so totalitarian that "Anyone who resists can survive only by being incorporated."[4]

Thus they propose that art, just like everything else, has been subdued by the market. Referring to the time period around 1944, they say that

today artists "call heads of governments by their first names and are subject, in every artistic impulse, to the judgment of their illiterate principals."[5] The situation has not changed much since then. Sarcastically, they add that liberalism, even in its heyday, has been the "freedom of the stupid to starve, in art, as elsewhere."[6] In such a way, the "culture industry" controls through the disguise of entertainment, and entertainment is devoid of any explicit content. It is meaningless, for it is not meant to provoke any thought processes but only to cause compliance and perpetuate the model. This creates art that is mere buffoonery, nonsense. The goal of art is, Adorno implies, just as with any commercial product, to sell more of it. Once it is sold, there is no concern about whether it provided what it had promised. "The diner must be satisfied with reading the menu,"[7] they posit, referring to the total spectacle that holds hegemony over society. The promise of the glossy package is nothing but a celebration of the daily routines, which the customer was seeking to escape. Yet, there is no escape. "The culture industry is corrupt.... it is causing meaninglessness to disappear at the lowest level of art just as radically as meaning is disappearing at the highest."[8] The process of the conflation of culture and entertainment is two-way: not only has culture been debased, but at the same time entertainment has been intellectualized; amusement itself has become the ideal, for it has replaced higher values.

Thus, as early as the 1940s it was theorized that art has become synonymous with money. Yet the first explicit examples of this in art would not come until the 1950s,[9] as exemplified by the work of Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni. The main focus of Klein's oeuvre was the conflation of art and life, as he said himself in 1959: "for me painting today no longer relates to the eye; it relates to the only thing in us that does not belong to us: our lives."[10] Yves Klein saw himself as a conductor of the divine, as a mediator, and thus his art was a means of communication. Pierre Restany points out that Klein rejected all avant-garde labels, for he saw himself as a classical painter, albeit not a maker of objects but of beauty, communicating through a "pictorial sensitivity."[11] During a talk in 1959, the artist explained what this sensitivity was, claiming that: "It is what exists beyond our being and yet always belongs to us. Life itself does not belong to us; it is with sensitivity, which does belong to us, that we are able to purchase it. Sensitivity is the coin of the universe, of space, of all of nature, which allows us to purchase life in the state of raw material."[12]

These words, uttered by the artist, are very interesting for they are exactly the thing that ties his art to the theory of Adorno and Horkheimer. Judging by this statement and the character of his art, it becomes clear that Yves Klein understood the fact that people have been deprived of their sensitivity, as a result, one may posit, of the "culture industry." He understood that people have become desensitized, deprived of the awareness of being alive, perhaps, so he attempted to educate his audience, to bring them out of their

trance, liberate them from the grip of the "culture industry."

Interestingly enough, Yves Klein speaks of money, of people being able to "purchase" life. And he emphasizes this idea with his art. On April 28, 1958, he introduced to the world "Le Vide" ("The Void"). The exhibition consisted of an empty gallery that was on display for one week, showing immaterial pictures.[13] Restany argues that Klein was not driven by purely commercial concerns, that he would not exhibit something unless he had something new to show, some new level of sensitivity.[14] Yet, during the exhibition of "The Void," Klein managed to sell two works, and he quickly established a system of "transference of immaterial zones," which was backed up by a certain weight of gold. Restany explains: "the principle of transfer was as follows: the zones of immaterial pictorial sensitivity were ceded on payment of a certain weight of fine gold (starting at 20 grams and doubling afterwards). For each zone ceded, a receipt was delivered indicating the exact weight of gold that was the material equivalent of the immaterial purchase. Zones could be transferred by their owners at double the initial sale value."[15]

Using this basic model, Yves Klein continued to sell his immaterial works. During the exhibition "Yves Klein le Monochrome" in 1960, there were 8 purchasers, among who were Peppino Palazzoli, an Italian gallery owner, Jacques Kugel, antique dealer, German Museum Haus "Lange Krefeld," Dino Buzzati, a famous Italian writer, and Michael Blankfort, an American playwright.[16] Despite his idea of benefiting the audience, it is clear that Klein materialized the immaterial through the commercial process of selling it for gold. Two things immediately become clear. First, the benefits of the immaterial, the possibility of "impregnation" with it, were only available to those who were well off, or at least enough to be able to pay for it. Second, the reduction of the process of reception of the immaterial sensitivity to a commercial exchange is highly indicative of the trends that art was taking. Klein's work exemplifies the appropriation of reality, merger between the aesthetic object and life that was started by Duchamp, but it goes beyond this, for now money, or exchange value, is becoming part of the work of art itself. Some 15 years earlier Adorno and Horkheimer had predicted that "the use value of cultural objects is replaced by exchange value; enjoyment is giving way to being there and being in the know, connoisseurship by enhanced prestige."[17]

The fact that Klein did stipulate an exchange value for his artistic products only further confirms Adorno's theory of the totalitarian nature of the "culture industry." Even though Klein's work is not entirely based on commercial exchange, it clearly marks the beginning of this trend, or of what Adorno and Horkheimer called the beginning of art as a "species of commodity."[18]

The Frankfurt school philosophers also posited that aesthetic sensibility in art had vanished. This can be seen in Yves Klein's work, but even more so in the work of Italian artist Piero Manzoni, Klein's contemporary. It is inter-

esting to note that in 1957 Piero Manzoni was one of the few who visited Yves Klein's first exhibition in Italy. The show of eleven blue monochromes was exhibited at Galleria Apollinaire on via Brera in Milan. This encounter, Pierre Restany claims, marked the turning point in Manzoni's own career, [19] for after seeing Klein's monochromes Manzoni stated that "l'arte non e vera creazione" (art is not a true creation) and began to create "achromes": paintings built up of primary materials, which were cut up or scratched. Manzoni said that he was not interested in material nor in color, but in the idea of a "space bereft of any images whatsoever, whether this be pure color, mark or material."[20]

One could interpret Manzoni's stated intentions as a reaction against materiality, as this was one of the main trends in Italian art at the time. Over the course of a few years, Italy was rapidly transformed from an agricultural country (pre World War II) to the rapidly industrialized society of the 1950's and 60's known as the "miracolo Italiano." Many artistic groups emerged, attempting to cope with the strain of such rapid changes. Manzoni was at the forefront of a new generation of artists who rejected the prevailing pessimistic outlook and adopted a more critical attitude, attempting to grapple with the place of art and culture in society.[21]

Piero Manzoni's oeuvre shares the shift from painting to concept based art with the work of Yves Klein, and further takes the commercial aspect of art seen in Klein's work to another level. Manzoni's art products, unlike those of Klein, were not ephemeral in nature, but rather concrete and material. In 1961 Manzoni presented his "Living Sculpture" at the Plinio de Martiis' Galleria la Tartaruga. This body of work consisted of people who had various parts of their bodies signed by the artist, for each of which he issued certificates of authenticity. The certificates read: "this is to certify that [name of person] has been signed by my hand and is therefore, from this date on, to be considered an authentic and true work of art, signed, Piero Manzoni."[22] Furthermore, a receipt was issued to each person, indicating the type of art they were, indicated by a stamp of a different color. Red, for example, stood for a work of art for life, yellow indicated that only part of the body was a work of art, green that the person was only a work of art under certain circumstances or when in a certain position, sleeping, eating etc, and mauve stood for a person who had been designated a work of art for life, but did not pay for it.[23]

Manzoni's "Living sculpture" exemplifies several of the main ideas presented by Adorno and Horkheimer. The latter argued that art "admits to being a commodity, abjures its autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumer goods, that has the charm of novelty."[24] One can clearly see how this is actualized in "Living Sculpture": the issuance of receipts for each work of art is a clear sign of the commoditization of art. The reduction of the artistic level to a color coded stamp entirely collapses art and commodity. "Living Sculpture" also exemplifies the idea that everything is dominated and sub-

verted by the "culture industry;" art and individuals alike have been leveled down to mere objects.

Adorno and Horkheimer asserted that the goal of the "culture industry" is to "never release the grip on the consumer" which is partially achieved by the presentation of "the same everyday world as paradise."[25] In the case of Manzoni's work, the human body was given a new status by the mere placement of a signature of another human being. This illusion of exclusivity, of expertise, the illusion that there is difference when there is none whatsoever, is exactly how the "culture industry" operates: the illusive diversity keeps subjects (or rather objects) entertained and satisfied, and the "social liquidation of art" becomes apparent, where art has not been denied a place in society, but has rather been subverted by the "culture industry" through its "debasement as cultural assets."[26]

This debasement of art is even more evident in Manzoni's *The Artist's Shit,* produced in 1961, and consisting of a set of 90 cans of the artist's feces, each weighing 30 grams. Each can had a serial number, and a label which read:

> Artist's shit
> Contents 30 gr. Net
> Freshly preserved
> Produced and tinned in May 1961[27]

Echoing Klein, the cans were sold for their price in gold. Manzoni, however, stripped the selling process of any trace of mysticism, declaring the direct connection between art and money. The series of cans directly reinforced as well as mocked the idea of art as a commodity, raising questions about the real value of art, and at the same time suggesting that art has no value other than the monetary equivalent for which it can be exchanged. It also points to the fact that the artists themselves have been reduced to mere producers, while at the same time they possess self-proclaimed, yet "magical," powers which enable them to sell their own feces as a valuable commodity. In fact, it is interesting to note that both Manzoni and Klein alluded to the privileged position of the artist as such, as someone who is able to communicate with the public, convey ideas, educate; someone special who is able to, just like a magician or a trickster, bestow value on ordinary objects simply by signing them or sell empty space by simply declaring it "special." As Adorno and Horkheimer had noted, the cheapness of mass-produced luxury items changes the character of art which "admits to being a commodity, abjures its autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumer goods, that has the charm of novelty."[28]

Manzoni, speaking about his art, said: "the work of art has the totemic value of living myth, without symbolic or descriptive dispersion: it is a primary and direct expression."[29] Manzoni's use of the words "totem" and "myth" are

worth nothing, for they fit directly into the ideas of the "culture industry." For Adorno and Horkheimer, the "culture industry" operates partially through the creation of illusions with the help of myth. The end result is a false fetishism of worthless objects, "totems" in Manzoni's words, creating a world in which, for the consumer, the use value of art is reduced to its function as a fetish, which is the only use value and the only quality of art that he or she can enjoy.[30] Resonating fully with the ideas of the "culture industry," Manzoni says: "there comes a point where individual mythology and universal mythology are identical,"[31] which marks the total power of the "culture industry."

Thus, by the early 1960s the world of art in Europe was developing directly along the lines described by Adorno and Horkheimer. At that time, group exhibitions, featuring both American and European artists, began to be organized.[32] It is easy to see the relationship between the work of the celebrated pop artist Andy Warhol of the 1960s and 70s and that of Manzoni and Klein. What differentiated the former from the latter was the fact that Warhol was media oriented, engaging objects from popular culture directly, rather than abstract ideas or the artist's body. This can be seen as a full embodiment of Adorno and Horkheimer's theory, exemplifying the total capitalization of art as a marker of the complete commoditization of the entirety of culture. The work of Andy Warhol offers a celebration of the "culture industry;" it exemplifies the total defeat of art's autonomy, shows the conflation of art and money, and the equation of the artist with a celebrity. All these ideas were present in the works of Klein and Manzoni, but are fully explored and exemplified by Warhol and his work.

*

In Adorno and Horkheimer's view, art was in danger, for it was being replaced by entertainment. By the end of the 20th century the effects of the "liquidation of art" were very clearly apparent; we see the complete actualization of Adorno's ideas. In the present day, it can safely be said that the idea of separateness has been entirely lost from the sphere of art. The existence of art today is justified by its ability to be translated into a monetary equivalent. In the United States, the beginning of this transformation can be seen with Warhol, who declared that he was a business artist, making the link between art and money very easy to see. Adorno's prediction that "in the culture industry respect is vanishing along with criticism: the latter gives way to mechanical expertise, the former to the forgetful cult of celebrities"[33] is fully actualized today.

As Don Thompson points out, in today's world, "put branding and publicity together... it must be art."[34] Yet branding in the sphere of art started at the time Klein and Manzoni; Yves Klein's *IKB 234,* a solid blue panel, was marketed as something that would offer the owner a "window into the eternal

and endless spiritual realm,"[35] in other words, a trustworthy brand that would fulfill a promise to the owner. Even at that time, art was already mimicking the sphere of advertising, as the "culture industry" predicted. There is an interesting similarity between the marketing pitch of *IKB 234* and a radio announcement made in 1923, which asserted:

> Sell them their dreams...Sell them what they longed for and hoped for and almost despaired of having... After all, people don't buy things to have things. They buy things to work for them. They buy hope, hope of what your merchandise will do for them. Sell them this hope and you won't have to worry about selling them goods.[36]

It is a curious fact that Yves Klein's first show in the United States took place in April1961 in Leo Castelli's gallery.[37] Castelli, an Italian banker, who in 1957 opened a gallery in New York, initiated gallery branding[38] several years before Andy Warhol became famous. (In fact, Warhol was at first rejected by Castelli; later, when the gallery agreed to represent him, Warhol denied in revenge.[39]) Gallery brands, artist brands, brands in general are what dictate the price of art today, Thompson says, not aesthetic concerns. This illustrates Adorno and Horkheimer's ideas that things are only seen as valuable so long as they have some exchange value. Thus, art for art's sake, or anything for its own sake is no longer wanted. Art has collapsed with commercialism.

In his book *The $12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art,* Dan Thompson explains in depth the mechanisms behind the contemporary art market. Even though, as we have seen, it could be argued that the seeds of artistic branding can be traced to the Europe of the previous decade, he contends that the process of branding began in the 1960s in New York, when artists were promoted by dealers such as Leo Casteli.[40] This, according to Thompson, initiated an avalanche of commercialism in art, to the point that today the art market complies with the same rules that apply to the commercial market. Art has truly become nothing more than a commodity, measured in money.

Damien Hirst, the artist who created *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living,* was made into a celebrity by Charles Saatchi, a wealthy businessman, whom Thompson calls a "branded collector." The author explains: "His purchases are publicized and create an instant reputation for the artist...he financed the creation of Damien Hirst's stuffed shark."[41] Saatchi did more than this. He set the standard for high-end gallery spaces, their advertising methods, and their audience and potential clients. Saatchi exhibited his collections in a former paint factory in London, which he never advertised, other than by hosting V.I.P. parties for the rich and famous.[42] Thus

galleries became nothing more than hubs for the promotion of artists and the sale of art.

Branding permeated yet another level of art: auction houses. Thompson points out that Sotheby's and Christie's form a "duopoly" on the art market, for together they share 80% of the auction market for high art.[43] What is more interesting is that they have created an internal hierarchy of wealthy customers, with the Ultra High Net Worth (UHNW) at the top of the lists. Auction houses are willing to go out of their way to cater to the needs of such customers. As part of their marketing strategies, they are willing to bring a work of art to an UHNW customer, to any part of the world, so that the customer would be able to see how the artwork will look in their premises.[44]

Auction houses also advertise the expertise of their specialists, which further adds to the value of the art they sell. The prices of art are created on the basis of the economic principles of supply and demand, rather than on artistic merit. "The starting point in setting a price for the work of a new artist is the dealer's reputation...it signals the reputation of the artist, the status of the dealer, and the status of the intended purchaser." As a rule, any consecutive art by the same artist would be sold at higher and higher prices. This is one of the reasons why people are willing to buy art, because it is a good investment, its prices are expected to always be on the rise and the buyer would profit over time. Dealers adjust their prices according to highs at auctions, and auction houses determine prices according to the lists of potential customers, the desirability of a given piece, and many other factors. Auction houses further give preferences and discounts to museums, frequent customers, or important collectors.[45]

Considering the state of contemporary art market, it is easy to see how the current situation exemplifies Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the "culture industry." The thinkers pointed out that free market was disappearing, creating an environment in which only the wealthiest are able to pay for advertising, and it is their products that thrive and take over the market. Thus, "the dominant taste derives its idea from the advertisement, from commodified beauty."[46] The work of art has become conforming to the demands of the market, to the point where for the consumer, the only value of art is its function as a fetish.[47] In the contemporary art market we also see the creation of illusory hierarchies that Adorno and Horkheimer talked about, yet, in the end, everyone is subject to the "culture industry," which, by this point in time, can be equated with money. The "culture industry" as Adorno and Horkheimer envisioned it was a culture of entertainment created by the wealthiest few. Today even these wealthiest few are controlled by money.

In the current situation one may ask why we keep using the word "art" to refer to things that are clearly controlled by economy and the market. "Art" seems to be an empty signifier, a label that stands for a type of commod-

ity. Adorno and Horkhemer would say that this is yet another effect of the "culture industry," which has permeated all spheres of life, including language. They posited that language would be reduced to mere signs, words would be used randomly by people who do not even fully understand their meaning; another effect of the "culture industry" that discourages any kind of critical thinking. Thus, works of art are transformed into advertising tools, to be used propaganda: "Advertising the totalitarian slogan."[48] Thus, in the contemporary art market, "price creates value and buyer satisfaction rather than reflecting it."[49]

One question remains to be answered. Why do people want to buy works of art? Throughout his book, Dan Thompson lists several possibilities as to why people are willing to buy art for exorbitant amounts of money: to be part of the group of the owners of important works of art; as a means of attaining membership on a museum board via a donation of an important painting; as a means of becoming a person who is presumed to be wealthy and cultured; as a means of gaining prominence for the possession of a highly coveted work of art and, finally, by people who just love art for art's sake and have the money to afford to own it. To see the parallel with the "culture industry" more clearly, it is useful to examine Christopher Lasch's theory of narcissism. According to him, people today have a psychological dependence on others in order to validate themselves as worthy individuals: "the narcissist cannot live without an admiring audience."[50] According to Lasch, it is within a society that demands submission that such narcissistic behaviors proliferate, for people are plagued by anxiety and depression (as a result of the oppression of the "culture industry"). Lasch argues that the media fuel narcissism by encouraging ordinary people to identify with celebrities, creating a situation where "In a society in which the dream of success has been drained of any meaning beyond itself, men have nothing against which to measure their achievements except the achievements of others. Self-approval depends on public recognition and acclaim..."[51] Compare Adorno and Horkheimer: "culture is a paradoxical commodity. It is so completely subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly equated with use that it can no longer be used. For this reason it merges with the advertisement."[52]

People today do not measure themselves against their achievements, but rather their possessions. People "want to be envied rather than respected."[53] This not only explains Thompson's reasons for the desire people have for expensive works of art, but also, once again, reflects the ideas of the "culture industry," which allows everyone to be free, to be the same. The only way to differentiate oneself from the rest is through possessions. In this sense the collapse of art and money is a logical consequence of the effect of the "culture industry." Its leveling and objectification of people and even life creates the desire to be different in an attempt to escape its grip. There is no escape, as

Adorno and Horkheimer said about 60 years ago, and there is no escape now. Money has spun far beyond our control. As Charles Saatchi said: "Today, there are no rules about investment. Sharks can be good. Artist's dung can be good."[54]

Notes

[1] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-137.

[2] Adorno and Horkheimer, 104.

[3] Adorno and Horkheimer, 106.

[4] Adorno and Horkheimer, 104-8.

[5] Adorno and Horkheimer, 105.

[6] Adorno and Horkheimer, 94-137.

[7] Adorno and Horkheimer, 111.

[8] Adorno and Horkheimer, 114.

[9] One can certainly say that the collapse of art and life can be traced back to the work of Marcel Duchamp. However, the mass production of commodified art did not occur until later, neither was Duchamp oeuvre directly indicative of the conflation between the art market and market in general, nor of the equation between art and money. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, his work will not be mentioned.

[10] Pierre Restany, *Yves Klein* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 7.

[11] Restany, 8.

[12] Restany, 8.

[13] Restany, 48.

[14] Restany, 42.

[15] Restany, 54.

[16] Restany, 57.

[17] Adorno and Horkheimer, 128.

[18] Adorno and Horkheimer, 128.

[19] Restany, 37.

[20] Germano Celant, ed. "Chronology", in *Piero Manzoni: Paintings, Reliefs, & Objects,* Translated by Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzola (London: The Tate Gallery, 1974), 6.

[21] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Thrust into the Whirlwind: Italian art before Arte Povera," in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001), 21-41.

[22] Celant, 11.

[23] Celant, 11.

[24] Adorno and Horkheimer, 127.

[25] Adorno and Horkheimer, 113.

[26] Adorno and Horkheimer, 130.

perhaps also 'observing' strategy), and as a repository of the nature and goals of critical inquiry—can all be applied to a criticism of visual artwork, and for our purposes will remain implicit within the argument of Picasso's creative self-deconstruction by the two prints in question. However it should not be forgotten to what point deconstructive criticism undoes itself: by enacting a critical reading, the concepts it utilizes themselves fall under the limitation of an authorized meaning (i.e. the meaning I assign them). Culler cautions this, pointing to Derrida's declaration that "deconstruction is not a critical operation. The critical is its object; the deconstruction always bears, at one moment or another, on the confidence invested in the critical or critico-theoretical process, in the act of decision, in the ultimate possibility of the decidable."[7] With this in mind, I will attempt to observe my mode of criticism itself as well as the artworks that have come under my critical gaze.

*

> *Clearly, there is a correspondence between...a deconstructive critique that defers meaning, and a creative process that defers closure.*[8]

Walking through the Marlborough exhibit, to first witness the embrace (slashed through) of *L'Etreinte* and to progress through Picasso's printed oeuvre to the *Peintre et Modèle* collection, is to move in a reverse narrative from consummation/copulation to a deferred closure and creative process impelled by erotic distance. Picasso's deferral of closure, this creative obsession with the barrier which Kleinfelder parallels to the deconstructive deferral of meaning, is however implicit even in this early example of an embrace, namely by the act of its cancellation. Though paradoxical, it is through the prevention of an edition of this work (whereas the edition of the later work further *compounds* a notion of sexual deferral), we encounter an act of denial, of an effacement of that consummation.

Printed work is a traditionally inferior medium to painting and other graphic artistic production in terms of the value placed on 'original' or unique works. There is a deferral of originality implicit in printed reproductions, and it is in this deferral that we find further challenges to artistic agency. The very notion of a print calls into question the action of Picasso's own hand. Though he may have originated the plate used for the etching and the aquatint of the aforementioned prints, the question must be asked whether the plate itself stands as original, or if in fact each print, editioned presumably by a printer

other than Picasso himself, is itself originary. If this be the case, then the print expresses its content while deferring the presence of a unified or ultimate original: in the case of *Peintre et Modèle* the originality of each reproduction compounds the notion of Picasso's fixation on sexual difference, while lending further credence to the symbolization of *L'Etreinte's* cancellation as a denial of an originary consummation, mastery, or creative fulfillment by the artist.

I have chosen to abstain from invoking Freud or psychoanalysis in this criticism for the sake of both brevity and clarity, though a healthy reading of Freudian theory regarding primary sexuality and libidinal drive theory would significantly augment an argument in regards to both sexual difference and the question of origin. To gesture, at the very least, to the correlation between sexuality and originality, and to foreshadow the confluence of the themes of supplementarity in representation, I choose to invoke a passage of Derrida from *Writing and Difference*, describing unconscious drives (in his reading of Freud) as 'originary prints' impelling (re)production. Derrida writes,

> Originary Prints. Everything begins with reproduction. Always already: that is to say, repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted in deferral, belatedly... supplementarily...the call of the supplement is primary, here, and it hollows out that which will be reconstituted by deferral as the present. The supplement, which seems to be added as a plenitude to a plenitude, is equally that which compensates for a lack.[9]

That Derrida prioritizes language is explicit in the themes and strategies continuous through his body of work. His reading of Freud above hinges on the laden terms of *supplementarity* and *deferral*, and it is the difference and indecidability of those terms through which they become operative to deconstructive criticism. Yet there is a self-negating origin present in Derrida's thought in his privileging of language and utterance as primary. Even *Truth in Painting,* his 'framing' of painting as act, as object, as sign, is impelled into argument by a written statement of Cezanne's: his transcribed promise to fellow painter Emile Bernard, "I owe you the truth in painting and I will give it to you." This declaration of a debt to truth confronts the relationship between truth and representation. Derrida continues, "The abyssal expression "truth of truth," which will have made it be said that the truth is the non-truth, can be crossed with itself according to all sort of chiasmi, according as one determines the model as presentation or as representation."[10] Removing the presence of a truth-giving original by the notion of deferred meaning, dislocation and supplementarity, is there any disclosure of truth in representation in Picasso's prints?

Derrida continues to analyze the notion of truth in regards to representation by further invoking the oppositional tension between literal and figurative, where an artwork speaks in a dialogue displacing the artist's active signature of meaning granting. He writes,

> But must we take a painter literally, once he starts to speak? Coming from Cezanne, "I will tell it to you" can be understood figuratively: he could have promised to tell the truth, in painting, to tell these four truths according to the pictorial metaphor of discourse or as a discourse silently working the space of painting. And since he promises to tell them "in painting," one does not even need to know of the signatory, for this hypothesis, that he is a painter.[11]

Likewise, the act of signature, or of artistic intention we seek to attach to this exhibition of printed works at the Marlborough, becomes doubly displaced first by the traditional printmaking delegation of physical production to a master printer, and in Picasso's figurative (passive) signing over of the body of work to the Marlborough's curator, where the exhibition becomes pictorial metaphor of a declaration made less by Picasso than by the ever changing and, subjectively motivated intentions of the curator, confusing Picasso's own historical/personal context with our own.

And yet the works of art must stand *themselves* as works rendered by Picasso *himself.* Historical context and autobiographical narrative must be both examined, while likewise being suspended and displaced, reworked into a model in which their movement is both understood and exposed as limiting. Both prints were inspired by the personal relationship Picasso shared with his lover of the time; they are not only representations of an archetypal sexual difference but also portraits of himself in encounter with his actual lover. Within the first chapter of her criticism, Kleinfelder addresses the extent to which an autobiographical authority should be assumed in Picasso's later prints, emphasizing the prevalence of what she termed an "open ended textuality" rather than "masterpiece aesthetic" in those prints, where it must be conceded of the late work that there is "more to the work than the man behind it." She continues:

> Even when Picasso uses the artist and model theme to make pointed references to himself, he more often than not does so to parody what Rosalind Krauss has called 'the autobiographical Picasso.' He in a sense deconstructs his own myth in order to put emphasis back on the images themselves, on what these representations of the act of representing represent. The question of reference, thus, is what these many images of the artist and model circle around,

> and Picasso seems to delight in problematizing that question again and again... The model is not simply a reference to Picasso's wife or mistress of the moment, anymore than the artist and model theme is simply a love story set in the studio. Looked at beyond the frame of personal reference, these works begin to open up a much broader range or reference, one that even includes reference to reference itself in all its various modes[12]

History, like context, is boundless, and so the question of meaning becomes a matter of acquiescing to the relative determination of a given context. Thus deconstruction exposes the indeterminacy of meaning, where meaning doubles as both what is grasped and what one fails to understand. The meaning of each print cannot be relegated solely to the personal sexual context that Picasso found himself inspired to represent. The Meaning of meaning can only be an infinite implication of reference in these works, alighting upon the indeterminate and mutable plurality of Picasso's creative process. Culler writes, "what deconstruction proposes is not an end to distinctions, not an indeterminacy that makes meaning the invention of the reader. The play of meaning is the result of what Derrida calls 'the play of the world,' in which the general text always provides further connections, correlations, and contexts." [13] The pursuit of meaning in deconstruction must instead become an attempt to find the *supplement*, the junctures, the hinges, which is an attempt to find the "heterogeneity of a text," and to "calculate probable forces" within the text.

On this notion of deconstructive supplementarity, Kleinfelder parallels Picasso's creative process, where "the act of pictorial representation engages Picasso in an analogous supplementary play...The supplementarity that marks rhetorical representations, thus will mark pictorial representations, as well, displaying its twofold logic: first, in the displacement that always separates the representation for its referent, and second, in the figurative play of the differential network of relays and traces that a representation sets into motion."[14] This differential network we can see explicitly in the deferral of figuration (by cancellation) in *L'Etreinte* and the deferral of sexual (and transitively artistic) fulfillment in *Peintre et Modèle.*

On the notion of supplementarity, Kleinfelder addresses the implication of closure and 'confinement' in the deferral of meaning, noting,

> The transcendent freedom implied by both Derrida's irrepressible supplementarity and Picasso's open-ended creativity proves, nonetheless, to be as much a confinement as a release. Not only is it impossible to fully attain ultimate meaning or definite conclusions when they are endlessly deferred and displaced by the logic of supplementarity, it is by the same token equally impossible for meaning to ever break free from the closed circuit operation of a

> textuality or figurative play that is both irreducible and unmasterable.[15]

Even if the limiting frame of supplementarity holds meaning perpetually in abeyance, that 'figurative play' is unmasterable likewise opens creative production into proliferation. That difference plays so heavily in the notion of supplementarity, it must be addressed to what extent deconstruction ruptures a closed system of creation *by means* of indecidable and irreducible difference from which artistic expression articulates itself.

Deconstructive analysis repeats the structures it analyzes; it is both inversive and interpretive. The analyzed text elucidates the analyzing. Deconstructive interpretation makes the marginal and inessential operative, though without reinscribing the marginal as a new center. Rather the mark or feature being analyzed is characterized by its element of *difference*, so becoming both its own frame and the rupturing of that frame, both the mark and the gap. "You have, I suppose, dreamt of finding a single word for designating difference and articulation. I have perhaps located it by chance in Robert ['s Dictionary] if I play on the word, or rather indicate its double meaning. This word is *brisure* [supplement]... Difference is *articulation.*"[16] Picasso's prints, featured at the Marlborough in all their protean, plural, contradictory articulation, position themselves so that a deconstructive interpretation of difference is implicated.

There are two terms to explore in relation to this notion of a supplement, of a hinge or graft both outlining and rupturing difference: *Chiasm* and *Hymen.* In Derrida's essay from *Truth in Painting* titled "+R" he explores the chiasm, which marks difference, as both a gesture of cancellation and erasure while also an additional mark which is physically articulated and present. [17]

Recalling Picasso's parody of 'autobiography,' Derrida theorizes the term *Chiasm* as it rearranges *'Ich,'* displacing self-identity and possession by marking. The chiasm present in both prints, of the act of cancellation of the first and of the canvas marking difference between model and artist, likewise cut through the notion of Picasso as self-portrayed in both prints, "On the border, on the Margins renamed/renowned and deleted. But announced, on this damaged frame, by an $\chi...\chi$, the chiasmus letter, is Chi, in its normal transcription. This is what I call that other scene, following, if you like. The anagrammatical inversion of *Ich.*"[18]

The presence of the chiasm in both prints, as the slash of cancellation and the slash of the canvas dividing sexes, implicates not only the sexual difference of concern to us in content, but, when taken as a mark denoting a physical act (presumably it was Picasso's decision to cancel *L'Etreinte),* the chiasm further situates the very notion of artistic agency in the indecidable territory of difference. To this point Derrida writes "*Ich* performs its own

operation...*Ich* signs the absolute reverse of a text, its other scene, but also shows that it is showing, draws the gallery, the monstration, the exhibition...exposes the exposition."[19] Derrida goes further. Where the signatory event denoting truth in an artistic expression falls under a chiasm denoting difference, whether in the sexual difference tied to Picasso's creative act, or in the difference opposing origin and reproduction in the editioning of prints, Picasso's own iconic signature is supplanted as "χ signs the picture."[20]

Beyond the question of agency and signature, the chiasm is most explicitly symbolic of sexual difference in *L'Etreinte* and *Peintre et Modèle.* It must be asked, concerning Picasso's consistent sexualization of the artistic enterprise and his obsession with the image of the model and an erotic separation, whether his creative process betrays a phallocentric bias. Phallocentrism correlates a logocentric claim of the logical supremacy of speech over writing with the notion of a paradigmatic phallic or paternal mastery over the feminine. Freud, in his writing on "Femininity" casts the female as derivative, where feminine sexuality begins "as an attenuated version of male sexuality,"[21] and one who must succumb to a castration, relegating her sexuality to the otherness of a primary lack.[22] Both written and visual narratives of sexual desire and pursuit follow this phallocentric story line, where sexual consummation stands as the affirmation of a phallic possession in penetration of the feminine.

The model's image plays as sexual object in *Peintre et Modèle,* and it would seem that Picasso's pursuit of her image is an act both exalting in the feminine form while at the same time debasing her essence in her objectification. Culler addresses this notion of phallocentric objectification by looking to Freud, who argues:

> that "the curb put upon love by civilization involves a universal tendency to debase sexual objects" and that therefore the woman who is to be an object of sexual attentions must be debased. As soon as the condition of debasement is fulfilled, sensuality can be freely expressed, and important sexual capacities and a high degree of pleasure can develop... the castrating operation which ascribes to woman an incomplete sexuality and hence penis envy is the "solution" Freud proposes for restoring to civilized man his full sexual power.[23]

To circle back to the question of the deferral of meaning inherent in irreducible difference, and its implication on the representation of truth in an artwork or a creative process, it is relevant to see the feminine as defined by supplementarity. Culler begins his discussion of deconstruction's theorization of sexual difference by invoking the symbol of the supplement. He writes, "like writing, woman is treated as supplement...and if she is considered separately

she will still be defined in terms of man, as his other."[24] In *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, Derrida addresses Nietzsche's claim "Truth is a woman," and articulates the tenuousness of the presentation of an objectified feminine. He writes:

> Let us attempt to decipher this inscription of the woman. Surely its necessity is not one of a concept-less metaphorical or allegorical illustration. Nor could it be that of a pure concept bare of any fantastic designs.
>
> Indeed it is clear from the context that it is the idea that becomes woman. The becoming-female is a 'process of the idea' and the idea a form of truth's self-presentation. Thus the truth has not always been woman nor is the woman always truth. They both have a history; together they both form a history. And perhaps, if history's strict sense has always been so presented in the movement of truth, their history is history itself, a history which philosophy alone, inasmuch as it is included therein, is unable to decode.[25]

Derrida continues his argument noting that Plato states "I am truth" and that it is the trace of this declaration, where the *idea* has given way and severed truth from self, the moment where history begins. In the infinite regress of historical context Picasso's objectification of his woman lover can be taken as an inscription of her supplementarity: displacing *Ich* and signature by couching the truth of an open creative process in the elusive idea of woman, held at a distance by the rift of the chiasm.

In discussing the painter/model theme, Kleinfelder establishes the canvas as a trope throughout those works, as an oppositional framework called the "canvas threshold" or canvas barrier. The canvas signifies a rift between artist/muse, feminine/masculine, but Kleinfelder also notes, in its repetitions throughout Picasso's print and painted work of the early 60's, that "the centered canvas barrier is not only the site of a rupture, but of an implosion, as well. A dynamic unity is the surprising outcome of converging contradictions that meet head-on at the canvas-divide."[26]

This notion of the canvas as an indecidable symbol, signifying both separation and union, alludes to the *hymen,* the Derridian term for the indecidability in sexual difference, and perhaps one which articulates most explicitly the tension of sexual difference and objectification within Picasso's prints. With an attenuated and ambiguous definition as that threshold which signifies virginity and also its rupture in consummation, the hymen is "tainted with vice yet sacred, between desire and fulfillment, perpetration and remembrance; here anticipating, there recalling, in the future, in the past, under the false appearance of a present"[27]

The pursuit of *L'Etreinte* is an ideal of consummation and fulfillment,

not of a desire impelled by lack but of a love attained. This breaks from this notion of debasement, the very nature of an 'embrace,' even an embrace in the throes of sexual penetration, signifies a union that transcends the separation of sexual difference. Yet in consummation between sexual opposites, difference is still implicit, the hymen remains correlated to chiasm and the cancelled χ of the chiasmic *L'Etreinte* reinscribes itself. Culler notes, "Derrida emphasizes, a hymen is also a membrane, and a hymen between desire and its accomplishment is precisely what keeps them separate. We have an 'operation which 'at once' brings about a fusion or confusion between opposites and stands between opposites,' a double and impossible operation."[28]

That Picasso returned to the representation of the embrace, that the fulfillment implied by the figures and implied by the completion of the piece, would indicate that Picasso himself was never fully satisfied, complete, satiated in its representation: somehow the notion of union and consummation evaded full possession. For Kleinfelder "*L'Etreinte* becomes a final affirmation of life over art."[29] Life as affirmed over art, however, becomes another exposed oppositional hierarchy that the theme of sexual polarity defers and deconstructs. The 1905 *L'Etreinte*'s etched creation and subsequent cancellation led to Picasso's later obsession in the *Peintre et Modèle* prints. Kleinfelder notes that this unattained consummation in the theme of the earlier print allows for the open and ongoing creativity of his late period:

> For Picasso, there was clearly a link between the act of copulation and the act of artistic creation. the theme of *L'Etreinte*, thus, is continued covertly in the image of the painter at work. But when the artist does finally cross that threshold and the canvas does become literally and figuratively embodied, the desired union is still not fulfilled. An element of conflict remains. The model Picasso pictures opposite the artist is not only other to him; she is the Other, beyond complete understanding...For Picasso, the initial stating of the theme as an antithesis will hold true; an ultimate resolution will remain forever beyond reach...it is precisely this closed system of the antithesis, continually circling back upon itself, that enables Picasso to unfold an open, ongoing system, which continually defers closure.[30]

The double movement of presenting sexually chiasmic figures in a medium that upends the hierarchy of originality deconstructs Picasso's authorial mastery and the objectifying representation of women in his work. Woman does not escape objectification when held as Other or supplement; nor is she pulled from debasement in tying the mystery of her image to truth. She remains an object in Picasso's prints and that the elements of sexual difference and isolation remain inferior to consummation and union still beg the question of

phallocentrism. Yet the moment of culminating union does not arrive. The representation of woman, however attenuated by objectification, impels a deferral of her meaning as the presentation of her truth remains in abeyance. That consummation is first conveyed and then denied in *L'Etreinte*, and erotically withheld through the deferral of separation in *Peintre et Modèle,* breaks down the notion of the creative process being tied to an act of mastery or fulfillment and to the expression of an explicit truth. Rather, deferral becomes itself the very mode of Picasso's creative process, and it is this openness in deferral in which these prints allude to a truth beyond the inscription of mastery.

Notes

[1] Quote by Pablo Picasso, as noted in Karen Kleinfelder, *The Painter, His Muse, Her Image, His Gaze* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 231n.

[2] Kleinfelder, 118.

[3] Kleinfelder, 48.

[4] To deconstruct an opposition is to first demonstrate the opposition as a metaphysical imposition by bringing out the presuppositions and role that metaphysical value, and how those texts which highlight that metaphysical value likewise undermine it. Further, deconstruction maintains the oppostition by employing it in one's argument and reinstating its reversal in a way which grants the very opposition a different status, thus compromising its metaphysical foundation.

[5] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 256.

[6] Kleinfelder, 9.

[7] Culler, 247.

[8] Kleinfelder, 48.

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 212.

[10] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 6.

[11] Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 8.

[12] Kleinfelder, 9.

[13] Culler, 134.

[14] Kleinfelder, 47

[15] Kleinfelder, 47.

[16] Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 66. Emphasis added.

[17] "+ R"'s main concerns revolve around notions of bargain, exchange and surplus value, in correlation with an artistic economy, and in application to the artist Adami and to Walter Benjamin. I found these notions secondary enough to my purposes to omit exploring them here, however the themes of exchange and economy could yield a very fruitful discussion on the nature of fine art print work's subordination to painting in the commercial art market.

[18] Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 165.

[19] Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 163.
[20] Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 166.
[21] Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 168.
[22] Third wave feminists, such as Helene Cixous (see *Sorties*) and Luce Irigaray (see *This Sex Which Is Not One*), have challenged this construct of feminine essence's definition by lack as fundamentally phallocentric.
[23] Culler, 170.
[24] Culler, 166.
[25] Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), 87.
[26] Kleinfelder, 77.
[27] Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 175.
[28] Culler, 145.
[29] Kleinfelder, 215.
[30] Kleinfelder, 70-71.

Swallowing Hell: Expressions of War in Japan and West Germany 1940s -1980s

Elyse Byrnes

Devastated by World War 2, the cultural atmospheres of both post-war Germany and postwar Japan were dominated by a desire to separate from, internalize, and cope with the horrors of war.[1] Artists in both countries were keen to address their experiences and the experiences of their forefathers in their art. However, the way in which these artists did so was greatly shaped by outside forces: the Allied occupational forces (referred to more commonly as SCAP in Japan), and the "collective memory" of the people.[2] The concept most heavily shaped by these forces was that of role of these artists' respective peoples' in the war as either perpetrator or victim. Each country's people, in its own right, were victim to numerous bombings by Allied forces, and in the case of Japan, two detonations of the atomic bomb. They were also supporters of fascist, expansionistic policy bringing untold horrors to Europe and Asia alike. This dialectic of perpetrator versus victim was the center of much discussion in the aftermath of the war.[3] Due to their unique postwar atmospheres, artists in Germany worked with the notion of Germans as perpetrators in the war, while Japanese artists treated the Japanese as peace-loving victims, as shown in the dominant trends in each respective country's art that addressed World War 2.

The end of the war brought with it not only peace to West Germany, but a complete reformation of its political system, economy, and culture, aimed particularly at purging the country of all remnants of the Third Reich.[4] Ian Buruma recalled:

> In the late 1940s and 1950s, the compulsion to forget was stronger [than in the 1980s]. Reminders of the past—not just Hitler's past—were destroyed, blown up, removed. Sites of concentration camps were used for sometime to house German prisoners, by Soviets and Western Allies alike, but as soon as was possible they were either razed or abandoned.[5]

This swift cleansing of all that was associated with fascism, under the guidance of Allied occupational forces was conducted on a "superficial level" and did not allow the German populace to acknowledge and cope with their Nazi pasts to any significant degree.[6] Historian Charles Maier notes that this inability to confront their history in the 1940s and 1950s contributed to the stability of the postwar state.[7]

This cleansing of the fascist past from the landscape, structures, and collective psyche of Germany became the subject of dispute when German historians began to debate the accountability of the German people in the War. "New revisionist" writings of history identified Germans living under the Third Reich as victims, and diminished the significance of the Holocaust by putting it on the same plane as other acts of genocide in history and claiming that it was a defense from the threat of "Bolshevists."[8] Tales of German prisoners of war were popularized because they allowed German to "craft their own narratives of German sufferings and victimhood."[9] German Psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich contended that this repression of the memory of their role in the Nazi regime was a psychic defense mechanism, leading to the Germans' lack of ability to process and mourn their crimes, creating a "defective collective psyche."[10]

A number of German artists were driven by the desire to break through this collective selective-memory by directly addressing the World War and the Holocaust in their works.[11] In the debate of whether Germans were to be remembered as victims or perpetrators in the War, artists trended toward the latter. Whether through destruction of the authority figures responsible, such as in the work of Georg Baselitz; exploring individual means of remembering and interpreting the Holocaust, as did Joseph Beuys; or contemplating the interrelated natures of history and guilt, like Anselm Kiefer; each of these prominent postwar German artists directly addressed the accountability of the German people, before, during, and after the war, in their work.

The Auschwitz (1963-1965) and Eichmann (1961) trials broke the trend of collective silence and sparked the people of West Germany to confront the Nazi history of themselves, their parents, and in some cases, leaders of industry and politicians.[12] This confrontation of the *Nachgeborenen* ("those born after") with the reality that their authority figures, including their parents, had been enabler and accomplice to the actions of the Third Reich led to transformation of the father into a negative icon.[13] Georg Baselitz (born 1938) was among the first to explore this degradation of the fathers of Germany with his paintings of broken, disheveled male figures torn of their masculinity and dignity.[14] In his 1965 oil painting, *B.J.M.C. Bonjour Monsieur Courbet,* Baselitz shows us a man in baggy and torn, blood-stained clothing, walking with unsure steps in bare feet. The figure is alone and exposed in fatigues on a backdrop of black and grey cloud, more reminiscent of the walking dead than a man.

He is, as Lisa Saltzman describes, "masculinity in ruins."[15] Baselitz has taken the masculine, ideal hero-types of German fascist art and mutated it into a wretched, war-torn being deserving of none of his, or the viewer's, respect for his efforts as a soldier of the Third Reich.

In a similarly themed painting of that same year, *With a Red Flag,* a lone figure stands in military fatigues, chest and genitals exposed, limply holding a flag painted with quick, gestured brushstrokes in the black, white, and red of the National Socialist's party. The figure's face is bland and shapeless, like the flag which he holds before him with no attempt to cover himself and retain his dignity. Another barefoot and helpless shadow of what for the figure was a more glorious time, Baselitz shows his disdain for the "fathers" who led Germany down the path of fascism, leaving their children to cope with the horrors they committed.

An equally pathetic and dignity-lacking figure is showcased in Baselitz's 1966 work, *A Modern Painter.* Again in army fatigues, with bare feet, chest, and flaccid genitals, the figure crouches in ruin, his fingers disjointed from his hands just as he has been separated from a more heroic time and the man who now paints him. In this work, as well as the works described above, pervades the desire to devalue and separate from the authorities responsible for Germany's role as perpetrators in World War 2. In this lies an underlying acknowledgement of the responsibility and culpability of his forefathers, his parents, relatives, and other authority figures in the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime.

Rather than sharing personal feelings of betrayal and separation on canvas like Baselitz, Joseph Beuys addressed World War 2 and the Holocaust by inviting viewers to dwell on their own memories and experiences with his 1968 vitrine, *Auschwitz Demonstration.* Matthew Biro describes the diverse composition of the work thusly:

> The *Auschwitz Demonstration* is a vitrine containing a collection of objects dating from 1956 to 1964 and assembled by Beuys in 1968. They include a cast metal relief image of a fish, a faceless clay figure of the crucified Christ and an old wafer carefully positioned in a discolored white soup dish, a desiccated rat on a bed of dried grass in a round wooden sieve, a bent and broken carpenter's ruler in another grass-lined sieve, a drawing of a starved girl with a sled, a folding photographic map of Auschwitz ripped from a book or a brochure, four rings of (120) blood sausages with plus or minus signs painted on either end, sun-lamp goggles, more moldy blood sausages and sausage fragments arranged on a corroded metal disc with a discolored mirror in its center, two round medicine vials containing fat, a brown bottle containing iodine, a blank aluminum tag on a string, and two rectangular blocks of wax on top of a

double-burner electric hot plate.[16]

Even without providing any photographic documentation of the victims, they become the subjects of the piece as the viewer acknowledges and absorbs each element in turn as they relate to themselves: several dirtied and tattered girls' shoes are lined up, reminiscent of the piles of shoes that followed the mass exterminations in death camps, begging the question of whom the original owners of these shoes were and what their fates were. The viewer and his or her reflections literally become part of the piece as their image is captured in a clouded mirror. As Beuys collected and assembled the objects of this piece, he brought to question his identity as "German" after the Holocaust, and compels viewers to do so as well.[17] In addition, he calls to question his and the viewers' role in the Holocaust; by utilizing such repulsive objects as blood sausage, rotted meat, and dead rats he suggests that the answer itself is repulsive: that all Germans held a degree of accountability for the horrors of the Holocaust.

Another, later German artist to directly address the Holocaust and memory in his work was Anselm Kiefer who entered the art scene as a student in the late 1960's.[18] In his art, Kiefer explores the notion of "German guilt" and its repression in history and collective memory by explicitly referencing the Third Reich and its military exploits, and the Holocaust.[19] In an interview, Kiefer describes his interest in history as beginning at seventeen when he realized the lack of historical attention paid to Germany's participation in World War 2 and the Holocaust; the first time he heard an original speech by Hitler:

> I was deeply shocked by them, in particular by those of Hitler... everything affected me; the brutality, the cunning way he exploited history, his use of the media. Hitler was the first person to make an artistic use of the media... that was my direct contact with history. In Germany we say that language *geht unter die Haut,* literally, "gets under your skin." It touches you personally. Records like those touch you directly, the skin before the ideas. This is why it is important to have a direct relationship with history, for instance by listening to it: whoever approaches it through books alone ends up making mistakes. [20]

Kiefer described his use of history in his works as a "lightning rod" for discussion—he noted that the only professor at the university who was not violently opposed to his works was a Holocaust survivor.[21]

One of these war-influenced works was his 1974 painting, *Nero Paints.* The burnt landscape and the onion dome of the church beyond clearly evoke the Nazi scorched earth campaigns on the Eastern front.[22] By choosing such a subject matter, Kiefer is clear in the culpability of the German people—the only

sympathy garnered in this piece is for those whose homes and lives are being destroyed by Nazi forces. Rather than depicting the German victims of Allied attack, Kiefer has made a conscious decision to portray foreign victims of domestic aggression. In doing so, he places Germany itself as the primarily accountable aggressor in the war.

In a later work, *Margarete* (1981), Kiefer uses oil painting laced with straw to evoke the victims of the Holocaust. This painting alludes to a poem by Paul Celan on the death camps, "Fugue of Death" through its title and medium, referring to a "*strohblond*" (straw-blonde) victim of genocide.[23] In this painting, the straw, representing the straw-blonde hair of Margarete, seems to struggle from a bed of ashes as it itself is set aflame. Here, Kiefer makes a powerful allusion to the mass-execution of the Jews therein, evoking Celan's poem: "you'll rise then as smoke to the sky/you'll have then a grave in the clouds there you won't be too cramped."[24] As in his previous work, *Nero Paints,* Kiefer clearly evokes the horrors of the Holocaust, the "absolute evil," for which he holds Germany responsible.[25]

Despite a postwar atmosphere in which encouragement from Allied occupational forces discouraged open discussion of the culpability of select German ruling and economic elites for stabilizing purposes, and a collective desire to move on from the fascist past, German artists clearly expressed the accountability of the German people in their postwar works. This cultural atmosphere German guilt was converse that of postwar Japan, despite circumstantial similarities.

From the end of the war until 1952, Japan was under the authority of SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, General Douglas Macarthur). This was a period of intense reconstruction; the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as the fire bombings of industrial centers such as Tokyo left hundreds of thousands dead and cities leveled. The purging of those in power during Japanese imperialism left power vacuums in both the economic and political sectors.[26] In the interests of maintaining stability in devastated postwar Japan, the Allied Occupational Forces made the conscious decision to not try the Emperor, as well as many of those in charge of important economic and industrial entities, and high-ranking officials, for war crimes.[27] In order to justify the authoritative position of these people who had been key-components of Japan's wartime hegemony, those in power in the postwar years (including SCAP) propagated the notion that the Japanese military alone had been responsible for territorial expansion and aggression in Asia, thus precipitating war with Allied forces and the ensuing destruction.[28] This myth conveniently exonerated not only those needed to maintain stability in occupied Japan, but the Japanese citizenry as well. In light of the mass destruction and casualties faced by the Japanese populace, the notion that they themselves were in no way responsible for said mass destruction and casualties absolved

them not only of responsibility but also of guilt during a time in which rebuilding and renewal became the primary focuses of life in Japan.

While much of the postwar atmosphere of Japan was similar to that in Germany in many respects, it differed on two relevant counts: firstly, the Allied forces saw Japan as a key force for democracy in the pacific where threats from communist China and the USSR loomed larger every year, causing SCAP to back the conservatism of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and purge the country of writers, artists, and film-makers who were feared to have communist ties; secondly, the detonation of nuclear weapons.[29] Both the efforts on behalf of stability of the conservative ruling elite and the devastation of the bombings would forever instill the mentality of the peace-seeking victim into the consciousness of the Japanese people.

This victim mentality, which largely disregarded the effects of Japanese imperialism on other Asian nations, was omnipresent in the art of the postwar period that addressed World War 2. The notion of the Japanese people as victims rather than perpetrators in the war was expressed typically in one of two ways: one, by celebrating peace in the face of the destruction brought about by the faceless architects of World War 2; and two, by focusing on the growth and rebirth that follows destruction, particularly in the face of nuclear war.

Shigeo Ishii, born 1933, was one of these artists to address the impact of World War 2 while avoiding placing blame on his countrymen.[30] In a 1955 series of graphic works, Ishii uses imagery of starving, deformed humans and barbed wire evocative of the horrors warfare. In the first of these works, *Person in a Dangerous City Tangled in Wires,* a naked human being is contorted beyond recognition within a barbed wire grid within a city. The nationality of the man, his location, and all other identifying traits are absent in the work. All that is apparent is that the city is relatively modern. The piece is an anonymous and universal comment on twentieth-century warfare.

In the next work, *A Dangerous City,* the figure and location are likewise unidentifiable. An androgynous, starved figure runs aimlessly through this nameless city, trapped by barbed wire. It is unclear who this figure is, or what he or she is running from, all that is certain is that this person is a victim of war.

Similarly, in *Robbed of Freedom* Ishii presents us with a tangle of multiple figures, some human, some once human, who have been mutated beyond the point of mobility. There are no faces shown, only hands clutching helplessly at nothing, and uselessly dangling feet before a gray environment. Again, without identifying either a specific perpetrator or victim, Ishii simply presents pain in the face of wartime.

This general commentary on the pain of war, assumingly World War 2 (the war through which Ishii lived), fails to acknowledge the fact that Japan's

involvement in World War 2 was brought about by Japan's aggression and expansionist activity throughout Asia. This is contrary to such works as those previously discussed by Anselm Kiefer, which express the pain of war while making explicit allusions to Germany's aggression and the specific victims of that aggression: the Russians in *Nero Paints,* or the Jews in *Margarete.* However, Ishii's work does not address the forced conscription of Koreans into military service and sexual slavery, or the brutality inflicted upon the Chinese such as at the Rape of Nanjing.

Another work centered about the theme of the suffering in war is Kazuki Yasuo's 1959 painting, *Work 1945.* According to the artist, this and his other works are based upon his experiences as a soldier in Manchuria and then prisoner-of-war in Siberia.[31] Kazuki stated, "By continuing to paint from these memories, I feel my burden is slowly lifted and my spiritual peace restored."[32] However, rather than choosing to paint from his memories as a soldier, in which he was an aggressor, Kazuki repeatedly uses Japanese POWs as his subject matter, where the Japanese play their role as victims. In this particular painting, the naked and beaten figure is placed in context by the title and the artist's background and words. Dirty and scarred, the man lying on the ground is a Japanese soldier in a Chinese prison. The boldly painted date reminds us that though the war officially ended in 1945, Japanese prisoners of war were often held for many years after. The viewer sympathizes with broken man, despite his role as a Japanese soldier in China, where some of the more brutal acts of the Pacific War were committed by the Japanese military. This work was one of many of the postwar period to emphasize the suffering of the Japanese during the war, while ignoring the suffering inflicted by the Japanese on other countries in Asia.[33]

Another mode through which Japanese artists depicted the Japanese as victims in the war was the atomic bomb, particularly as a trope of peace and rebirth. Naoko Shimazu describes the atomic bomb in popular culture thusly:

> The most powerful symbols of Japan's defeat were the atomic bombs. It was the sheer scale of the destructiveness of these bombs that anointed the Japanese forever as victims of the war.... Due to the highly politicized nature of the atomic bombs as the symbol of extremities—both peace and war—memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have become and internationalized memory of the war.... All in all, the appeal of these 'atomic bomb stories' is quite evident. The tragic experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki allowed the Japanese to adopt the role of victim and, in the process, to forget their primary role as perpetrators of the war. Hiroshima became the symbol of peace, thereby providing the uncontested narrative for the rebirth of postwar Japanese as pacifists.[34]

And so, by incorporating the atomic bomb into their work, artists were able to explore the ramifications of World War 2, in which Japan was an aggressor, while guiltlessly depicting the Japanese as the victim. The atomic bomb came to be morphed by Japanese postwar society into a symbol of peace and rebirth, allowing for a blameless, cathartic lifting of the burden of the memories of World War 2 when used by artists.

Tomatsu Shomei, of the *Sengo-ha* (postwar) school of photography documented the occupation of Japan by the American military with his series, *11:02 Nagasaki* in 1966.[35] This series of photographs chronicles the effects of World War 2 on Japan; by juxtaposing images of American military bases with men and women disfigured with burns and keloidal scars from nuclear radiation, Shomei emphasizes a victim/perpetrator dynamic between the American people and the Japanese. However, deeper themes, such as the origins of the conflict between the USA and Japan, or between Japan and China are not explored. In this telling of the victims of World War 2, the victims of Japanese imperialism in China, Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan, the South Pacific and beyond do not make an appearance.

The atomic bomb also served a symbol of peace, and figured prominently in the works of artist Kiyoshi Awazu. In a 1970 silkscreen, Awazu utilizes atomic bomb imagery in an anti-war poster. In the middle ground, a series of mushrooms reference the distinct shape of the nuclear explosions are scattered before a large military helmet, framed in the stars and stripes of the American flag. In the foreground, almost perched upon the large slogan "ANTI-WAR" are four young Japanese children, with a large hand signaling halt, reminding the viewer to reconsider war (particularly the use of nuclear weapons) and its effect on the most innocent of the population. Here, the urging of pacifism is aimed rather succinctly at the United States, rather than the people of Japan. In doing so, the piece suggests that the initial aggressors of World War 2, and therefore the suffering of the postwar era, were the Allied powers rather than Japan.

In another public poster, titled *No More Ash and Black Rain Falls,* Awazu clouds a number of traditionally-dressed Japanese townspeople, who scowl at the audience. Again, Awazu uses children, as well as bare-chested women to garner sympathy. As in the previous work, no deeper meaning is searched for in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, rather, only the immediate aftermath and the fear of a repeat of that aftermath is considered. By treating the use of nuclear weapons against Japan as almost a natural disaster, Awazu precludes the possibility of the Japanese people having any preventative power, and therefore any responsibility.

In an earlier, untitled public poster, Awazu utilizes the imagery of the atomic bombings to express memories of World War 2 from the perspective of the Japanese as helpless victims. In this piece, dozens of roughly sketched

figures clump together and reach out their hands as they are enveloped by the light of the nuclear blast behind them. At the bottom, large white text reads, "(Spread) the voices of Hiroshima to the world!" (*Hiroshima no koe o sekai e*). Again, this anti-war message is directed at the world outside of Japan, promulgating the image that the Japanese were victims in the war, while the Allied forces were perpetrators.

The themes of these three works contrast with the themes of the paintings of Awazu's German contemporary, Georg Baselitz, in which the blame for postwar suffering is placed squarely on the German citizens of the Third Reich. Because the majority of Japanese industry had been destroyed, and the only surviving economic and industrial leaders had been accomplice to the fascist government of wartime Japan, it would have been against Japanese interests of rebuilding to demonize or criminalize the previous regime. Instead, postwar trauma was acted out with either faceless targets, or targets which had no place in the rebuilding of Japan, such as the atomic bombs.

While both artists in Germany and Japan were prolific in their works addressing or inspired by the events or memory of World War 2, each respective country was influenced by a number of outside sources. Germany had been devastated by its postwar revelations: the Auschwitz trials and victim testimonies left Germans psychologically scarred with guilt and shame. However, in the interest of maintaining stability in a country considered to be so "other," the postwar trials of Japan were much less elucidating. A number of officials, including the emperor, were never tried for war crimes. Abominations such as the forced sexual slavery of thousands of Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese women were never brought up at the Tokyo War Crimes tribunal of the late 1940's.[36] After the war, Japan was increasingly separated by those it had victimized under influence of the Allied Occupational forces in the interests of containing communism in the Pacific, unlike Germany which was landlocked by the countries it had invaded and subjugated, not to mention the thousands of Holocaust survivors who remained within the country's borders.[37]

Because the Japanese people were not held accountable by the hegemony of postwar society and the collective consciousness, the Japanese people did not hold themselves responsible for their country's aggression and expansionistic policies in the Pacific. As a result, when portraying the war in art, artists depicted the Japanese of victims, either of a faceless architect or of the atomic bombs (and less directly, the United States). Conversely, Germany (after a brief period of "collective amnesia") had been held accountable by the postwar hegemony, and this acceptance of accountability was reproduced in postwar art.[38]

Notes

[1] Olaf Hoerschelmann,"'Memoria Dextera Est': Film and Public Memory in Postwar Germany," *Cinema Journal*, 40/2 (2001): 79.

[2] Naoko Shimazu, "Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan," in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38/1, "Redesigning the Past" (January 2002): 101.

[3]Stephanie Barron, Sabine Eckmann, and Eckhard Gillen, *Art of Two Germanys—Cold War Cultures* (New York: Abrams, in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009), 232.

[4] Hoerschelmann, 79.

[5] Hoerschelmann, 79.

[6] Hoerschelmann, 79.

[7] Hoerschelmann, 79.

[8] Matthew Biro, "Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memory of the Holocaust," *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16/1 (2003): 125.

[9] Richard Langston, *Visions of Violence: German Avant-Gardes after Fascism* (Illinois: North Western University Press, 2008), 14-15.

[10] Langston, 14-15.

[11] Barron, 232.

[12] Barron, 235.

[13] Lisa Saltzman and Anselm Kiefer, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 51.

[14] Saltzman and Kiefer, 51.

[15] Saltzman, 51.

[16] Biro, 119-120.

[17] Biro,124.

[18] Germano Celant, *Anselm Kiefer* (Milano, Italy: Skira Editore S.p.A, in association with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2007), 37.

[19] Celant, 404.

[20] Celant, 404.

[21] Celant, 404

[22] Saltzman, 63.

[23] Saltzman, 27-28.

[24] Saltzman, 27-28.

[25] Celant, 407.

[26] David Eason, "History of Japan II/Occupation and Reform," a lecture given at University at Albany, Albany, NY, April 21, 2010.

[27] Eason.

[28] Yinan He, "Remembering and Forgetting the War: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction, and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1950-2006," *History & Memory* 19/2 (Fall/Winter 2007): 48.

[29] Naoko Shimazu, 104-106.

[30] David Elliott, "The New Japan," in *Berlin Tokyo, Tokyo Berlin: The Art of Two Cities* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2006), 2.

[31] David Kung, *The Contemporary Artist in Japan* (Sydney: Argus and Robertson, 1966), 69, 71.

[32] Kung, 69, 71.
[33] Naoko Shimazu, 104-5.
[34] Naoko Shimazu, 110-111.
[35] Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 152, 165.
[36] Eason, "A History of Women in Modern Japan/Women and War Part 2," a lecture given at University at Albany, Albany NY, March 3, 2010.
[37] Eason, "History of Japan II/Occupation and Reform."
[38] Hoerschelmann, 79.

Introducing the World to Himself: Robert Rauschenberg and ROCI Chile

Josefina de la Maza Chevesich

> I feel strongly in my beliefs... that a one-to-one contact through art contains peaceful powers, and is the most non-elitist way to share exotic and common information, seducing us into creative mutual understandings for the benefit of all...
>
> —Robert Rauschenberg

In 1984, in an international scene framed by the Cold War, Robert Rauschenberg introduced at the United Nations the ROCI project (Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange), a personal crusade to establish artistic and cultural bonds between West American culture and "'sensitive' areas of the world;" what Rauschenberg considered as "developing countries crippled by poverty, countries with totalitarian governments (...) and Communist countries with which the United States has been in a political deadlock."[1] Immersed in his own ideas of international welfare and his belief that art was a powerful vehicle to promote peace and American democratic values to the world, the artist presented his plan as a necessary path to "foster mutual understanding and global cooperation."[2] Maintaining the project in complete financial and artistic independence, Rauschenberg drew ROCI's itinerary for the next seven years. His plan included ten countries and it would end

This paper is part of a larger project on the relationships between art, technology, and politics in Chile during the 1980s I am conducting with Chilean art historian Sebastián Vidal. Research credit goes to him for some of the data presented in this essay. I also appreciate Donald Kuspit and Andrés Estefane's suggestions and editing comments.

with a final show in the United States.[3]

Compared with other aspects of the artist's work—the combines, his incursionin technology, his relationship with performing arts, etc.—ROCI has usually had a minor presence in the general overall of Rauschenberg's *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, a few scholars and art critics have focused on ROCI: some of them trying to include this project in the larger spectrum of Rauschenberg's international—and collaborative—work; others seeking to understand the impact that "life" and the experience of travel had in Rauschenberg's creative processes. For most critics and scholars, ROCI constitutes the paradigm *par excellence* of international artistic and cultural cooperation. However, for others this project reflects a cultural imperialist strategy that explicitly supposes the primacy of the United States in the cultural arena, with the subsequent importation of American culture to "sensitive areas" in order to provide "civilization." Despite the ideological differences between these two perspectives, they share a common feature: none of them has focused on the analysis of the exhibitions and the works of art involved in ROCI, nor they have considered the artistic and cultural realms of those countries in order to understand their feedback to Rauschenberg's work.[4]

Considering that all ROCI exhibitions respond to a major common structure designed by the artist and his team, this essay will focus on one of them, Chile in 1985, as a case study that will allow us to understand the goals, complexities, and paradoxes of Robert Rauschenberg's project. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate that there are two different accounts—that do not seem to be articulated dialectically—of what ROCI means: that of an artist that was running after a dream of peace and welfare—hoping to change the world through his art—and the other of those publics who received his message in a context where art could no longer be freed from politics. The importance of articulating these two accounts is to tackle two faces of a phenomenon that has been understood, until now, from a single perspective.

Having in mind not only the complex state of affairs that Chile was experiencing due to Augusto Pinochet's dictatorial regime, but also the formal and iconographic articulation of Rauschenberg's Chilean works, I will problematize ROCI Chile considering the ambivalent political and artistic position in which the artist was situated. As Benjamin once said, "political commitment, however revolutionary it may seem, functions in a counter-revolutionary way so long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat only *in the mind* and not as a producer."[5] We may ask what Benjamin's ideas have to do with the ROCI project, especially if Rauschenberg defined himself as an apolitical artist in several accounts. However, independently of what he said, the truth is that not only his works, but also his actions were seen as politically charged in the context of the whole project and especially in ROCI Chile. Donald Saff, ROCI's artistic director, commented the following in an interview:

> I never experienced as much anger about any artist's project (...) as about ROCI Chile. The reactions from friends, fellow artists, and others was absolute outrage (...) Personally I would have counted myself among the critics, but Rauschenberg saw his Chilean exhibit as a radical gesture that would eventually help to open the path to democracy. Perhaps it did it, though I am still inclined to think of the ROCI Chile project as a mistake and one of the artist's political shortcomings.[6]

As we can read in Saff's words, Rauschenberg was sympathetic to the Chilean people and wanted to help them with his art to open a "path to democracy." If we think carefully, an endeavor like this one is from the start a political choice. We cannot negate Rauschenberg's humanitarian character, but we cannot separate his compassionate disposition from politics. His aim from the beginning was determined by a complex political game in which the artist freely decided to participate. Thus, regarding this observation, we could ask how exactly was Rauschenberg thinking he could help the Chilean people open a path to democracy; by means of his solely presence in Chile? By the cultural exchange he had with the Chilean people? Or through the exhibition of his works in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Museum of Fine Arts)? Of course, we could positively answer all these questions; however, Rauschenberg's art was remote from the Chilean "people" as a manifestation of "high" culture—although the subject matter of his pieces tried to establish a direct bond with them.

Furthermore, Rauschenberg's works were not only seen as a product of high culture, they were "read"—by Chilean artists opposed to the dictatorship—as a demonstration of American imperialism. Those artists saw in the artist's glossy, smoothie, and industrialized silkscreens an agent of capitalism, and in the mega-production of the ROCI project an ultra-commodification of the work of art. The imposture suggested by Rauschenberg's works was also extended to the show itself because of the sponsorship offered to him by the conservative newspaper *El Mercurio* while exhibiting in Chile. In this context, Benjamin's concept of "exhibition value" will gain importance. As is known, one of the key aspects of Rauschenberg's trajectory was the value he gave to the presentation of his work, and during the ROCI project his requirements made him follow unconventional strategies in order to pursue his objective—it is well known, for example, that he offered financial aid to repair the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes' damages produced by an earthquake that occurred in March of 1985. Nevertheless, this control over the production of the exhibition created a gap between his art and the public. Underestimating the symbolic significance of the institutions and the media under Pinochet's dictatorship,

Rauschenberg lost control over the meaning of his work and how it would be finally received in Chile.

Touring Chile: A "Dantesque" Experience

Following an itinerary that would later become the *modus operandi* of the project, ROCI Chile was structured in two main travels.[7] The objective of the first trip was to document through photographs and videos Rauschenberg's experiences of the country. The second trip's aim was the organization of the exhibition and social activities associated with the opening. After positively evaluating the Chilean political and cultural context—Donald Saff had traveled before, in early October 1984, in order to scope the political situation and to find out whether an exhibition of Rauschenberg's works would be well received by the cultural establishment or not—Saff informed the artist of his reassurance that Chile could be, indeed, part of ROCI. Rauschenberg arrived in the capital city of Santiago on October 25, extending his stay until November 10.

Despite Rauschenberg's independent and free spirit, that could make us think that he was going to "discover" the country in his own terms, the truth is that his presence in Chile was mainly defined by the "Briefing Paper"[8] and his Chilean contacts, perhaps in an effort to secure his persona from "the volatile situation" in which he was involved.[9]

The "Briefing Paper" was a document written by Rauschenberg's team for each venue of the ROCI project in order to highlight some aspects of the country and its culture—like a tourist guide designed specially for the artist. As any tourist guide it was articulated through a foreign gaze that stressed common places of the country's territory, history, and culture, even misinterpreting some aspects of it. The role of this document was so fundamental that it conditioned the artist and virtually controlled Rauschenberg's agenda in Chile. In fact, most of the data that appeared in the text has a close correlation with the ROCI Chilean series, as if the "Briefing Paper" was the hidden libretto of the exhibition. This document problematizes the character of Rauschenberg's first visit to Chile, a visit where he was supposed to be immersed in the culture and the people of the "sensitive area." Although it is known that the ROCI project had a very tight agenda that conditioned the artist to make "deadline art," as Jack Cowart so-called it, it is also true that the "Briefing Paper" would have created preconceptions in Rauschenberg's mind of what Chile represented for the foreigner's eyes. As we will see later, these preconceptions will lead the artist to select a certain kind of imagery for his Chilean works, imagery that in some occasions misinterpreted—or generalized—the culture he wanted to be connected with.

On the other hand, the most significant contacts Rauschenberg had in Chile were the writer José Donoso and his wife; his translator, Monica

Gelcich; the representative of the shipping company used by ROCI in South America, Mario Stern; and, to a lesser extent, Nena Ossa, the director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes where the exhibition would take place the following year. Although José Donoso was an influential an important writer opposed to the dictatorship, he scarcely had bonds with the Chilean scene of art.[10] His ties were mainly related to the literary field; thus, it is highly possible that Octavio Paz, the Nobel Prize poet and friend of Donoso who wrote the catalogue's text for ROCI Mexico, mediated the first encounter between the artist and the writer. Similarly, neither Monica Gelcich nor Mario Stern knew much about Chilean art, and even though they had an important role in defining Rauschenberg's agenda in Chile, they were primarily technical supporters for the artist. The only person who knew more about the Chilean art scene was, of course, Nena Ossa. But from her official position in the direction of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, she kept a conservative profile and she did not gain Rauschenberg's trust.

Considering the circle frequented by Rauschenberg, it is not surprising that he did not have contact with those artists who could have been his most interesting interlocutors in Chile. The Chilean art scene opposed to Pinochet's regime was mainly working in alternative art circuits and their works were highly political and sophisticated. Most of them were linked to—or have been associated to—the "Escena de Avanzada" (term coined by the art critic Nelly Richard). Among these artists were former professors and students of the Universidad de Chile and young independent artists who were, because of their political leftist affiliations, outside the formal and institutional networks of Chilean art.[11] Instead, Rauschenberg met one of the artists related to the new administration of the Faculty of Arts of the Universidad de Chile, Benito Rojo, who taught him some of the techniques used in the print workshop of the art school in order to work with copper plates—techniques that he would later apply to his *Copperhead-Bite* series. Also, Rauschenberg met in a church during his stay in Santiago with a group of intellectuals, poets, artists, and students (no names are known) thanks to the mediation of Donoso. Interestingly enough, what Rauschenberg most recalled about this meeting was the fear of the people who gathered to meet him and their request not to exhibit in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes:

> The intellectuals, painters, poets, artists, the sensitive people who were part of the positive side of 'get rid of Pinochet' movement, couldn't understand how we could use a state-run space. I told them that ROCI, by its nature and if it was to work, must be apolitical. That's different from bipartisan. Bipartisan implies that you get along with both sides. (...) [They] insisted that I honor the Church, which of course was Catholic. I said I couldn't...[12]

Perhaps the most symptomatic event of Rauschenberg's first visit to Chile was his participation in this encounter. There he was asked not to exhibit in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes because it explicitly represented the symbolic power of the dictatorship. It is obvious that the alternative presented by the intellectuals, artists, and poets to Rauschenberg was a strange one mainly because the artist did not know what "church" they were referring to. What they should have proposed to Rauschenberg as the exhibiting place—if we consider the political context of the 1980s—was the "Vicaría de la Solidaridad," an organization created in 1976 by Monsignor Raúl Silva Henríquez to defend the lives of persecuted people, to obtain the freedom of political prisoners, and to help the poor. Although created by the Catholic Church, the "Vicaría" was a center where lawyers, doctors, psychologists, social workers, and a large number of volunteers, worked against the dictatorship—among them, various artists.[13] The accomplishment of the institution was the organization of professional teams helping the "people" Robert Rauschenberg was looking for. The intellectuals, artists, and poets were not referring to what the artist understood by the "church:" a conservative, structured, and hierarchical organization. That conservative image of the church was reflected, though, in the photographs Rauschenberg took in Chile: "[he] photographed the rich details in the statues of the saints, crucifixes, and priests."[14] The "Vicaría" was, indeed, the contrary of Rauschenberg's idea of what the church was. Nevertheless, "Chile *needed* his window to the outside world"[15] and the "church" was not going to provide that kind of exposure according to the artist. This was Rauschenberg's first choice. Instead of working for the people, trying to "help to open a path to democracy," he preferred to work for the international success of the ROCI project, where he would show to the world his sympathy for Chile. In the choice he made, Rauschenberg was expressing his solidarity—as Benjamin once said—only in the mind and not as a producer.

Besides Rauschenberg's meeting in the church and his awareness of the control that the military had in the country ("China is a piece of cake when you look at the control Pinochet has," he would later say in an interview with Barbara Rose), his trip to the North of Chile was one of the experiences that impacted the artist the most. There he saw the desert and copper mines where he felt—in Chuquicamata's fire-refining factory—"like Dante descending into inferno."[16] In the North he realized the importance of copper for the Chilean economy, and the different and rich meanings of this mineral for the country's image.

Rauschenberg completed his trip in the desert. After visiting shantytowns, the mines, and being exposed to the governmental bureaucratic apparatus (Chuquicamata was a state company), he came back to the United

States. Combining the images registered during his fifteen-days stay in Chile, materials, techniques, and probably using the always-useful "Briefing Paper" as a constant reminder, Rauschenberg started working in what was to be exhibited in Chile the following year.

The Museum and the Press: ROCI Chile

On July 17, 1985, the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, the official sponsor of ROCI Chile and the only written media that obtained a full interview with the artist, published the following handwritten note in English:

> This is an invitation from me
> to share my inaugural show of art at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.
> Wednesday 7.00 pm / July 17 -1985.
> Thank you, Chile. Rauschenberg.[17]

The artist wrote this note the day before during a visit to the central offices of the newspaper where the final activity was a lunch offered in Rauschenberg's honor. For the occasion, a select group of guests were chosen: Horacio Aránguiz, Minister of Education; Enrique Campos, Director of the DIBAM (Direction of Libraries and Museums); Nena Ossa, Director of the Museo de Bellas Artes where the exhibition was taking place; Cristián Zegers, Director of *La Segunda*, an evening newspaper that belonged to the owners of *El Mercurio*; and the owner and director of the newspaper, Agustín Edwards, and his wife, Malú del Río de Edwards. As is possible to see after knowing the titles of Rauschenberg's company, the artist was surrounded by the official face of the Chilean cultural establishment, a group of people strongly linked with Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship.[18] Indeed, as the director of the biggest newspaper in Chile, Agustín Edwards—who also had one of the major fortunes in the country at that time—was known as one of the most committed public figures to Pinochet's regime.[19] For that reason, the recurrent omissions of *El Mercurio* in relation to the "disappeared" and the repressions made against the population by the military regime, plus the montages prepared by the newspaper to cover the killings of the government, were not a surprise for anyone.[20]

Considering the editorial and political agenda of Edwards and *El Mercurio*, one could infer why the people rejected the newspaper as a medium of public expression. The consumer public of *El Mercurio* was the Chilean upper class supporter of the military not only because of what the newspaper represented in political terms, but also because of the consumer gap revealed in the type of subjects addressed in the newspaper, the language used by their journalists, and its daily cost—a cost too elevated for a worker family. Clearly,

El Mercurio did not have strong credibility among those opposed to the dictatorship. Besides, its untrustworthiness had a long story: since the late 1960s the newspaper was questioned when a group of students from one of the most important Chilean universities denounced false accusations that appeared in a series of reportages after student revolts in the capital city of Santiago. From that moment, the phrase "*El Mercurio* miente!" (*El Mercurio* lies!) started being used—even until today—as a common way to refer to Agustín Edwards' publication.[21]

Conscious or not of the ideological adherence of *El Mercurio*, Rauschenberg was being presented in Chile as an artist openly sympathetic to the conservative right party who supported Pinochet's regime. His handwritten invitation was, in fact, a clear proof of that situation. However, it is important to realize that Rauschenberg himself thought of his presence in Santiago from a different perspective. Giving an account of the artist's iconography in the Chilean series, Robert Mattison states the following:

> Another eight representations in Rauschenberg's Chilean works involve newspapers, broadsides, and posters. Since the 1950s Rauschenberg had been using newspaper fragments in his art, a sign of his active involvement with the events of everyday life and his desire to view his works as collecting points for a wide variety of information. Their use in these Chilean works takes on added significance because of the restrictions on freedom of the press imposed by the Pinochet government. These constraints reached a high-water mark during Rauschenberg's stay in Chile... Such censorship flew directly in the face of open access to information that is at the core of ROCI.[22]

If we follow Mattison's argument, Rauschenberg's idea of using photographs of Chilean newspapers kiosks was to call attention to what was happening in the country in terms of censorship. In other words, through publicly and openly exhibiting those images (where the atrocities of the dictatorship are nowhere to be found) Rauschenberg's silk-screenings would reveal what was absent in the Chilean press. His images would be a powerful device to remember the phantoms of recent history and to at least invoke from an art perspective, change. However, if Rauschenberg's aim was to "open access to information" through his art—as Mattison proposes—through his actions he was doing exactly the opposite. With the sponsorship of *El Mercurio* and the invitation that appeared the opening day, he was misinterpreting the public reach of the newspaper: he was losing the "people"(workers, housewives, students, etc.). Furthermore, the artist was keeping the information inside a group that, being too far from the "people," preferred the "exclusive" character of cultural and social events. As *El Mercurio* reports, governmental

authorities, representatives from different diplomatic legations, and socialites from the art and cultural world assisted at the opening night.[23] Although it is probable that the public gradually changed during the month that Rauschenberg's show was exhibited in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, towards a wider social spectrum, it is not possible to be completely assured of that.[24]

In a spectacular montage that included almost all the museum space, 224 pictorial and sculptural works, insured for 4 million dollars, were shown. Without doubt, Rauschenberg's exhibition was one of the most important and expensive shows ever presented in Chile.[25] For that reason, it is not surprising that extra security was required and that even the Police was asked to participate in the security of Rauschenberg's exhibition.[26] For the public and the press (*El Mercurio* and perhaps *La Segunda*) that assisted to the opening ceremony, the works that received more attention were, of course, the ones related to Rauschenberg's Chilean experience. However, in all the accounts made apropos of the exhibition, no single reference to these works can be found. All the comments—and even the interview made by the art critic of *El Mercurio*, Waldemar Sommer, with Robert Rauschenberg—omitted the formal features and the content of the Chilean series. In other words, no critique of the exhibition was made, and every written account was devoted to celebrating the figure of the "American master" and describing his personal and artistic story.

One could argue that in Chile, Rauschenberg's show became a spectacle of American imperialism. All the attention paid by the artist to the exhibition value of the show—the trip made by his team to prepare the exhibition in order to avoid domestic help, the perfection of the montage, Rauschenberg's gesture to pay for the restoration of the museum space after an earthquake earlier that year, the emphasis on the insurance cost of the works, and the overall monumental character of the ROCI project—produced, at the end, the invisibility of the works on display. It was the paraphernalia of the exhibition that caught the attention of the public and the only way the cultural establishment had to behave was to secure the exhibition. Thus, both the surveillance and the economic importance given to the materiality of the art worked together to emphasize the exhibition value and commodity character of the pieces. Even though Rauschenberg always stressed "exhibition value" in his shows, it is also true that in the ROCI project he wanted to highlight, as well, the "cult value" of his work. He wanted to transform commodities into pieces with a symbolic character, because "art contains peaceful powers... seducing us into creative mutual understandings for the benefit of all."[27] Although this idea might sound paradoxical—especially if we think that for Benjamin the cult value is lost with the advent of technical reproduction, a technical reproduction which was indeed, Rauschenberg's signature—we could suppose that even though the artist regarded ROCI from the start as a personal "enterprise,"

his aim was to give a "sacred" character to ROCI that would convert his idea of art as a bridge capable of uniting people and destroying political, economic, and social frontiers. But for a variety of reasons, Rauschenberg's works remained "invisible to the spectator."[28] If in the past art was hidden behind its sacred attributes, in ROCI Chile art was hidden by its economic value.

Form and Content: the Chilean series

In 1991 Washington's National Gallery of Art exhibited a selection of the artworks produced by Rauschenberg to commemorate the end of the ROCI project.[29] In the exhibition's catalogue Jack Cowart described the "shift" of Rauschenberg's technical and iconographical procedures as follows:

> To meet the demands of ROCI, Rauschenberg had to envision and then quickly create new work, testing himself during his late middle age to make 'deadline art' in fresh circumstances. (...) There was little time for second thoughts or objective distance. (...) Of equal importance to Rauschenberg's use of color, fabrics, and sculptural assemblage is his return to direct silkscreening for the ROCI paintings. He had largely avoided this technique for painting since his last great silkscreen achievements of 1962-1963. These earlier work often took "second hand" images from the public media and reused them to make complex, woven paintings with subdued silkscreen inks. By contrast, the recent ROCI works use only the artist's own photographs for the screens ('first-hand' material) and bright new acrylic colors in clearer, aggressive compositions. The photos are his immediate, authentic record, the 'information' and facts about the things he has observed in each country. Subsequently enlarged, these images are the creative matrix for the paintings groups.[30]

In this short paragraph, Cowart highlights Rauschenberg's return to silkscreening painting and the renovation of his imagery—now determined not by "second hand" images, but by the "information and facts" of each country. From this comment, and from what we already know about the ROCI project, we would think that Rauschenberg's use of silkscreening was mediated by his need of having a technical mean that would assure the effectiveness and fastness of his production and, at the same time, that would retain by means of industrial painting the brightness and power of the photographs taken during his research trips. But the ROCI project was not limited to this technique. There was also a series of sculptural works, most in the same line as his earlier combines, but now made from pre-fabricated and industrial materials instead of the every-day life objects of his famous pieces of the 1950s. We could say that what calls the spectators' attention to the ROCI project is Rauschenberg's use of "old forms" to present "new meanings."

The 1985 exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes is a perfect example of what the ROCI project was about. There, Rauschenberg presented three major series of Chilean works: *Copperhead-Bite*, *Copperhead Grande* and *Copperhead Chica*, and *Caryatid Cavalcade*. He also exhibited the sculptural work *Altar Peace*, considered as one of the symbols of the ROCI project.[31] From a technical point of view, the most innovative work of ROCI Chile was the *Copperhead* series. Applying the knowledge he gained from Benito Rojo of the Faculty of Arts of the Universidad de Chile, Rauschenberg was able to transfer images (using acids and tarnishing agents) onto large copper plates. In this series, the natural color of the mineral predominates, although in some plates areas of brilliant colors highlight the composition.

By using copper as the basic material for the series, Rauschenberg wanted to express its ambiguous meaning for the Chilean people. Chile's economy was (and still is) based on the exportation of copper. In the 1960s the mineral was the symbol of the Unidad Popular—Salvador Allende's government—, later on it became the symbol of neo-liberal economics during the dictatorship.[32] Rauschenberg also regarded the mines as "the location of some of the worst government authoritarian practices and labor abuses." The generic title of *Copperhead* refers, therefore, to "the poisonous North American snake and makes an analogy between its bite and the bite of acid into the copper," Mattison regarding the title, says "the danger of the Chilean situation as Rauschenberg perceived it was highlighted."[33] Independently of Rauschenberg's thoughts it is impossible not to wonder, from a "Chilean perspective," what Rauschenberg was finally associating with the "poisonous North American snake." Pinochet's figure and all the atrocities of his dictatorship or the role of the United States overthrowing Salvador Allende's government through its anti-communist campaign?

Scholars have considered plate number IV the "most political" one in the *Copperhead-Bite* series. There are three overlapped photographs: one that shows a poster with a menu of a popular restaurant, another a detail of one of the copper mines, and the third a partial view of a kiosk in downtown Santiago. The political aspect of the image derive mainly from the contrast of the newspapers' covers of the kiosk—the headlines were the assassination of Indira Gandhi, a police raid, and the cover of a history magazine with Ingres' portrait of Napoleon—and the bucolic and sweet images of popular prints hung in the upper space of the kiosk. As noted, this work, along with the rest of the ROCI Chile series, was metonymic in character. Hiding political contents—with the exception of the police raid—the communication of the "facts" recorded by Rauschenberg would provide a "message" the people could understand. Although metonymically complex, when compared with the rest of the series, *Copperhead-Bite IV* lacks density. In general, the series redounds in ordinary, common, easily accessed "facts." Attempting to bypass the fear and distress

of everyday life, Rauschenberg ended up atomizing the experience of the everyday by transforming it into a bricolage of picturesque scenes.

Altar Peace was the only sculptural work presented in ROCI Chile. Built by Rauschenberg to "honor the church," he used not only the images he photographed inside of churches, but remembered the conversations he had with José Donoso and the various intellectuals, artists, and students who asked him to exhibit in the "church" rather than at the museum. Thus the artist conceived of *Altar Peace* as a little homage to the "people" and to those who made him see the "reconciliatory power" of the church in Chile. The work consisted of a large aluminum cross, covered on each side by priests' chasubles, and by several images from Rauschenberg's Chilean portfolio. The enormous cross had great symbolic power for the artist. It was, as it title indicated, an altar dedicated to peace; a conciliatory monument that would reunite oppressors and oppressed, the right and the left. One would think that *Altar Peace* accomplished its mission; but one could also argue that this occurred in a different way than Rauschenberg expected. As mentioned, part of the "church" dedicated its efforts to help those in need. The "people," therefore, could identify themselves with this monument of peace because it is a basic and simple form full of color and images. Indeed, the visual syntax of the work could engage them in a way that broadened the work's meaning. But the place where *Altar Piece* was located could easily change that meaning. The cross' shape highlighted by the use of priest's chasubles also reflected the Christian values of the Catholic conservatives—the Chilean right wing—who, in general, chose not to see what was happening with respect to the violation of human rights. It was a group that because of its economic and social ties with Pinochet's regime preferred to ignore reality, and establish bonds with the most conservative parties within Catholicism. If Rauschenberg's *Altar Piece* was being displayed in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and sponsored by *El Mercurio*, it could also be regarded as a celebration of the values that were obliterating any possibility of reconciliation and peace in Chile.

If Rauschenberg's works were highly problematic in "content" and "social" levels, they were also problematic in "technique," especially for the Chilean "art scene" of the 1980s. As mentioned, these artists saw in Rauschenberg's hyper-industrialized, ostentatious, and colossal works an agent of capitalism. For most of them, Rauschenberg was betraying his past *oeuvre*, especially his early paintings and combines. In his works of the 1940s and 1950s artists like Francisco Brugnoli and Virginia Errázuriz, among others, saw—following the classical interpretations of Rauschenberg's works of this period—a strong relationship between art and life, and a political attempt to subvert artistic genres and institutional ties incorporating the everyday object into the work. Rauschenberg's renunciation of this mode, as they saw it, caused

a crisis in their own agenda, which was focused on the introduction of everyday objects into art in order to establish a strong relationship between art and politics—without doing propaganda. If Rauschenberg surrendered himself to capitalism, if his work abandoned the hand-made character of his paintings and combines for the anonymous work of a team directed by an "artistic businessman," then the model they were looking for, the model of the artist who engages with society and uses his technique as a medium to critically respond to capitalism, was in danger. What they respected in Rauschenberg's past works (for example *Bed*, 1955), was the residual character of modernity; the waste of society's forms of production. Thus, to them the Chilean series seemed hyper-sophisticated and hyper-produced. They thought that Rauschenberg's works were too remote from the Chilean reality of art and of everyday life to incorporate them in an artistic experience, even though the subject matter of those works was in fact Chile. And they were a constant reminder that only a foreign artist—and an artist related to the dictatorship—could have an exhibition like the one Rauschenberg had in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

Rauschenberg's exhibition in Chile in 1985 was profoundly determined by the political context the country was experiencing. The artist, without fully comprehending the complexities of the situation, failed in understanding the symbolic articulations of the power of the dictatorship and the institutions related to it. Rauschenberg's crystalline and reductive comprehension of this context, together with his belief that the meaningfulness and the power of art were beyond ideology, resulted in the emptiness of his "apolitical" strategy. The ROCI project dealt with the dream of a single artist who hoped to change the world through his art, and a public—the Chilean public—that could not innocently and simply receive the artist's message in a context in which art was inseparable from politics.

Notes

[1] Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg / Art and Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 28.

[2] Pamela Kachurin, "The ROCI Road to Peace. Robert Rauschenberg, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4/1 (Winter 2002): 34.

[3] The countries included in the ROCI project were Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Tibet, China, Japan, Cuba, USRR, Germany, and Malaysia. ROCI started in 1984 in Mexico and came to an end in a retrospective exhibition at Washington's National Gallery in 1991.

[4] An exception is Pamela Kachurin's essay about Rauschenberg's visit to the USSR.

[5] Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in , *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. (Oxford,

Speaking Directly: An Examination of Symbol and Communication in Allan Kaprow's Happenings

Nick Parkinson

> ...anything may be art and anyone may be an artist, but in plain fact it only extends the right of sensitive perception and creative activity to those, who wish to respond appropriately.
>
> —Allan Kaprow[1]

Allan Kaprow's Happenings were intended as psychological experiments as much as they were intended as "works of art" proper. Considered as works of art (Kaprow himself was ambivalent about the use of the word in relation to his works), they are objects and events which provoke an "aesthetic experience" in the viewer/participant. Impromptu junk towers, an ice-cube, a sweaty shirt, a jelly-sandwich – the art objects themselves sound inane precisely because they are essentially inconsequential, or at least highly interchangeable in Kaprow's work. What matters is how the object affects the participant, how the participants interact, and above all what is communicated to the participant and what she experiences. The question of "art" is a psychological issue rather than an ontological one, and this idea is suggested in Kaprow's use of the term "nonart" rather than "antiart" to describe his work. Art-objects are not the issue. Rather, "the art is the forgetting of art."[2] Kaprow wanted to rid art of its disingenuousness and life of its thoughtlessness in order to merge the two into a lived art. In a sense, Kaprow wanted to bypass (or at least minimize) the object in order to go straight to the experience. But the problem which arises in radically altering the artistic medium is that it strips communication of its symbols, and the work of art teeters on becoming unintelligible.

Given Kaprow's emphasis on the psychological importance of his art and not its formalistic qualities, it seems only fair to approach his work from a

psychoanalytic perspective. This essay will attempt to apply psychoanalyst Ronald Fairbairn's theory of aesthetic experience, described in "The Ultimate Basis of Aesthetic Experience," to Kaprow's work. Fairbairn approaches art from the standpoint of its psychological function. A successful work of art communicates an emotional feeling, transmitted from artist to beholder, where both the artist and the beholder "discover" symbolic significance in an object which the artist has "framed." Thus, a work of art is dependent upon the relationship between the beholder and the artist, where the beholder must keep an "open mind" to receive the work, while the artist must adequately create a symbol which can be communicated to the beholder.[3] What is communicated in the symbol, and what occurs psychologically for the creator and the beholder of the work of art, is the reparation of the object, making it a "*restored object*,", which functions to provide emotional release.[4] Thus our question will not be *Is it art?* but rather *Does it succeed in its function?*.

This essay will follow the progression of Kaprow's work and its reception by its participants by focusing—though not exclusively—on four different Happenings: *Communication* (1958), *Pastorale* (1958), *Household* (1964) and *Take-Off* (1974). In doing so we will see how Kaprow, in response to the unintelligibility of his earlier Happenings, attempted to heighten the communicability of his work through enacting tighter control over the receptivity of his participants, in part by selecting more "open minded" participants. At the same time Kaprow attempted to reduce and even eliminate symbolization in his work in order to create a purer kind of communication: I will show how the elimination of symbols had the opposite effect, hindering communication instead of freeing it, and rendering his work incomprehensible to many of his participants.

One of Kaprow's first attempts at a Happening in 1958, *Pastorale*, was symptomatic of the difficulties he would encounter throughout his career. The event took place on his friend George Segal's farm, with the participants being fellow artists and friends. The intended activities consisted of jumping through plastic sheets, sitting in chicken coops while making noises, collectively painting a canvas, and other events scripted by Kaprow.[5] The whole event ended up being an embarrassing failure for Kaprow. He later recalled how people were more concerned with drinking and having fun than participating in the event. Miles Forst, who was assigned by Kaprow to play the bugle during part of the event, would not take his role seriously. Nor would the people within the chicken coops: instead of rattling their noisemakers and creating a fury of sound, they were more concerned with making out.[6] Kaprow was frustrated with his participants' unwillingness to maintain their roles, but the participants were upset with Kaprow as well. The day at Segal's farm had started off as an informal gathering, and the participants felt as if Kaprow had intruded on their party and hurled demands on them. Moreover, they dis-

agreed with Kaprow's artistic intentions, complaining that art which explores spontaneous experience should not be controlled, with one artist going so far as to label Kaprow a "fascist" for trying to direct his participants.[7] This Happening indicated a sharp divide between what Kaprow intended to communicate, along with how he imagined his participants would pick up and understand his cues, and how the audience actually experienced and interpreted the event. Whatever symbolic meaning Kaprow was trying to convey was either lost to those who attended to have fun, or vehemently rejected by those who opposed his methods.

Kaprow set up *Pastorale* as a response to a Happening (his first real Happening, though it was not called by that name yet) he had set up earlier in the year at Douglass College titled *Communication.* Like *Pastorale*, this Happening revolved around a series of simultaneous, disruptive actions and noises, including bouncing a ball, lighting matches, repeating short phrases, and banging tin cans. The highlight of the event was a "speech" given by Kaprow, which had been prerecorded and then played for the student audience. The speech was then garbled, rendering the words incomprehensible, by playing the same speech over two other audio players out of sync with one another. Kaprow wanted to explore the problematic nature of communication by turning a speech into an incoherent, multimedia event.[8] The student attendees were unsure of how to interpret what they had experienced, or what Kaprow had intended in creating this event and inviting them to watch and listen; nevertheless, Kaprow's Happening had an effect on them. As author Jeff Kelley remarks, "No one knew precisely what had happened, but clearly something had."[9] Kaprow was dissatisfied, at least in part, because of the event's structure, which occurred in the College's chapel, with Kaprow sitting at the front, thus dividing him from the audience and making him appear too much as an authority figure. Moreover, given the religious setting, the event unintentionally seemed to be making critical remarks toward religion, when it was intended to be a purely apolitical experiment concerning the problem of communication.[10] Thus, and perhaps comically fitting given Kaprow's intended meaning of *Communication*, Kaprow decided that his Happening had not properly conveyed to the audience what he had intended.

Kaprow decided to try creating a Happening in a less constrained, more informal environment, and the result was *Pastorale.* He had hoped that his friends, being artists themselves, would be more sympathetic participants who would "get" what he was trying to accomplish.[11] Ironically, the opposite occurred. In removing himself from the formal college setting in which he had authority to an informal environment amongst friends, he lost his legitimacy. He became to his friends a tyrant and a spoilsport, and unlike the Douglass College students who, though perhaps bewildered, were nonetheless attentive to Kaprow's work, they refused to listen to him.

In the audio recording played during *Communication,* Kaprow derides the possibility of personal communication, proclaiming its inability to express anything or do more than repeat clichés. Later in the recording he states,

> I am only interested in that experience for which I alone am responsible and to which I alone respond. This, for me, is the only authenticity...[12] The only "communication" that interests me is the communication of non-communication. This alone is potent, variable, fresh and communicable. Beyond that there is only the simple art.[13]

What Kaprow is seeking, ideally, and what he struggles with, is communication unmediated by symbols, to express the phenomenological experience in its immediacy. This is what he is striving for in "authenticity." If he and his audience are to engage in a Happening, and if both are to experience it as equally meaningful, then this would require a pure intersubjectivity. In other words, he wants the process of discovery for all participants to be unhindered, shared and profound. This is why he detested the formal setting in which *Communication* took place. He felt that he was imposing his thoughts on students instead of letting them actively engage in experiencing ideas. He had hoped that communication with his friends would be more direct and authentic.

To a certain degree Kaprow's desires find credibility in Fairbairn's theory of aesthetic experience. Fairbairn states, "In making his discovery, the beholder shares the experience of the artist who made the discovery in the first instance; and, by identifying himself with the artist, he shares the satisfaction of artistic creation himself."[14] If both artist and beholder can share the same discovery, if their discrete psychological reactions to the work of art are the same, then it seems possible to have an aesthetic experience which is both communal and "authentic" for the individual. In other words, the artist does not have to force the experience onto the subject. Additionally, if the artist and the beholder are both creators and discoverers, then this should make possible Kaprow's desire for the dissolution of difference between artist and audience, having only participants instead.

Moreover, Kaprow's work initially appears to fulfill Fairbairn's minimum requirement for a work of art, which is that it function as a 'found object,' or in Kaprow's particular case, the "found word, noise, or action" and "environment."[15] The "found object" is the object or event from which both the artist and the beholder attain their sense of having discovered something significant, and as such it is the medium of communication between the artist and the beholder. This discovery, then, leads to "an intense emotional experi-

ence," which the beholder and the artist associate with the beauty or significance of the object. What is a necessary for a discovery to be made in the first place – and it is at this crucial point that Kaprow's work can be seen to falter – that the 'found object' function as a symbol. Fairbairn states that "a certain amount of disguise appears to be necessary to enable any object to function as a 'found object'."[16] A work of art, or object which is to be adequate for the psychological process of discovery, must be recognized as a symbol; otherwise, nothing can be 'found,' eliminating the beholder's sense of surprise. This is at least one reason why *Pastorale* and *Communication* failed as aesthetic experiences for the participants. Whatever hidden significance Kaprow found in the events and objects of these Happenings, he failed to adequately symbolize them for the audience. Even if the meaning behind *Communication* was nonsense, the audience failed to understand it as nonsense, but as something else instead, which they sought to apply meaning to. *Communication* was, at least, communicative in that the event was 'framed' for the audience. They knew something was occurring, and they paid attention. As for *Pastorale,* there was an obvious discrepancy between Kaprow's intention and his participants' expectations, which means that they failed to identify with Kaprow or connect through his symbols. There was, as what Fairbairn describes in his essay, "a disparity between the total emotional needs of the artist and those of the beholder."[17] Kaprow wanted to share a "found" experience which was for him symbolically significant, while the emotional needs of the participants were directed elsewhere – toward enjoying their party.

As Kaprow continued experimenting with Happenings into the 1960s, public curiosity grew, especially amongst students and those in the art world. "By the late 1960s," Jeff Kelley states, "Happenings were bigger as rumors than they had ever been as events."[18] This attention proved to be an important resource for the success of Kaprow's Happenings. Firstly, as his Happenings became more famous, more people wanted to participate in them. This provided Kaprow with a large group of sympathetic participants, open to new ideas and curious to see what Happenings were all about. Secondly, as awareness of what Happenings were grew, his participants had a better idea of what to expect, and so they would be less likely to be lost in total confusion when the Happenings took place. Thus, at least potentially, people would be more capable of interpreting the Happenings as their symbolic meaning became more widely understood. There would be greater chance that the emotional needs and intentions of the participants would be on par with Kaprow's, and thus a greater chance at finding and communicating meaning.

Many of the Happenings during the 1960s took place on university campuses, where willing participants could readily be found. One such Happening, titled *Household,* was commissioned by Cornell University and took place in the spring of 1964. Nearly 200 people, most of whom were Cornell

students, participated. The Happening took place at a dump site outside of campus (Kaprow originally wanted it to take place at Fall Creek Gorge, an idea later scrapped because of safety concerns), and revolved around a staged conflict between a group of men and a group of women.[19] The men built a tower out of junk, while the women built a nest, both of which would eventually be destroyed by the opposite party. Strawberry jam was spread over the hood of a junk car by the men, which was then licked-up by the women. The men then drove the women away and consumed the jam themselves. Afterward shirts were removed, and the men destroyed the car with a battering log and sledge hammers while the women cheered them on. All this occurred while a large group of participants emerged from the woods shouting and making noises. The car was then set on fire while people watched and smoked cigarettes, after which, as directed, the participants all left in silence.[20]

An account of *Household* in *The Ithaca Journal* states that the responses of the participants were mixed, citing three quotes which gave a generalized account of student reactions: "It was like having a dream... nonsense;" "Absolutely wonderful;" and "The emotional experience Kaprow was trying to get across failed because some didn't take an active part."[21] However, people were open to the Happening, and faculty members did not dismiss it as meaningless or a waste of time. Likewise, the participants who formed the opposing gender groups went along with the script as planned, and they seemed to enjoy playing their parts. Overall, *Household* seemed to be a success. This was due in part to the kind of open-minded idealism which was prevalent on university campuses during the mid-sixties, and also to the way in which Kaprow planned the Happening.[22] Before *Household* took place, Kaprow held a meeting with the participants where he assigned roles and handed out scripts. He had found a proper medium between the spontaneity of *Pastorale* and the exclusive, controlled structure of *Communication.*

Though the script to *Household* objectively lays out what actions are to be performed, the directions are sparse enough for the participants to determine how they should perform the actions. Thus, Kaprow does not dictate how the participants should express their actions or how they should feel, and as an orchestrator he remains in the background, despite the fact that the events are almost entirely scripted. Personal and interpersonal experience was the focus of his Happening, but Kaprow did not view improvisation as a necessary component of experience. Rather, he regarded too much improvisation as a hindrance. In a 1965 interview with *Village Voice,* Kaprow defends his method of controlling action, stating,

> When people are told to improvise, they become self-conscious and perform banal, stereotyped actions, like taking off their clothes or throwing things. They get very destructive. Real freedom is the

consequence of real limitations."[23]

Kaprow had witnessed the destructiveness of people when given the opportunity to improvise during his two 1958 "Environments" at the Hansa Gallery, which he later named *Beauty Parlor*. Here, by eliminating the stage and other privileged spaces of the artist, he tried to turn the spectators into participants.[24] However, Kaprow complained that, despite his pleas to the audience, it did not take long before people started poking things with their umbrellas, deliberately destroying parts of the Environments. According to him, people were confused, even frustrated by these works, and they did not know to what degree they were supposed to interact with the Environments.[25] In other words, the Environments provoked people's aggression, which was allowed to manifest through the elimination of the distinction between creator and spectator. In trying to eliminate social boundaries and structures, Kaprow also eliminated, or at least dissipated, people's inhibitions. Kaprow obviously wanted to maintain some degree of order. He did not want his participants to be completely unrestrained. Kaprow found it necessary to impose structure on the events, and thus his scripted events, such as *Household*, were a way of implementing limitations while eschewing conventional social norms when it came to art.

Again, Kaprow was dealing with problems concerning symbol and communication. In his essay, *Prolegomena to a Psychology of Art*, Fairbairn describes how unconscious destructive impulses are a primary source of artistic inspiration. A work of art functions, in part, by allowing "the repressed impulses an opportunity for expression," which then relieves "the *tension between the repressed impulses and the ego*."[26] The buildup of this tension, caused by sadism and the urge to destroy, is then released through artistic activity. However, with the creation of a work of art, the partial release of destructive urges causes guilt, and so they are countered by libidinal urges, which function in a reparative manner. In this reparative act, the repressed urges are disguised, and this disguise takes the form of a symbol. When there is "a low coefficient of repression in relation to the strength of the unconscious urges expressed," then "the art-work [the psychic function which disguises the urges] is comparatively meagre."[27] If a work of art lacks symbolization, then, the destructiveness expressed in the work comes to fore. In such a case, the beholder of the work of art rejects the work of art. Fairbairn states that an under-symbolized work "says more than the beholder's superego will tolerate," and the censorship of the superego is expressed in the "feelings of disgust and indignation."[28] As a result of this rejection, the beholder does not engage with the work, and so he cannot reveal its hidden significance. Thus, the artist must adequately symbolize her work in a manner which transforms it into a significant object. Otherwise, the beholder does not experience the work

as a something profound, but as an expression of aggression, and so he disregards the work as rubbish.

In *Beauty Parlor*, the work of art is under-symbolized, making the latent destructive desires of the artist apparent to the superego. The feelings of confusion and frustration which Kaprow recounts his participants as feeling describes the manner in which their superegos rejected the Environment. The process of discovery was squandered, since there was no symbol through which to "find" an object. However, the destructiveness of the participants also suggests, at least for some participants, not a rejection by the superego but a lack of repression of their sadistic urges as well. In inviting people to join him in creating nonart, or art which seeks to frame most elementary form of aesthetic experience encountered in daily life, Kaprow unwittingly invited his guests to express their destructive urges. Whatever symbolic significance Kaprow's work possessed was not discovered because it was under-symbolized. The result was not the mutual discovery of a "found object," but a Dionysian release. Kaprow's mistake was to believe that the creative impulse is primarily libidinal, that amateurs, given the possibility of free creation, would respond to his Environments with care rather than sadism. Thus people were not necessarily acting in a cliché manner, as Kaprow suggested; they were merely doing what unconsciously came to them given in an environment which urged them to eschew restraint.

The destructiveness inherent within *Household* is likewise apparent, if not more so. There are acts of devouring, a mock war, the destruction of phallic and vaginal symbols, aggressive, almost rape-like tearing off of clothing, and numerous other acts which degrade human relationships and revel in wanton destructiveness. On the other hand, *Household* offered the participants some level of comprehensible symbolization. Tom McDonough remarks that a number of themes are apparent within the work, including "sexual liberation; the critique of an oppressive, technological society; and the return to a more authentic mode of existence through a playful, ritualized violence."[29] Likewise, Jeff Kelley concludes that the Happening's location at a dump "suggested to some that old-fashioned sexual stereotypes ought to be tossed in the trash."[30] Of course, some of the participants may have easily interpreted Kaprow's use of gender to be neither liberating nor progressive, but rather, as Judith Rodenbeck writes, an example of "shockingly reactionary gender coding."[31] Likewise, as one of the quotes from *The Ithaca Journal* suggests, some participants were unable to find any meaning in the Happening at all. In either case, there is, to recall Fairbairn's remark, "a disparity between the total emotional needs of the artist and those of the beholder." These complains suggest that the superego applied its censuring power, either through the conscious realization and rejection of violent symbols (found in the complaint that the work stereotyped genders), or through the inability to discover any symbolic

significance at all (found in the complaint that the work was meaningless). However, signs of restraint and repression of destructive urges are apparent in that nobody was hurt in the mock-battle.[32] The violence was recognized as symbolic, not literal, and an essential component in producing the recognition of symbols was Kaprow's control over the event. With a script, *Household* was given a "frame," which, according to Fairbairn, is the artist's way of directing the beholder toward making a discovery—that is, it indicates a "found object."[33] Through Kaprow's direction, *Household* pointed to something and was a way of communicating with his participants. Thus, the events of the Happening took the shape of a symbol (even if, according to Fairbairn's theory, it still suffered from gross under-symbolization), which allowed at least some students to realize it as a 'found event.'

Kaprow, however, started to have reservations about controlled events with large numbers of participants such as *Household* and similar Happenings he produced during the 1960s. Ideally, he wanted to relinquish control, becoming just another participant, and let his fellow participants come to their own conclusions concerning his work. He began to fear that his participants were just acting along, without experiencing his art in the lifelike manner he had intended. The tendency for participants to become actors was especially apparent to Kaprow when cameras were brought in to record the Happening.[34] As his Happenings progressed into the 1970s, his instructional booklets became sparser, and the format became looser. He resisted having to "frame" anything for his participants. What Kaprow wanted was *Pastorale* again, but to find a way to make it work. He wanted sympathetic participants who would be would be able to locate meaning in the event without him having to communicate it. Thus, Kaprow moved away from large groups of participants, preferring instead small groups with like-minded persons, people who were often his friends or somehow connected with his group. He felt that these people had a natural ability to experience art in the everyday world, without having to be directed by cues. Kaprow states, "the experimental minority apparently does not need these settings... they have a readymade 'art frame' in their heads, and this frame can be set down anywhere, at any time."[35] Kaprow was still searching for "authentic experience." He wanted his participants to experience life in its "'raw' primary state," unmediated by symbols.[36]

Kaprow's work of the 1970s turned to themes of interpersonal communication to a much greater degree than the earlier work. The seventies works focused on one-on-one interactions, often employing touching between the two participants, recording their bodily reactions, and emphasized personal subjective responses.[37] In *Time Pieces* (1973), two participants measured one another's pulses and exchanged breaths. *Affect* (1974) involved two persons pressing their bodies together, wetting parts of the body and then letting them dry, each recording thoughts about his or her self and the other, and then

playing the recording back. Kaprow called these types of events, in which little happens and which focus on experience and relationships, "Activities." Activity, for Kaprow, was the most compelling kind of Happening, the most ideal type of the six categories of Happenings he outlined in his essay, "Pinpoint Happenings" (1967). He also believed it to be the most difficult type of Happening through which to attain success. Kaprow writes,

> The Activity type is risky because it easily loses the clarity of its paradoxical position of being art-life or life-art. Habit may lead Happeners to depend on certain favored situations and to perfect them in the manner of conventional artists. Or their choices may become so indistinguishable from daily events that participation degenerates into routine and indifference.[38]

What Kaprow risked losing in Activities was the "found object." The art event becomes indistinguishable from the everyday event since there is only the mildest framing of an event – given through loose coordination, and by being labeled an 'Activity' – which is otherwise just an ordinary event. Kaprow was well aware of the risk involved in eliminating the artist, and therefore in eliminating the process of symbolization. For without the symbol, how are participants to locate meaning? The communication between persons, which the art object functions as, is obviously eliminated when the art object is eliminated. In the audio recording played during *Communication* in 1958, Kaprow had said that communicating "is to merely extend the shadow of what was once worthwhile uttering."[39] He obviously saw art and all forms of symbolic communication as the shadow of what was trying to be communicated. By eliminating symbol, Kaprow hoped two people could share an unmediated experience of something significant.

The Activity *Take Off* (1974) included nine participants (including Kaprow himself) divided into groups of three. The groups were formed so that most of the participants already knew one another to some degree. The Activity involved person A performing a mundane task (dressing, undressing, replacing bed sheets, and removing bed sheets), making an audio recording describing the action, and recording a command for person C to perform the same action. A had the opportunity to lie about what task he or she had actually performed, and thus had the option to be deliberately deceptive in making the audio recording. If A lied on the recording, then B took a photo of A performing the act which A had deceitfully described. If A told the truth, then B took a photo of A performing one of the actions he or she did not do. The photo and audio recording were then delivered to person C through person B. Thus, person C had to decide whether or not A had been honest or not—something ultimately impossible for C to know with certainty given the uncer-

tainty of the evidence. The participants then exchanged roles.[40] However, the rules were, if not a trick, essentially meaningless. "The rules," wrote Kaprow, "were used only as pretexts for the dynamics of [the participants'] interpersonal relationships."[41] *Take Off* was really about being willing to expose yourself to another person—quite literally, at times, when photos of undressing were taken—and about trusting in others, despite being unable to know their intentions. It had extremely erotic undertones which were barely symbolic since the task was for the participants to explore their relationship as participants and not just think about how the actions were symbols concerning relationships.

The reactions of the first two groups (the ones in which Kaprow was not a participant) demonstrated that they all understood that this Activity was about interpersonal relationships, and that the rules imposed by the Activity were somehow a hindrance to their relationships. However, they more or less failed to focus purely on their relationships. They reacted, as Kaprow foresaw in writing "Pinpoint Happenings," like "conventional artists" by supplementing the Activity with creative acts. As part of their protest against the rules of the Activity, for example, group members A and C of the first group "symbolically killed [B] with a pistol and photographed the action." Likewise, the second group expressed their feelings about the event through "a series of completely black and completely white photographs," which "stood for a synthesis of all behavioral possibilities that could result from following Kaprow's plan."[42] Both groups, then, produced art by expressing themselves symbolically, though Kaprow's Activities were meant to be nonart events. In another example, while performing part of the Activity, one of the participants in the second group recording into a tape, "I usually don't have any feelings while making a bed. I don't think about it but now I have to think because Allan told me to.... This bed isn't a bed anymore. It's just a process in a Happening."[43] What's interesting in all these examples is that the events of *Take Off* were not met with disgust or by remarks of "This isn't really art at all."[44] According to Fairbairn, these should be the responses stipulated by the superego when confronted with a work which is under-symbolized. Instead, perhaps as a shield against the latent sexual content of the Activity, the participants unconsciously took up the process of art-work. Where symbols were absent, they were sought; and if symbols were not found, they were created.

The third group, in which Kaprow was a participant, instead focused mainly on exploring relationships. Both Kaprow and another one of the participants, Ester Carla, performed their actions mostly for the purpose of trying to get the third participant—a shy Norwegian woman named Ingrid—to open up to them emotionally. Kaprow's written reflections reiterate his interest in exploring the complexity of relationships, detailing the rationale behind of each of his gestures performed during the Activity. Ester Carla's written reflections,

however, express quite explicitly that her reasons for wanting to know Ingrid were sexual. She reveled in undressing in front of Ingrid, and even more so by the embarrassment and excitement it caused Ingrid. Ingrid, likewise, (at least according to Ester Carla, since Ingrid gave no written reflections on the event), felt excited by the thought of "playing in a prohibited game."[45] There was little artistic creation to be found in the group's actions, few symbols to locate other than the gestures they made toward one another in being honest, lying, undressing, or dressing. In the end, there was a sense of complicity amongst the participators. Ester Carla writes that the Activity "gave form to our relationships," and that the Activity then dissolved in order for the relationships to stand alone.[46] Thus, it might be interpreted that the Activity was successful, at least in terms of its psychological function. The Activity seems to have fulfilled the total emotional needs of all participants through the building of their relationships, and they all felt that something significant had happened. Yet there is a sense in which Kaprow cheated in order to achieve success, namely in that Ester Carla already knew Kaprow's intentions. She had helped Kaprow translate the Activity into Italian (*Take Off* took place in Genoa), and so, as Ester Carla remarks, she "was already familiar with the mechanism of the action."[47] The meaning was known beforehand, not through the experience of the Activity itself, and so no object had to be 'found' or any symbol revealed.

What seems to be missing in this last example, and indeed in many of Kaprow's Happenings, would be an act of reparation. According to Fairbairn, for an act of reparation to occur, and therefore produce an aesthetic experience, there has to be "the resolution of an antinomy created by the simultaneous operation of the libido (the life principle) and the destructive urges (the death principle)."[48] This feeling of resolve is what gives weight to the percipient's emotional experience. For even if an object is "found," what makes the discovery enduring is the feeling of the experience's uniqueness, that something significant has happened. Kaprow states that "focused upon with a certain care," everyday events such as "stepping off the curb, buying an ice-cream cone, or flying a kite... can become very rich and moving."[49] Yet what differentiates the pleasant or the mundane from the rich and the moving is the exaltation of an object and the resolution of a conflict in the ego. In *Take Off*, there was no explicit act of reparation in the participants' experience since nothing was ever threatened; instead there was only the giddiness of sexual anticipation. While the Activity may have been pleasant in the way that flying a kite or eating ice-cream is, this does not necessarily qualify it as having performed an aesthetic function for the participants.

Undoubtedly, objections can be made against Fairbairn's theory and its limited analysis of aesthetic experience. A symbol works when the expectations of the artist and the audience can find common ground. What Fairbairn labeled as under-symbolic, and therefore dismissed as aesthetic failures (in his

case, the Surrealists, and for our case, Kaprow), do in fact function as works of art for many people. Moreover, Fairbairn writes that minimally, art is anything which is made or perceived "for fun," which places art under the category of "play."[50] Kaprow's work falls nicely under the concept of play, as it most resembles a game; yet Fairbairn completely neglects games and how they function, focusing almost entirely on painting instead. Nonetheless, Fairbairn's theory remains a powerful tool for understanding why Kaprow's Happenings left so many people frustrated and confused. Kaprow wanted life to be experienced as art, or rather have an art which was lived without the language of a medium. His desire, though sublime, was perhaps a philosophical ideality and psychologically unfeasible. As Claes Oldenburg once remarked to Kaprow, "An art of non-artistic reality or philosophical reality is an impossibility."[51] When Kaprow tried to eliminate himself as an artist, his Happenings ceased to communicate with the participants. They could no longer discover the symbolic significance within the events of his Happenings, and so they ceased to function as works of art for the participants. Kaprow mistakenly believed that symbols obscure experience when in fact they reveal it by creating a bridge between the artist and the audience.

Notes

[1] Quoted in: W.M.H. Kaiser, comp. *Happenings—Activities by Allan Kaprow, USA* (Amsterdam/New York, 1977), 17.

[2] Allan Kaprow, "Just Doing," *TDR*, 41/3 (1997): 103.

[3] Fairbairn supposes that only art which has an "optimum of symbolic significance" will succeed, which means that the work of art both allows the release of the destructive urges while affectively obscuring them through symbol, and also countering the release of destructive urges with libidinal urges. Art which is under-symbolized will make the destructive phantasies of the artist overly apparent, thus leading the art to be rejected by the superego, causing the art to fail. Kaprow's art is explicitly under-symbolized; but instead of presupposing the failure of his work, it is more productive to ask whether if his work fails for the beholder, and suggesting a possible critique of Fairbairn's theory.

[4] W.R.D. Fairbairn, "The Ultimate Basic of Aesthetic Experience," in *From Instinct to Self, Vol. II*, Ellinor Fairbairn Birtles and David E. Sharff, eds. (Upper Saddle River: Jason Aronson, 1994), 404, 406. Author's italics.

[5] Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay: the Art of Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 25.

[6] "Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon" in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, Events, Objects, Documents* (New York : Wallach Art Gallery, 1999), 70.

[7] Kelley, 27.

[8] Kelley, 24.
[9] Kelley, 24.
[10] Kelley, 24-5.
[11] Kelley, 25.
[12] Quoted in Tom McDonough, "Where It's Happening" *Art in America* 96/3 (2008): 196.
[13] Quoted in Stephanie Rosenthal, "Agency for Action" in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, eds. Eva Meyer-Herman, et al (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 61.
[14] Fairbairn, 404.
[15] Allan Kaprow, "Manifesto" in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 81.
[16] Kaprow, 402.
[17] Kaprow, 405.
[18] Kelley, 88.
[19] "It Happened and Still Is," *The Ithaca Journal* (February 1964).
[20] Kaprow, *Some Recent Happenings* (New York: Something Else Press, Inc., 1966), 6-9.
[21] *The Ithaca Journal.*
[22] Kelley, 103.
[23] Gordon Brown, "An Interview with Allan Kaprow, Pioneer of 'Happenings'" *Village Voice* (Winter 1965), Art Voices.
[24] Kelley, 20.
[25] "Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon," 75.
[26] W.R.D. Fairbairn, "Prolegomena to a Psychology of Art", in *From Instinct to Self, Vol. II*, 393. Author's italics.
[27] Fairbairn, 392.
[28] W.R.D. Fairbairn, "The Ultimate Basic of Aesthetic Experience" in *From Instinct to Self, Vol. II*, 406.
[29] McDonough, 131.
[30] Kelley, 103.
[31] Judith F. Rodenbeck, "Foil: Allan Kaprow before Photography" in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, Events, Objects, Documents* (New York : Wallach Art Gallery, 1999), 53.
[32] Rodenbeck, 53.
[33] Fairbairn, 399.
[34] Rodenbeck, 58.
[35] Quoted in: Kaiser, 22-3.
[36] Kaiser, 22-3.
[37] Annette Leddy, "Intimate: The Allan Kaprow Papers" in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life*, eds. Eva Meyer-Herman, et al (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 48.
[38] Kaprow, "Pinpoint Happenings" in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 87-8.
[39] Quoted in: McDonough, 128.
[40] Kaprow, "Take Off" *TDR*, 19/1 (1975): 88-9.

[41] Kaprow, 90.
[42] Kaprow, 90.
[43] Kaprow, 90.
[44] Fairbairn, 407.
[45] Fairbairn, 93.
[46] Fairbairn, 93.
[47] Fairbairn, 91.
[48] Fairbairn, 408.
[49] "Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts Interviewed by Sidney Simon," 76.
[50] W.R.D. Fairbairn, "Prolegomena to a Psychology of Art," in *From Instinct to Self, Vol. II*, 383.
[51] Quoted in: Leddy, 43.

From Happenings to Conversations: Allan Kaprow's Legacy in Contemporary "Relational" Art Practices

Gillian Sneed

> Art and life are not simply comingled; the identity of each is uncertain.
>
> —Allan Kaprow, "Manifesto," 1966[1]

> You can't 'talk back' to, and thus change, an artlike artwork; but 'conversation' is the very means of life-like art, which is always changing.
>
> —Allan Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," 1983[2]

The Blurring of Art and Life

In her 2006 essay, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," critic, Claire Bishop critically examines the aesthetic and political implications of collaborative/participatory art practices (also known as "relational" art practices, a moniker that is derived from Nicolas Bourriaud's contentious[3] text, *Relational Aesthetics*, 1998). In it, she describes "the recent surge of artistic interest in collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with specific social constituencies,"[4] and explains that: "[t]hese practices are less interested in a relational aesthetic than in the creative rewards of collaborative activity—whether in the form of working with preexisting communities or establishing one's own interdisciplinary network."[5] According to Bishop, "[t]his mixed panorama of socially collaborative work arguably forms what avant-garde we have today: artists using social situations to produce dematerialized, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life."[6]

Yet, the artistic "blurring of art and life" is not a new phenomenon.

Having its earliest origins in the rituals of ancient theatrical practices, and its modernist roots in the historical avant-garde, its most celebrated and well-articulated appeal comes from the middle of the 20th century in the theoretical writings of Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), who in 1966, wrote: "The history of art and esthetics is all on bookshelves. To its pluralism of values, add the current blurring of boundaries diving the arts, and dividing art from life … . Not only does art become life, but life refuses to be itself."[7]

Most well known as a pioneer in the development of performance art in the late 50s and early 60s, Kaprow was the progenitor of what came to be known as "Environments" and "Happenings." As his work developed in 70s, these practices eventually shifted into a later form of work he called "Activities," non-audience driven "real-world" pieces intended as personal explorations of the quotidian activities of everyday life. He was a prolific writer and art theorist, articulating his observations on the art movements of his day, as well as the motivations behind his own work, with a clarity and prescience seldom achieved by professional critics and historians, much less artists.

Yet, despite Kaprow's crucial contributions to contemporary art theory, in art history he is usually only dealt with as an artist, and when his writings are considered, they are more often applied in analyses of performance art than in texts on relational practices.[8] In this essay I would like to trace the genealogy of contemporary relational art practices back to Kaprow's seminal writings.[9] Through an examination of the work of two contemporary artists working within the expanded field of relational practices—Rirkrit Tiravanija and Tino Sehgal[10]—I will explore the links between Kaprow's theories and current practices by these artists, as well as with other contemporary theorists including Claire Bishop and Donald Kuspit. I will start with an overview of Kaprow's conception of what constitutes a Happening, followed by an examination of the work of the artists mentioned above. Ultimately, I will argue in favor of Sehgal's approach (over Tiravanija's), as one that not only fulfills Kaprow's requirements for successful consciousness-raising activities, but also that meets Bishop's and Kuspit's aesthetic standards.

Pinpointing Happenings

Having started out as an action painter, Kaprow's experiences with and observations of the advances in this style of painting were what eventually led him to develop the concept of Happenings.[11] In October 1958, the 31-year-old painter published his seminal essay, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in *Art News.* In it, he argues that it was Pollock's "diaristic gesture"[12] that was his greatest contribution to avant-garde art. By laying his canvases on the floor, he was able to literally enter *into* the painting as he worked. Kaprow also lauds Pollock's disregard for the rectangular confines of the canvas "in favor of a continuum going in all directions simultaneously."[13] Because of this, view-

ers were forced to participate more actively in his works, continuing, in their own minds, his gestures past the edges of the canvas into the space they actually inhabited.

Also of great significance for Kaprow was the massive scale of Pollock's works. Their mammoth size transformed them from paintings to "environments."[14] Instead of extending his paintings inwards towards a distant vanishing point, his gestures and marks rested not just on the surface—as Greenberg had argued—but rather, extended out into the room. The painting came out at the spectators, making them "participants rather than observers."[15]

Ultimately, according to Kaprow, Pollock blurred the boundaries between the world of the artist—the canvas—and the world of the spectator—the "real world," a move that would prove to be his greatest influence on Kaprow. "Pollock, as I see him," writes Kaprow, "left us at the point where we must become preoccupied ... by the space and objects of our everyday life."[16] This realization led him and others to give up painting entirely in favor of activities that were more attuned to the world outside the canvas.

By 1961, Kaprow had begun articulating Happenings through writing, a practice that would continue for the rest of his life. "Happenings," he writes, "are events that, put simply, happen ... ."[17] He continues:

> ... they appear to go nowhere and do make any particular literary point. In contrast to the arts of the past, they have no structured beginning, middle, or end. Their form is open-ended and fluid; nothing obviously is sought and therefore nothing is won, except the certainty of a number of occurrences to which we are more than normally attentive.[18]

Happenings have "no plot, no obvious 'philosophy,' and [are] materialized in an improvisatory fashion, like jazz ... ."[19] They involve chance, and imply possible failure, making them more like life than like art.[20] Similarly, unlike art objects, they are *not* commodities, but rather, brief events, which *cannot* be repeated.[21] Furthermore, Happenings should "[e]liminate the arts, and anything that even remotely suggests them, as well as steer clear of art galleries, theaters, concert halls, and other cultural emporia ... ."[22]

Just as Happenings should renounce artistic conventions, so too should they renounce theatrical conventions. Unlike plays, they should remain unrehearsed, and should be enacted by non-professionals. Above all, "*audiences should be eliminated entirely*," he writes in 1966,[23] so that "[a]ll the elements—people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time— ... can be integrated ... [causing] the last shred of theatrical convention [to disappear]."[24]

In 1967, Kaprow explains that of all the various kinds of Happenings,[25] "activities" are "the most compelling, if indeed most risky,"[26] because they are the most "directly involved in the everyday world, ignor[ing] theaters and audiences, [and] ... select[ing] and combin[ing] situations to be *participated in* (italics mine), rather than watched or just thought about."[27] Activities best "confront the question ... whether life is a Happening or a Happening is an art of life."[28]

Such statements indicate Kaprow's increasing shift away from art altogether, a second ongoing theme in his writings, which he first developed in the early 70s, and continued to develop throughout the later 70s, 80s, and 90s. In "The Education of the Un-artist," parts I, II, and III, (1971, 1972, and 1974) he examines what he perceives as art's death to life itself,[29] the emergence of what he alternately refers to as "un-art," "nonart," or "postart,"[30] (or, what he later refers to as "life-like art"[31]), the importance of play in life-like art,[32] and the potential technological models of the postart of the future.[33] This shift towards nonart in Kaprow's later writings will be revisited at the end of this essay, but at this point, I would like to turn to two contemporary artists who can be examined within the frame of Kaprow's theories of Happenings.

The Social Turn

Of the abundance of sub-genres within the expanded field of contemporary relational art practices, Claire Bishop identifies several in "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents": "socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, [and] collaborative art ... "[34] Add to these: "activist art," "institutional critique," "constructed situations," and the "educational turn in art," and we have a plethora of terms to choose from in talking about this kind of work. These categories are in no way rigid; artists working within these practices often engage in multiple approaches simultaneously. Though this is true of the artists I will discuss here, the frames within which I will situate them in this paper are: socially-engaged work (Tiravanija) and game-like constructed situations (Sehgal).

Conversations over Curry

Let's first consider *Untitled 1992 (Free)*, the first in a series of "hybrid installation performances"[35] by New York-based artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, which appeared in New York's 303 Gallery in 1992. Described by critic Jerry Saltz as "combining elements of ... Warhol and post–60s street artists,"[36] the piece involved the transference of all of the items in the gallery's office and storeroom to the main exhibition space, replacing the displaced items in the storeroom, with a "makeshift refugee kitchen"[37] replete with a fridge, hot plates, rice steamers, paper plates, plastic kitchen utensils, folding tables, stools, and

chairs. Tiravanija then proceeded to cook Thai curry for visitors everyday of the exhibition. Anyone could stop by, eat for free, and "hang out" with the artist and other visitors for as long as he wanted, while the remaining post-meal detritus became a part of the art installation whenever Tiravanija wasn't there.[38] It is clear from this description that *Untitled 1992 (Free)* falls within the rubric of "Happenings" and "activities" as described previously. In some ways, it is also typical of what Kaprow calls "avant-garde lifelike art."[39] As a "nonart performance"[40] in which a random assortment of visitors gather to eat, it "begins to function in the world as if it were life."[41] In fact, Tiravanija actually considers participants to be the raw material of his work,[42] a position that clearly follows from Kaprow's belief that participants "become a real and necessary part of the work."[43] For many critics, the piece was a success because it engendered audience involvement, particularly a "convivial relationship between the audience and the artist."[44] Moreover, it "seemed to bridge a mind-body gap that often exists in Western art ... [by providing] sustenance, healing, and communion,"[45] allying it with Kaprow's edict that lifelike art can operate as a mode of therapy or healing.[46]

Yet, despite the parallels between *Untitled 1992 (Free)* and Kaprow's "lifelike art," the fact that it took place in a gallery, ultimately caused it to fail to fulfill the most important tenet of lifelike art: that it should "shift art away from its familiar contexts ... to anywhere else in the real world,"[47] and that it explicitly *not* be a "specialized object in the gallery."[48] In fact, of the five kinds of "nontheatrical performance" Kaprow identifies in a 1976 essay of the same title, Tiravanija's work exemplifies the second type: "work in unrecognizable, i.e. nonart, modes ... present[ed] ... in recognizable art contexts."[49] It becomes apparent that *Untitled 1992 (Free)* hasn't achieved Kaprow's favored form: "work in nonart modes and nonart contexts [that] cease to call the work art ...."[50]

For Kaprow, the value in approaching art practice as lifelike "nonart" is that "[i]ntentionally performing everyday life ... create[s] some kind of awareness"[51] in which the artist frames the "transaction *internally* (italics mine) ...."[52] Yet, this is more than just a personal experience. For Kaprow, it is a moral, ethical, and ultimately political act.[53] "Happenings are moral activity," he writes.[54] Taking up a position informed by his study of Zen, he argues that focusing one's awareness on his own actions and the resulting raised self-consciousness this effects has the power to "alter the world."[55] For Kaprow, then, we are all part of an interconnected living organism, happenings representing the "best efforts of contemporary inquiry into identity and meaning ... [positioning them] among the most responsible [choices] of our time."[56]

For some critics, the effective political position in works like *Untitled 1992 (Free)*, is that they "[advocate] ... dialogue over monologue."[57] Yet, for Bishop, whose criticisms evidence clear parallels with Kaprow's ideas,

Tiravanija's work fails on several counts. She writes:

> There is debate and dialogue in a Tiravanija cooking piece to be sure, but there is no inherent friction since the situation is what Bourriaud calls 'microtopian': it produces a community whose members identify with each other, because they have something in common .... Tiravanija's intervention is considered good because it permits networking among a group of art dealers and like-minded art lovers, and because it evokes the atmosphere of a late-night bar. Everyone has a common interest in art, and the result is art-world gossip, exhibition reviews, flirtations ... .[58]

As Kaprow points out, "participation presupposes shared assumptions, interest, language, meanings, contexts, and uses. It cannot take place otherwise."[59] For Bishop, the work fails precisely because the relations between participants and artist are "fundamentally harmonious ... addressed to a community of viewing subjects with something in common."[60] Bishop writes, "[d]espite Tiravanija's rhetoric of open-endedness and viewer emancipation, the structure of his work circumscribes the outcome in advance, and relies on its presence within a gallery to differentiate it from entertainment,"[61] a sentiment that echoes Kaprow's criticisms of locating nonart in institutional art spaces. According to Bishop, the "microtopia" engendered by Tiravanija prevents any real consciousness-raising within the larger public, because it is only accessible and enjoyed by an elite group of gallery-goers.[62]

Like Kaprow, she believes that art can serve a critical function that "appropriates and reassigns value, distancing our thoughts from the predominant and preexisting consensus,"[63] but achieving this aim requires more than just activating the audience by creating "cool" hangout spots and feeding them curry. Moreover, she disparages the fact that traditional aesthetic evaluations have been abandoned in judging works of this type. In contrast to Kaprow who advocated dropping traditional aesthetic criteria altogether,[64] Bishop writes, "today, political, moral, and ethical judgments have come to fill the vacuum of aesthetic judgment in a way that was unthinkable forty years ago,"[65] a misguided trend she aims to correct. These issues will be revisited in the final section of this essay, "Is it art"? but at this point, I would like to turn my attention to the second artist in this inquiry—one whose practice is in many ways diametrically opposed to Tiravanija's.

Conversations with Kids

Tino Sehgal is a Berlin-based artist in his early 30s, who with his recent one-man exhibition entitled *Tino Sehgal* at the Guggenheim, is the youngest artist to present a solo show in the museum's rotunda.[66] Like Tiravanija's

Untitled 1992 (Free), Sehgal's happening is an activity that doesn't achieve Kaprow's ideal: "non art modes in nonart contexts,"[67] because it is presented in the lion's den: the museum. Yet, unlike Tiravanija's utopian, haphazard, anti-commodity approach, Sehgal'a work is choreographed, scripted, politically ambiguous, and commodified.

The work that occupied the museum's iconic ramp was entitled *This Progress*, and was an interactive performance presented by a series of "interpreters" who engaged audience members in conversation as they made their way up the ramp. First presented in 2006 at London's ICA prior to being presented at the Guggenheim in the first months of 2010, the piece is most notable for stripping the museum walls of its usually prerequisite artwork. Instead, *This Progress* is a Happening that opens as a museum visitor first steps onto the ramp of the empty museum and is greeted by a child of eight or nine years old.[68] The child introduces herself, and then slowly guides the visitor up the ramp, informing the visitor: "This is a work by Tino Sehgal." She then inquires: "What is progress?"[69]

After the visitor responds to this question, the child guides her to a second interpreter, this time a teenager, to whom she introduces the visitor and summarizes her response. The teen then takes over, guiding the visitor ever upwards, picking up where the child left off by engaging her in a conversation related to the answer she gave to the question on progress. At various intervals, the visitor is passed on to two more guides, one in her 30s, and one in his 60s, all the while continuing to talk about progress, and various other subjects all loosely related to the meaning of life. As the visitor and her last guide approach the top of the ramp, she is politely informed: "This work is entitled *This Progress.*"

Interestingly, Sehgal, who has a background in dance and economics, resists the label of "performance artist," preferring to adopt the more general term "visual artist." This position closely parallels Kaprow's belief that "[y]oung artists of today need no longer say, 'I am a painter' or 'a poet' or 'a dancer.' They are simply 'artists.'"[70] Sehgal also resists most of the usual trappings of the art institution—no press releases are written, no photographic documentation is allowed. His work is intended to live only in the moment and in the memory of those who experience them, an approach that aligns him with performance theorists like Peggy Phelan, who claim that documentation counteracts the lived experience of performance.[71] In contrast, Kaprow's take on documenting performances only appears prohibitive when it is used as a marketing ploy to objectify an otherwise ephemeral experience.[72]

The aspect of Sehgal's practice to which Kaprow would probably most object, is his whole-hearted embrace of the art market. The fact the sale of his ephemeral works (through oral agreements rather than written contracts) is in fact an extension of his artistic practice, has been criticized by many as

> may be its subject matter—and thus a psychic space in which we can own ourselves and survive, that is realize autonomy, however aware we are of the special and limited conditions in which it is possible. It ignores the ethics inherent in aesthetics and beauty. Artistic contemplation—as distinct from art as a kind of social practice and even theorizing about the world—is a way of caring for one's psyche.[99]

A Beautiful Happening?

In opposition to Kaprow, both Kuspit and Bishop believe that successful art should be "privileged and independent"[100] in some way. Both critics also believe that postmodern art "has become all too subsumed into everyday life,"[101] and both advocate for artists to reassert their autonomy.[102] Bishop makes the case for "socially-engaged" art that "allow[s] for multiple interpretations ... that have a life beyond an immediate social goal."[103] She calls for aesthetic judgments that maintain "a more complicated imbrication of the social and the aesthetic"[104] rooted in the values of antagonism, nonidentification, and autonomy, while Kuspit calls for the elimination of the blurring of art and life altogether, and the reinstatement of the high culture values of traditional aesthetics. Furthermore, whereas for Kaprow, the heightened awareness of real life—achieved through nonart performance—is consciousness-raising, for Kuspit, the transmutation of real life into the ethereal realm of beauty is what raises one's consciousness.[105]

According to Kaprow, it was inevitable that the very meaning and function of art in the future would change from being "quantitative (producing physical objects or specific actions)" to being "qualitative (offering a way of perceiving things)."[106] In opposition to Kuspit's position, he advocates for the transformation of art from a position of "holding out a promise of perfection in some other realm, to [one that] demonstrat[es] a way of living meaningfully in this one."[107] Despite the vast philosophical divergences between Kaprow and Kuspit, in evaluating a work like Sehgal's *This Progress,* in comparison with something like Tiravanija's *Untitled 1992 (Free)*, perhaps a reconciliation of sorts could be achieved between Kaprow and Kuspit (as well as with Bishop).

Whereas Tiravanija's casual approach of completely imbricating art with everyday experiences is the epitome of the post-aesthetic's rejection of beauty,[108] Sehgal's work is more ethereal. Fulfilling Bishop's appeal for a clear sense of authorship, he assumes responsibility for his aesthetic decisions, which while choreographed, leave room for improvisation.[109] Keeping in line with Kuspit's advocacy of inspired experiences in sacred spaces, Sehgal's work evidences a clear separation from everyday life, despite its reliance on real-life social activities, such as chatting with strangers. His work holds a contradictory position as both "ephemeral, yet fixed; [and] intangible, yet

expensive"[110] [i.e. an object of value]. His edict that his pieces shouldn't be documented heightens their rarity, and the fact that he makes a big to-do about the sale of these works—likening them to any other object on the art market[111]—attests the ability of his works to function more like "art art" than postart. Both of these factors contribute to an aura of unique distinction around the work, not available in Tiravanija's works. While he is criticized for his ambiguous and apolitical position, he exemplifies Bishop's and Kuspit's assertions that ethics and criticality are *a priori* embedded in aesthetic works, and do not need to be superimposed as criteria for evaluation.[112]

Yet, just as he meets some of the standards set by Kuspit and Bishop, his work simultaneously demonstrates many Kaprowian characteristics as well. Sehgal particularly seems to pay homage to Kaprow in the playfulness of his works, which according to critic Anne Midgette, function as "games, governed by detailed rules ... [which reward] those who play along."[113] In fact, it is this playfulness that speaks directly the kind of criticality Kaprow aims to effect in his work. "Play," he wrote in 1997, " ... is at the heart of experimentation ... [which] also involves attention to the normally unnoticed."[114]

For Kaprow, it is the awareness of the "unnoticed" that is central to his arguments for the value of nonart. It is through "noticing" and "awareness" that (non)artists are able to come into contact with the world, and change it.[115] For Kaprow, lifelike nonart is a new way of "weaving ... meaning ... with any or all parts of our lives" and of "sharing responsibility for ... the world's most pressing problem[s]."[116] Significantly, the kind of awareness-raising he advocates is quite similar to the ways in which Sehgal's work draws one's attention to tiny details of experience, place, and ultimately life.[117] Kaprow writes:

> ... as art becomes less art, it takes on philosophy's early role as critique of life. Even if its beauty can be refuted, it remains astonishingly thoughtful. Precisely because art can be confused with life, it forces attention upon the aim of its ambiguities, to 'reveal' experience.[118]

I would argue that *This Progress* succeeds precisely because of its ability to "reveal" experience in this way. Yet, this does not contradict Kuspit's insistence that: "... aesthetic experience is heightened sense experience, separated from all other experience ... [which is] inherently beautiful and affords pure pleasure."[119] In *This Progress,* the conversations Guggenheim visitors engage in with the strangers who host them are both poignant and meaningful, and leave one feeling a heightened sense of being, an inspired sense of consciousness, and a new awareness of the intricacies of life that are both revelatory and pleasurable. It is a thoughtful and graceful work that in the simplicity

of its gesture, underscores the museum's unique architecture as a sacred space for contemplation, ultimately achieving an elegance and beauty akin to works in many of the other fine arts from painting to music to dance.

"Can one see objects both ways—as everyday artifacts and elegant works of art simultaneously?"[120] queries Kuspit. Ultimately, he concludes, no, they can't. Yet, works like *This Progress* just may offer an alternative answer to this question, one that suggests noteworthy implications for the future of Happenings, not just as beautiful "artlike art," but as works that imply a sense of autonomy and ethereality, as well as an implied criticality and antagonism—all while still holding their own under traditional aesthetic scrutiny.

Notes

[1] Allan Kaprow, "Manifesto" (1966) in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003), 82.

[2] Kaprow, "The Real Experiment" (1983), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 204.

[3] For a sampling of critiques of Relational Aesthetics, see Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, 110/1 (2004): 51-80; and Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *ThirdText*, 21/4 (2007): 369–386.

[4] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," *Artforum*, 44/6 (2006): 178.

[5] Bishop, 179.

[6] Bishop, 179.

[7] Kaprow, "Manifesto," 81.

[8] Though Kaprow is often invoked in texts on relational art practices, his theories are not usually dealt with in detail.

[9] The significance of Fluxus—the other early progenitor of Happenings—in this genealogy is not to be overlooked. It is noteworthy to mention the antagonistic relationship between Kaprow and George Maciunas, the founder of Fluxus. (While they both attended John Cage's experimental music composition classes at the New School for Social Research, they differed in ideological approaches to Happenings.) For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on Kaprow, both because he was a more prolific writer—articulating his philosophies over five decades—and because he developed Happenings first (his first happening, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* in 1959, took place two years before Fluxus's first happening in 1961).

[10] While the pool of artists working within this mode are vast and varied, these two were chosen for their divergences—the work by Tiravanija I will be discussing is considered one of the earliest "relational" works, and the work by Sehgal—an artist of a younger generation—is relatively recent. Furthermore, each artist approaches "relationality" in rather diametrically opposed manners, creating an interesting frame for comparison from the perspective of Kaprow's theories.

[11] The writings of John Dewey—especially *Art as Experience* (1934)—were also

very influential on the development of Kaprow's thought.

[12] Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 3.

[13] Kaprow, 5.

[14] Kaprow, 6.

[15] Kaprow, 6.

[16] Kaprow, 7.

[17] Kaprow, "Happenings in the New York Scene" (1961), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 16–17.

[18] Kaprow, 17

[19] Kaprow, 19.

[20] Kaprow, 19–20.

[21] Kaprow, 25–26.

[22] Kaprow, "Happenings are Dead! Long Live Happenings!" (1966), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 62.

[23] Kaprow, "Notes on the Elimination of the Audience" (1966) in Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), 103.

[24] Kaprow, 103.

[25] Including nightclubs, extravaganzas, events, guided tours, ideas/suggestions, and activities. Kaprow, "Pinpointing Happenings" (1967), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 85–86.

[26] Kaprow, 87.

[27] Kaprow, 87.

[28] Kaprow, 87.

[29] "Art is dying—not just because it operates within conventions that have ceased to be fertile. It is dying because it has preserved it conventions and created a growing weariness toward them, out of indifference to what I suspect has become the fine arts' most important, though mostly unconscious, subject matter: the ritual escape from Culture... Art art has served as an instructional transition to its own elimination by life. Such an acute awareness among artists enables the whole world and its humanity to be experienced as a work of art." Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I" (1971), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 102.

[30] Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I," 97–126.

[31] Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," 201–218.

[32] Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part II" (1972), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 110–126.

[33] Kaprow, "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III" (1974), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 130–147.

[34] Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," 179.

[35] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 56.

[36] Jerry Saltz, "A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija," *Art in America*, 84/2 (1996): 82.

[37] Saltz, 84.

[38] Descriptions from: Saltz, 82–83; and Bishop "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 55–56.

Adorno, his critique of Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics is rooted in its failure to adequately account for the relationship between contemporary art practices and systems of capitalist exchange. See: Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," 378.

[96] Bishop, 181.

[97] Bishop, 183.

[98] Bishop, 183.

[99] Kuspit, 37.

[100] "One of the presumptions underlying Relational Aesthetics is the idea—introduced by the historical avant-garde and reiterated ever since—that art should not be a privileged and independent sphere but instead fused with 'life.' Today, when art has become all too subsumed into everyday life" advocates for artists who reassert the autonomy of artistic creativity." Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 74–75.

[101] Bishop, 75.

[102] While outside the scope of this article, Martin offers a significant counterpoint to both Kuspit's and Bishop's positions that deserves future attention. He emphasizes the fact that Adorno does not posit autonomous art as an alternative to commodification, but rather as a product of it. He explains that Adorno's theory of autonomous art reveals how it is a fetish (like any other fetishized commodity) that seeks to obscure its social determinations. This is a contradiction, because autonomous art claims to be liberated from commodification. It is in this way that art positions its own autonomy against commodification, even though it is in fact constituted by it. He writes: "... Adorno's account reveals an aporia of autonomy and heteronomy within the formation of modern art that still resonates profoundly with the dynamics of contemporary art ... . The affirmation of either autonomy or heteronomy needs to be replaced by a dialectical critique of their relationship. Thus, art's autonomy is only constituted critically if it is mediated by its heteronomy ... ." Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," 375. See also: Martin, "The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity," *Radical Philosophy*, 146 (2007): 15–25.

[103] Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents": 181.

[104] Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics": 78.

[105] "When one looks at Otto Dix's horrific images of trench warfare, his aesthetic transmutation of death and destruction into a weirdly beautiful scene gives us a certain perspective on it that is more critically effective—more consciousness raising (italics mine)—than any journalistic rendering of it." Kuspit, 37–38.

[106] Kaprow, "Participation Performance," 178.

[107] Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," 218.

[108] "The resentment and repudiation of beauty, resulting in a one-sided, aesthetically inadequate art—art that can hardly be called fine art—is a central feature of post-aesthetic art." Kuspit, 31.

[109] Here we see the influence of dance—the discipline within which Sehgal was trained—on his approach, an observation that raises interesting questions regarding the relationship between modern dance and Happenings.

[110] Anne Midgette, "You Can't Hold It, but You Can Own It," *New York Times*

(November 25, 2007). < http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/25/arts/design/25midg.html>

[111] While Sehgal's emphasis on the commodification of his work could be critiqued as epitomizing the reified and clichéd spectacles typical of the culture industry, the transparency of their commodification exemplifies Martin's stance that the perceived ambivalence of much relational art should actually be understood as a "...critique of capitalist exchange relations" which work to demonstrate and reveal "the contradictions of an art of social exchange ...." Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," 380.

[112] From Martin's perspective, this embedded criticality would be related to the ways in which Sehgal's work exposes the inherent contradictory nature of the role of autonomous art within a capitalist system. See: Martin, "Autonomy and Anti-Art: Adorno's Concept of Avant-Garde Art," *Constellations*, 7/2 (2000): 197-207.

[113] In one piece, *This Success/This Failure*, the work actually consists of children playing in an empty gallery. Midgette, "You Can't Hold It, but You Can Own It."

[114] Kaprow, "Just Doing" (1997), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* 250. Another interesting perspective on the psychologically reparative nature of "play" can be found in D.W. Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (1971), in which he investigates the nature of play and creativity, and their role in a person's development from preoedipal to mature object relations in adulthood. Though there is not ample space to fully explore the implications of Winnicott's ideas on Sehgal's work, the possibility that the playful nature of his work could result in a reparative experience is an interesting one. See: D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[115] "...art politics is not only possible but necessary. It is the new means of persuasion. And persuasion leads to a verification of artists' contact with the world." Kaprow, "Artist As a Man of the World," 51.

[116] Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," 216.

[117] In the case of *This Progress*, one becomes unusually attentive to Frank Lloyd Wright's looping rotunda architecture, becoming newly aware of it, as I argue in "Tino Sehgal Presents a Work in Progress."

[118] Kaprow, "Manifesto," 82.

[119] Kuspit, 34.

[120] Kuspit, 22.

The Leveling Up of Performance Art in the 20th Century

Cliona Stack

Murray Krieger's *Arts on the Level: The Fall of the Elite Object* is a collection of John C. Hodges Lectures, delivered in October 1979, which account for the tendency toward leveling the arts in the 20th century. In the first lecture, "The Precious Object: Fetish as Aesthetic," Krieger posits, "what are the consequences to the arts—and to criticism of the arts—of contemporary efforts to level them, to make all artistic productions level with one another, to reduce them all to a dead level?"[1] The term "level," which is a visually self-reinforcing word, renders art dead as it indicates a flattening of creativity, a stunting the upward inclination of the arts, and imposition of the so-called "horror of the horizontal."[2] Krieger notes that with the rise of Kantian theory and museum culture, the object gained both autonomy and intrinsic value. A canon of masterworks was established and, more importantly, assessed primarily in terms of monetary worth. Aesthetics were therefore tied to the materiality of the object, and thus emerged the fetish of the elite object, the secular 'religion' of the plastic arts, and the market culture of art in general. Crucial to the leveling of the arts, then, is the emergence of anti-elitist critical theory. Anti-elitist doctrine necessitated the devaluation of the object, the privileging of objects of everyday life, and nondiscriminatory approach to art. In the extreme, anti-elitism provided for a non-objective art. Performance art was involved in this anti-elite art movement and, in attempting to rise to the level of the art object, ultimately contributed to the fall of the elite object.

Throughout much of the history of art, performance was supplemental to actual art objects or involved in a working out of art objects. RoseLee Goldberg cites many early examples of performance during the Renaissance, such as Leonardo da Vinci's 1490 pageant *Paradiso,* Polidoro da Carvaggio's 1589 mock naval battle, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini's stage performances, such as the 1638 *L'Inondazione.*[3] Similarly, artists such as Jackson Pollock integrated performance into the creation of their art objects, allowing the process to be integrally tied to certain types of action. In Pollock's case, this process resulted in his so-called *action paintings.* Nevertheless, performance art as it

is commonly known today (the imprecise, boundless art of performer, time, space and audience) rose out of anti-elitist theories and the conceptual art movement, gaining tremendous momentum in the 1960s and 1970s. Preceding art movements such as Futurism, Constructivism, Dadaism and Surrealism affirmed that, "The gesture for us will no longer be a fixed moment of universal dynamism: it will be decisively the dynamic sensation made eternal."[4] Because these movements accommodated dynamism (movement), sensation (the body), and the eternal within their theory, these movements also allowed the *idea* to enter into the art world as an art object in its own right. Performance art emerged from this *idea,* which was greatly privileged over the traditional art object (i.e. painting, sculpture, etc.) as artists increasingly wanted to move away from elite objects toward non-material aspects of art. The theory espoused by such artists was that to deny the material art object was to deny museum culture of the art world and, ultimately, to deny elitism. Performance art naturally came to the fore of this movement as it was thought to embrace two types of immateriality, both immateriality of object and of economy. Performance art was bound to the body and the moment and also aspired to be a non-commercial art, or an art that could not be bought or sold.

In order to truly overcome the traditional art object, however, performance art first needed to level up to or *become* an art object itself. This process was similar to the "materialization" of literary works that Krieger speaks of in *Arts on the Level.* In his analysis of the leveling of literature, Krieger notes that critics began to treat literary works as material objects and, more importantly, as secondary rather than primary objects. As with the plastic arts, the movement away from the elite object rendered all literary works flat, horizontal, equal. The trend prevented traditional bodies of literary criticism to exist in their own right and instead brought all works under the same general body of 'literature.' Krieger further notes that this move also privileged the critic's word over the literature itself or, in his own terms, that this move allowed the formerly secondary text (criticism) to overtake the formerly primary text (i.e. the poem). In essence, established hierarchies and values of literary criticism were inverted in the leveling process.

With 20th century art criticism, established hierarchies and values were similarly overturned. The art object, previously elite and supreme in the art world, was supplanted by the non-objective art object or the *idea.* This reversal denied the necessity of an art object, debased the traditional art object and blurred the definition of art, allowing nearly anything to enter into the realm of the art world as an art object. The everyday was permissible, heralding pieces such as Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* and Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* and *Fountain.* Such artists questioned the boundaries between art and life by allowing not only the found and the everyday to enter the museum as art but, in the case of *Merda d'artista,* allowing even human excre-

fragmented self, and the adult self will fluctuate between states of cohesion and fragmentation.[9] Self disorders, Kohut further explains, arise from either a failure to achieve a cohesive self or a loss of the cohesive self. A strong self can successfully navigate blows to the self-esteem resulting from failures and disappointments, however, the weak self cannot and consequently fragments. Winnicott similarly argues for the importance of a holding environment in which the self can truly being to feel *real*, the failure of which results in persons who feels s/he does not exist.[10] He also argues that the mother is the precursor to the mirror, stating that the "mother's role [is] of giving back to the baby the baby's own self."[11] In this way, the infant sees a reflection of the self in the environment and ultimately finds positive affirmation in this reflection. Thus sets off a cycle of seeking positive, holding environments in the adult.

One can extrapolate that the artist seeks a mirroring relationship with his audience, or confirmation of the self through positive recognition. Art provides the artist with permanence: it is a part of the self that will outlive the self (if successful). The artist wants to feel idealized and mirrored, and the audience's mirroring is a means to this self-validation. With performance artists, however, a new level of elitism allows the artist to confer the status of art directly onto the self rather than another external selfobject. The mirroring is therefore sought with a selfobject that is *the very self,* physically and mentally inseparable from the artist. Thus, the performance artist's selfobject is especially sensitive because the artist is necessarily present during the exhibition of the self/object while the audience is concomitantly trying to establish a relationship with that self/object.

The exhibitionism associated with performance similarly reveals the artist's drive to establish a mirroring relationship with the other. Leon Wurmser writes of *delophilia,* the exhibition drive, and *theatophlia,* a drive that is associated with voyeurism, in *The Mask of Shame.* Interestingly, both drives are understood in relation to Kohut's theories. *Delophilia* is the desire to be seen or "to express oneself and to fascinate others by one's self-exposure, to show and to impress, to merge with the other through communication."[12] Wurmser quotes Kohut in his explanation of this desire, furthermore, stating that *delophilia* is related to "the normal phase of the development of the grandiose self in which the gleam in the mother's eye, which mirrors the child's exhibitionistic display, and other forms of maternal participation in and response to the child's narcissistic-exhibitionistic enjoyment confirm the child's self-esteem."[13] Moreover, from this, Wurmser understands exhibitionism as the grandiose self seeking out that very primary confirmation of *looking,* of the mother's gaze, in soliciting the audience to see him/her. Theatophilia, on the other hand, is the desire to see and to merge and control the other through seeing. Wurmser also quotes Kohut in explaining this desire, stating that this drive relates to Kohut's idealized selfobject, in which *theatophilia* "attempts to supply substitutes for

the idealized parent imago and its functions...attempts to reestablish the union with the narcissistically invested lost object through visual fusion and other archaic forms of identification."[14] Again, the focus is on establishing a relationship through visual means.

The artist seems to express both drives simultaneously during performance. The artist is driven to be seen, to merge with the other through communication, and to simultaneously see the audience, to merge with and master the other through attention. The emphasis on the performance-audience relationship confirms this duality of being seen and seeing. This is especially true in performances that encourage audience participation, such as Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm O* (1974) in which the audience was invited to inflict pain or pleasure upon the artist's body at will for six hours using the 72 instruments provided. Abramovic was being seen by her audience (having allowed herself to become the art object, the object of attention) and simultaneously was seeing her audience (in allowing the performance to be carried out on both ends, allowing the audience to act upon her). Abramovic in fact talked about preparing for performances in an interview with Janet Kaplan and revealed something of this duality in her own experience of performing. When asked about readying herself, Abramovic explains,

> Three days before a performance, this very uncomfortable state of mind sets in. I can't calm myself. It just takes possession of me. But the moment the public is there, something happens. I move from the lower self to a higher state, and the fear and nervousness stop. Once you enter into the performance state, you can push your body to do things you absolutely could never normally do.[15]

Abramovic understands her transition from preparing to performing in terms of nervousness and shame followed by a high. In Wurmer's terms, during her preparation Abramovic is transitioning from the passive mode of *delophilia,* in which fear of being exposed and of "being overcome and devoured by the looks of others"[16] overcomes the exhibitionist, to the active mode, in which the desire is acted upon and the exhibitionist actually seeks to fascinate and merge with others, "to conquer by looking, to merge...with the partner into an all-powerful, autarkic union, to incorporate strength and value of the other person and attain control over him."[17]

Interestingly, this duality also raises the question of whether the artist is an artist because she performs, or whether the artist's body is art because she performs and exhibits it, for the artist here is both observer and observed. Traditionally, artists were thought of as those who "see beyond." In the early modern period, artists were thought of as conjurers who observed and presented a second, false reality. This power of observation allowed

artists to be associated with witchcraft. Charles Baudelaire also described the modern painter as a *flâneur*, one who observes. He wrote, "The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito,"[18] emphasizing that the *flâneur* remains hidden from the world while observing it. The resultant object was thus imbued with all the artist's observations, generating ideas of aesthetic significance and material importance. However, in performance this role is not clear. Where does observation take place? Can the artist be both observer and the object of observation? As Jaques Lacan describes the narcissistic display of self and self-reflection,

> All that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others there...For the moment this gaze exists, I am already something other, in that I feel myself becoming an object for the gaze of others. But in this position, which is a reciprocal one, others also know that I am an object who knows himself to be seen.[19]

The performance artist clearly sees himself as a *conscious* object, that which has both established its own object-ness (is the artist and observer) and that which revels in being seen as such (is observed).

Related to this exhibition drive is a particular facet of performance art: nudity. Performing nude reveals a new layer of exhibitionism in which the artist feels the need to show the body in full. In many ways, nude performances can be understood as the artist's desperation to shock the modern audience. In today's society, ever more radical strategies are needed to actually shock the public as society is ever desensitized to external stimuli. One need only look to the Victorian era to see that minimal skin exposure, such as an exposed ankle, was once sufficiently provocative and even scandalous in society. Today, a nude, in the flesh body is no longer quite as startling or provocative, if it is at all. Thus, performance artists go to extreme measures to ensure the shock and ensuing gaze of the audience. Abramovic herself has performed nude in many pieces including *Lips of Thomas* (1975) and *Relation in Space* (1976), which was performed with her partner Ulay. Abramovic describes *Lips of Thomas*:

> I slowly eat 1 kilo of honey with a silver spoon. I slowly drink 1 liter of red wine out of a crystal glass. I break the glass with my right hand. I cut a five-pointed star on my stomach with a razor blade. I violently whip myself until I no longer feel any pain. I lay down on a cross made of ice blocks. The heat of a suspended heater pointed at my stomach causes the cut star to bleed. The rest of my body begins to freeze. I remain on the ice cross for 30 minutes until the public interrupts the piece by removing the ice blocks from underneath me.[20]

This type of nude performance clearly involves a second extreme element: masochism. Abramovic attacks the selfobject, the body. She also asserts her role as a martyr, as a crucified Christ-figure. The violence in this piece seems to be used in addition to nudity in order to further incite the audience and solicit their fascination and mirroring relationship. As Maureen Turim notes, however, we can also understand this pain in relation to nudity and eroticism. She emphasizes that Abramovic's violence is directed to the womb. She explains,

> The woman mutilates the expanse of flesh connected to breath, to birth, to life, which comes between breasts and vagina. Here we might consider how masochism is often misconstrued as direct pleasure from pain, rather than as a complex desire for pain.[21]

What is clear is that Abramovic's pain is deeply connected to her nudity during performance. Again, the primary goal here is to fascinate, and these elements combine to attract the audience through shock. Her solicitation for a mirroring relationship with the audience is so resilient, moreover, that she allows the audience to determine the end of the performance and resolves herself to waiting until they can no longer stand to observe her abused body, prostrate and bleeding on the ice crucifix in front of them and decide to remove the ice from under her. Returning to Wurmser and Kohut, Abramovic is waiting for the audience to look and to see, to confirm her presence as the mother's gaze does for the infant by taking action in the piece. Interestingly, in waiting for the audience to end the performance for her, Abramovic's art is not autonomous as traditional, objective art was. The object is not whole and complete by the artist's hand but is dependent on audience in new ways.

Another issue that must be raised is that of the human element of Abramovic's art. Successful art traditionally held a position as a 'secular-religion,' as something with both aesthetic import and consensually valid human elements. The question at hand, therefore, is can we identify with some greater human issue within Abramovic's work? Or has the leveling of art and the leveling up of performance rendered all works of art dead, as Krieger fears? How has the opening up of all the world to art changed the success of certain artworks? In Abramovic's work, there is often an issue of destruction. She frequently uses pain (whips, razors, etc) to inflict harm upon the object, the self, revealing a fragmented, destroyed object. It seems that these types of performances do not have the same connotation of an elite object flying high toward the summit of human achievement, which is how Krieger understands the traditional role of art and the art object. In trying to understand this, we must also assume that if performance has truly leveled art, maybe pieces such as this start at a flat level anyway. In her most recent work, *The Artist is Present,* there is another issue that begs the question, what are we talking

about? In this performance there are some familiar elements from Abramovic's earlier works. Again, the title of the piece acts as a forceful affirmation of her status as the elite art object, just as *Art Must be Beautiful, Artist Must be Beautiful.* During this piece, which is very similar to *Nightsea Crossing,* Abramovic sits at a table in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art without moving for the duration of the museum's open hours for each day of the exhibit, which total 716 hours and 30 minutes of sitting. An audience queues in order to get the chance to sit across from her and to see her. In this piece, the gaze of the audience and the hoped for mirroring relationship is more the focus than ever, seeing as this gaze is nearly all that exists here. One might ask whether the whole point of the piece is just to get that gaze, if Abramovic is only asking that the audience see her as a good object, as the art object. What human element is here? Possibly there is only the seeking of a mirroring relationship, presumably to compensate for the loss or failure of another. Holland Cotter, art critic for *The New York Times*, summarized his impressions of the piece, stating,

> In a sense the whole business is another act of self-enshrinement in the art world's ego Olympics, and that's not interesting. Divas are a dime a dozen, and I don't trust charisma anyway. More interesting, because it ties with her impulse to conserve a possibly unconservable art form, is the way "The Artist is Present" attempts to control time, hers and ours.[22]

His assessment seems to accurately capture the exhibitionism evident in all performance art. However, we are still left seeking the consensually valid human message here.

What is most interesting about the rise of performance art, however, is that despite the initial intent of performance artists, which was to overturn the elite object, performers have now turned the self into a new ultra-elite artist-object. More importantly, their ulta-elitism has generated the same fetishizing following that performance initially sought to move away from. The fetishizing of the new elite object, the artist, is obvious in RoseLee Goldberg explanation of performance art:

> Performance has been a way of appealing directly to a large public, as well as shocking audiences into reassessing their own notions of art and its relation to culture. Conversely, public interest in the medium, especially in the 1980s, stems from an apparent desire of that public to gain access to the art world, to be a spectator of its ritual and its distinct community, and to be surprised by the unexpected, always unorthodox presentation that the artists devise.[23]

To be in the presence of the new art object, the artist's body, is the attraction of performance art. *The Artist is Present* says it all: let us be in the presence of *an artist*, let us see this *art object*. Thus, in this sense performance art fails to avoid the material and monetary culture of the art world. Very simply put, performance has materialized in that it is being bought and sold despite its supposed immateriality. The most radical example of this may be that Tino Seghal has been able to sell his ideas. MoMA purchased his piece *Kiss* with the intention of somehow preserving this transient art. One minor complication, besides the question of figuring out what exactly it was that MoMA was purchasing (being that there is no object per say), was the issue that Sehgal's works are meant to be undocumented. Therefore, no documentation could go into the purchase. Erica Orden of New York Magazine described the transaction as follows:

> There's no script or manual. The how-to is passed on orally, like a folktale—which is how MoMA sealed the deal, with a spoken contract. The artist will explain its workings to a curator; he or she will pass it on, down the road; and MoMA will have the rights to reproduce the performance forever.[24]

Performance has truly succumb to the museum culture of art and, in attempting to rise up to the level of the art object, in attempting to demolish the elite art object, has itself become a monster of elitism.

Notes

[1] Murray Krieger, *Arts on the Level: The Fall of the Elite Object* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 3.
[2] Krieger, 6.
[3] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988), 8-9.
[4] Goldberg, 14.
[5] Goldberg, 153.
[6] Goldberg, 30.
[7] Goldberg, 148-149.
[8] Goldberg, 149.
[9] Heinz Kohut and Ernest S. Wolf, "The Disorders of the Self and their Treatment: An Outline," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 59 (1978): 414.
[10] Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 127.
[11] Phillips, 128.
[12] Leon Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 158.
[13] Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press,

1971), 116 as quoted in Wurmser, 153.

[14] Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, 98-99 as quoted in Wurmser, 153.

[15] Janet A. Kaplan, "Deeper and Deeper: Interview with Marina Abramovic," *Art Journal*, 58:2 (Summer 1999), 10.

[16] Wurmser, 162.

[17] Wurmser, 162.

[18] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), 9.

[19] Jacques Lacan, as quoted in Anna Novakov, "Point of Access: Marina Abramovic's 1975 Performance 'Role Exchange,'" *Woman's Art Journal*, 24/2 (Autumn 2003-Winter 2004): 33.

[20] Maureen Turim, "Marina Abramovic's Performance: Stresses on the Body and Psyche in Installation Art," *Camera Obscura*, 18/3 (2003): 100-101.

[21] Turim, 102.

[22] Holland Cotter, "Performance Art Preserved, in the Flesh," *New York Times*, March 11, 2010. Accessed online April 4, 2010 (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/arts/design/12abromovic.html)

[23] Goldberg, 8.

[24] Orden, Erica. "Collecting Smoke: How does a museum acquire art that vanishes the moment it's made?," *New York Magazine*, December 28, 2008. Accessed April 11, 2010 (http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/53146/)

A New Way of Approaching the Absolute through Art: The *Sacred Mirrors* of Alex Grey

Julie M. Gilbert

Spirituality and mysticism have been explored by many artists throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries, but by none so famously as the abstract artists. While the method of abstraction maintains a definite connection between artist and artwork, it may still have a missing link between the spirituality felt by the artist and the way that spirituality engages the viewer, due to the very nature of abstraction itself. Contemporary author Ken Wilber states, "A spiritual art must transform the artist and the viewer. In order for art to be transformative, it has to undo you."[1] To be considered "spiritual," art must execute a dual task; it must not only alter the consciousness and being of the artist who is creating it, it must also alter the consciousness of a viewer.

To make the unification of art and viewer more feasible perhaps requires a new approach to spiritual art using new methods; an approach which returns to representation and the image, but also one that involves *participation* – a participation that instills in the viewer the understanding of the unitary consciousness that encompasses all of reality. This is the approach taken by artist Alex Grey.

Alex Grey, an American artist and visionary, has created a style of art that resolves the detachment between artist, art, and viewer. His images, which largely depict human figures with transparent skin and anatomically exact bodily systems, combine precision of technique with bright colors and swirling representations of energies. One of the characteristics of Grey's art that makes it so forceful and intriguing is his reconciliation of opposites—his endeavoring to portray reality in a profoundly interconnected way. This concept – that everything is interconnected with everything else, and that the world of separation we perceive is merely an illusion constructed by our mind – is *nonduality*.

The concept of nonduality is the idea that all is one, or more accurately, that all is "not two," or not many. It is this idea that is the apex of the search for truth, reality and enlightenment in most Eastern religions, and even in certain Western mystical traditions. Nonduality in its most basic definition is

also indicative of Hegel's philosophy of the whole being more crucial than its individual parts are separately. As Hegel notes immediately in the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "The True is the whole."[2]

Using Wilber's criteria for the definition of spiritual art, I intend to demonstrate that while both the art of Alex Grey and abstract art can be read as having mystical and spiritual potential, only Grey's art has the power to provide the viewer with a transformative experience and thus can appropriately be identified as a truly "spiritual art." The works which most forcefully exemplify this idea of transforming the viewer are part of a series called the *Sacred Mirrors,* and are the main works by Grey that I will explore here. I will also show that what enables the viewer to become more easily integrated in Grey's art is, in large part, his incorporation of nonduality, not just as an end in itself, but also as a means by which he and the viewer of his art can achieve that end.

Nonduality

The idea of collective unity is present in many religious and mystical traditions throughout the world. It exists in the Advaita Vedanta teaching that *atman* is identical to *Brahman*; it is found in Plotinus's theory of the One and it is seen in the kabbalistic idea of God as "one without two."[3] Nonduality is also touched upon by secular fields such as psychoanalysis.

Many scholars, such as Erich Fromm, consider a state of nonduality to be inherent in our nature. He states, "The disharmony of man's existence generates needs which transcend those of his animal origin. These needs result in an imperative drive to restore a unity and equilibrium between himself and the rest of nature."[4]

For Ken Wilber, nonduality is not only the state that predated humanity as a whole, but moreover a state that originates in all of us while we are in the womb and for a short time after birth. He states, "By almost all accounts, neither the fetus in the womb nor the infant at birth possesses a developed self-sense. For the neonate there is no real separation whatsoever between inside and outside, subject and object, body and environment."[5]

The nonduality present in these numerous traditions and fields of study is consistent with the nonduality utilized by Alex Grey in his artworks – particularly in his *Sacred Mirrors* series. The nonduality in Grey's art also emulates the presence of nonduality in mystical experiences, enabling Grey to provide the viewer with a way to embark on an awareness of a unitary consciousness.

The *Sacred Mirror* series consists of twenty-one pieces, or "mirrors," on each of which Grey has painted a human figure. The pose of the human figure is intended to be mimicked by the viewer, which further promotes the nondual relationship between the viewer and the figure in the work. The series is divided into three groups: *Body*, *Mind*, and *Spirit*.

Body, which includes the first thirteen paintings, explores the physi-

cality of the human form. It begins with a metal silhouette of a human figure, onto which the symbols for the chemical make-up of the body are inscribed. The following six mirrors take the viewer through each of the systems of the body—from the skeletal system to the muscular system. Grey then depicts three different races: Caucasian, African, and Asian, each race represented by a man and a woman.

The next group of paintings, called *Mind,* consists of three works. Titled *Psychic Energy System*, *Spiritual Energy System*, and *The Universal Mind Lattice*, these paintings represent the psychic and spiritual energies that flow through and around us that we cannot physically see and at best can only sense.

The last set of "mirrors" is referred to as *Spirit*. These five paintings represent the spiritual or Absolute reality, as it is understood by several different mystical traditions. One of the paintings, for example, depicts Avalokitesvara, an important bodhisattva figure in Tibetan Buddhism; another depicts Christ, the messianic figure in Christianity, with surrounding images and symbols from the Christian religion and its mystical sects. Also depicted is Sophia, wisdom personified and mother goddess in the Gnostic mystical tradition. The last mirror in this group, and in the series, is literally a mirror on which Grey has inscribed the word "GOD," representing the pinnacle of the viewer's spiritual journey.

Grey's goal for the viewer of his art is what he calls "deeply seeing," which is the process that will lead to the nonduality of viewer and painting; subject and object. He writes, "When deeply seeing, the object of our contemplation enters our heart and mind directly. In the act of deeply seeing, we transcend the egoic boundaries between the self and the otherness of the world, momentarily merging with the thing seen."[6] This oneness experienced by the viewer is crucial for the progression of the viewer through the *Sacred Mirror* series.

Nonduality defines the intention of the viewer's progression through Grey's *Sacred Mirrors*. With each mirror, the viewer is meant to imitate the pose of the figure pictured before them, as though literally staring at a reflection in an actual mirror.[7] As Grey writes, "The purpose of the Sacred Mirrors is to reflect on and appreciate the sacredness of the individual self, one's unity with other people and cultures, and one's connectedness with the earth and universe."[8] Through "deeply seeing," the viewer is meant to merge themselves with the image in front of them, and thus experience the identification of themselves with each of the represented ideas: from the basic, physical nature of the human body, to ultimately divine unity, the viewer experiences what it would be like to be unified with these images.

Alex Grey's process of creating a nondual experience between the viewer and each of the paintings in the *Sacred Mirror* series resembles the

psychotherapeutic technique that shares a similar name. "Sacred mirroring" is a technique in psychotherapy used to create a nondual connection between therapist and client.[9] In describing how this technique first emerged, psychotherapist John Prendergast recounts, "I first discovered this function of *being together* or sacred mirroring in 1988 while working with a very sensitive client with whom I shared an intimate rapport. There were several moments in our work together when there was a natural stop to our conventional thinking and feeling and we simultaneously dropped into a shared sense of Being."[10] Used as part of what is referred to as nondual wisdom, sacred mirroring allows the therapist and client to reach a point where they no longer feel themselves as separate, individual entities, but rather as intimately joined in Being. They find the relationship between themselves as nondual, or not two. Prendergast notes, "When presence arises during therapy, both therapist and client have the felt-understanding that they simply are. The conditioned sense of separation between a discrete self and other falls away and leaves the felt-sense of nonseparateness or nonduality."[11]

In the act of sacred mirroring, there can be no distinction between the one who is "mirroring," and the one who is "being mirrored." As Prendergast observes, "The apparent subject (me) is seen to be no different than the apparent object (you) at an essential level. However, if we begin to identify with this function and take our self as special mirroring somebody, we impose duality upon what is an essentially nondual relationship with our clients. From this perspective, no one can be a sacred mirror or be sacredly mirrored! Being itself is the mirror."[12] As soon as one sees oneself as "the mirror" or "the mirrored," the process fails because by identifying oneself as such, one inadvertently creates the illusion of an "other," which in turn creates a duality where there should be none.

It could be said that Grey seems to be applying the sacred mirror technique of psychotherapy in his *Sacred Mirror* series in order to help the viewer find their own nondual experience.[13] He is translating the practice into literal terms, using actual mirrors and paintings that could serve as the "therapist," in order to facilitate the mirroring, or "being with" experience. Thus, the nondual relationship that occurs during the client-therapist session of "being with," is likewise the desired outcome of the relationship between the viewer and each *Sacred Mirror* painting during the process of "deeply seeing."

The way that viewers are to interact with Grey's paintings and the intended goal of that interaction is very similar to the idea behind the sacred mirroring technique. "When we look into an ordinary mirror, we see how we appear. When we look into a sacred mirror, we see who we are. In the first kind of looking, we find an object – our face or body—and take it to be our self. In the second kind of looking, we see *through* a mental object (our self images and stories) and find no one."[14] This is not just implied or metaphorical but

literally physically demonstrated in Grey's series. As we progress through the mirrors, we are gradually stripped of our physical appearance until at the very end, what we are left with is the divine or the absolute – what we *really* are.

The attitude of making no distinction between "mirror" and "mirrored" seen in sacred mirroring is the same as the attitude that should be brought to the viewing of Grey's *Sacred Mirrors*. To successfully achieve the nonduality of viewer and art, the viewer must *not* make the distinction of the work as the "mirror" and themselves as the "mirrored." The process of mirroring must be reciprocal in order to allow the division of viewer and artwork – subject and object—to disappear, and to permit the viewer to enter into the state of "deeply seeing."

Sacred mirroring also reflects the idea of nonduality as already being present between subject and object; the process of "being with" is merely a tool with which to recognize it. There is nothing that either therapist or client must actively do in order to achieve the nonduality of "being with" – they must simply allow it to happen. The nondual connection of all things implicitly exists, therefore there is no effort required on the part of either the therapist or the client to initiate it. In the process of sacred mirroring, it will simply disclose itself. As Prendergast states, "Paradoxically, the effort to become a sacred mirror takes one farther from it. Trying to be present, open and available is like trying to make the sun rise (or the earth turn) – it happens of its own."[15] This idea reflects the viewer's role in Grey's art; all the viewer is meant to do is to stand before the mirror, mimic its pose, and just *be*. The viewer must allow the connection to spontaneously happen without making any deliberate effort.

Grey and the Abstract Spiritual Art Legacy

Alex Grey's art can be read as continuing in the tradition of the spiritual art of the non-objective artists working in the beginning and middle of the 20th century. During that time, abstraction was used by artists as a means by which to understand the Absolute. Many abstract artists, perhaps most famously Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian early in the 20th century, and the American Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s, sought to imbue their works with a kind of mysticism presumably reflective of their inner emotional spirituality. As he stated, Mondrian was aware of the capacity of art to, "provide a transition to the finer regions, which I call the spiritual realm."[16] Their goal was to create a work that was transcendent, one that would leave this world behind and move toward, and into, the "Beyond."

Grey's theories on the spiritual and on nonduality reflect those of many Eastern religions. A practitioner himself of Tibetan Buddhism, he often incorporates ideas, symbols and images from this and various other monistic Eastern religions and traditions in his paintings. In the *Sacred Mirror* series, for example, one of the mirrors in the category Grey calls "Spirit" represents

Avalokitesvara, a very important figure in Tibetan Buddhism, who "represents the Great Bodhisattva as a tantric manifestation of active compassion."[17] Grey's use of religious figures and symbols from Eastern traditions reflects his profound interest in ideas from these various traditions.

Kandinsky and Mondrian were also interested in the monistic theories of Eastern thought, but became familiar with them indirectly through their involvement in Theosophy,[18] begun in 1875 by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, as an attempt to create a sort of "universal religion," distilling and mixing the wisdoms of Eastern and Western spiritual traditions.[19] In his famous grid paintings Mondrian alluded to the Eastern idea of the nonduality of all things, which argues that separation is merely an illusion. In his article "Spirituality, Mysticism and Abstract Art," Peter Fingesten argues that Mondrian's "neutral background is the undifferentiated continuum, the void, or nirvana. Within this cosmic void the Absolute plays its cosmic game of creating and destroying, manifesting and disappearing, becoming and resting."[20]

American abstract painters also showed awareness of Eastern thought and applied it in their artistic theories. This is particularly true of Ad Reinhardt, whose interest in combining Eastern and Western philosophies—studying Buddhism as well as the writings of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, a twentieth-century philosopher from Sri Lanka who focused on Indian art and culture—informed his art.[21]

Grey and the abstract artists also share what might be called a visionary method of creating their works. In his article, "Abstract Expressionism: The Mystical Experience," Edward Levine considers how artists who attempt to express the spiritual in their art appear to receive its form and physicality from a "place" beyond themselves, as though they are creating on behalf of the Divine. He writes, "To arrive at this content [the spiritual] the artist must go a step beyond the individual personality, to a supracosmic self; in order to achieve this step the artist must become a sort of medium through which the spirit operates."[22] It is this description of an artist as mediator of the Divine that defines him or her as a "visionary artist."

Grey considers himself, as do many others, a visionary artist: that is, an artist inspired by visions – the experiences of altered states of consciousness that can occur either involuntarily or spontaneously during dreams, or through self-induced activities, such as meditation, shamanic drumming, or the use of entheogenic substances.[23]

One particular vision Grey often recounts in his writings which led to the creation of the work titled *Universal Mind Lattice*, occurred during his first experience of LSD in 1976: he saw himself as interconnected with everything and everyone around him. What made the occurrence even more important and inspiring for Grey was that his wife, who had taken LSD at the same time, described having an identical experience. This shared experience seemed to

convince Grey that the interconnectedness of all things was irrefutable: that the world we experience daily—the phenomenal world characterized by separation—is an illusion, while the nondual connectedness experienced during his LSD "trip" was the ultimate reality.[24]

Some of the 20th century abstract artists also regarded themselves as vehicles through which the divine could act. Kandinsky said, "I could not think up forms, and it repels me when I see such forms. All the forms which I ever use came 'from themselves,' they presented themselves complete before my eyes, and it only remained to me to copy them, or they created themselves while I was working, often surprising me."[25] Kandinsky felt that the art he was creating was coming from a force beyond himself—that the forms that ended up on the canvas were not of his own imagining, but part of an experience of the Absolute beyond his conscious control.

Similarly, American abstractionist Mark Rothko expressed his desire to be a visionary. In an article he wrote for the one-issue journal, *Possibilities*, he stated: "I think of my pictures as dramatic....Ideas and plans that existed in the mind at the start were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur....The presentation of this drama in the familiar world was never possible, unless everyday acts belonged to a ritual accepted as referring to a transcendent realm."[26] What began as simple ideas allowed Rothko to escape into a world beyond this one, where he would have perceived true reality. His task, like that of other visionary artists was to reveal that reality through his art.

Grey regards himself a sort of intermediary for Divine action, as did many of the artists in the abstract tradition equally interested in the spiritual. As prophets for the world that exists beyond the world we ordinarily inhabit, the job of the visionary artist is to take what he or she perceived in a vision and translate it into the arena of art, in order to show the rest of humanity the ultimate truth of reality, and ultimately envelop them in it.

Grey and many of the abstract artists share the idea of a cosmic unity of all things or a unitary consciousness. Levine describes the aim of American Abstract Expressionism as a "passionate search for value and meaning in the universe and... [a] desire to find mystic unification."[27] Just as Grey attempts to reconcile opposites into a total nonduality in his paintings, so, too, did Mondrian attempt to make these reconciliations: "The positive and negative break up oneness, they are the cause of all unhappiness....The union of the positive and negative is happiness....Since modern science has confirmed the Theosophical doctrine according to which matter and force (mind) are one, there is no reason to separate them."[28] For both Grey and Mondrian nonduality is inherently *mystical.*

There are numerous definitions of mysticism, but all seem to agree that the basis of mystical experience is the awareness of unity, or nonduality.

Evelyn Underhill, a Christian mystic, defined mysticism as, "the science of union with the Absolute and nothing else," where the mystic is "the person who attains this union."[29] According to William James, "in mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness."[30] In his article *Mysticism and Religious Experience*, Jerome I. Gellman narrowly defines the mystical experience as "a (purportedly :) super sense-perceptual or sub sense-perceptual *unitive* experience granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense-perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection."[31] I will use this definition by Gellman to explore the mystical potentiality of Grey's art, as well as those of the abstract artists.

The purpose of the *Sacred Mirror* series is to allow viewers to gradually transcend their own reality in order to achieve a greater unity with everything around them.[32] Grey states, "I wanted my paintings to visually chart the spectrum of consciousness from material perception to spiritual insight; and to function, if possible, as symbolic portals to the mystical dimension."[33] Unifying with "the All" is common to all mystical experiences, whether related to a particular religious tradition or not. This idea of unity is also consistent with Grey's works, which, as noted, do not focus on one specific religion but rather incorporate ideas, symbols, and images from different religions and mystical traditions.

Narrowing his definition even further, Gellman outlines specifically *theistic* mystical experiences. The theistic mystical experience is one in which, according to Gellman, there is an experience of unity, or more pointedly, identification with God.[34] The theistic mystical experience is exemplified most clearly by Grey's mirror, *Spiritual World*. In this work, Grey pictures a sun with rays of light emanating from it, and in the center of the sun he has etched the word "GOD." When the viewer stands in front of the panel, it appears at his or her heart level. To emphasize the identification of the viewer with God even more forcefully, Grey created this panel using an *actual* mirror. The inclusion of the mirror allows viewers to experience "God" literally at the center of themselves. The viewer's ability not only to imagine, but now also physically see him or herself in the work as identical to "God," reinforces the theistic mystical experience: not merely a union with God, where the viewer and God are simply "not separate," but an *identity* with God—an understanding that the two are one and the same.

A common and important characteristic of mystical experience is *ineffability*. Ineffability is the inability to describe a concept, such as God or the Absolute, or an experience of such a concept, due to the fact that the languages of the phenomenal world are insufficient to describe something that extends beyond it and into the realm of the Real or Absolute.

The early abstract artists of the twentieth century felt that the only

way to inspire the spiritual emotions they wanted to convey was through abstract or non-representational art. They believed that in order to convey an idea that was ineffable, it would be most effective to use abstract forms that also have no reference in the phenomenal world. Instead of using recognizable imagery that appealed to the viewer's imagination and understanding to describe the ideas that they wanted to convey, the abstract artists relied on the basic formal elements of their abstract forms, such as color, shape, intensity and gesture, to appeal to the viewer's emotions. For them, abstract art had to reflect the ineffability of the mystical experience.

A mystical experience can only be truly understood by an individual through personal experience.[35] As William James wrote, "This incommunicableness of the transport is the keynote of all mysticism. Mystical truth exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else. In this...it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by conceptual thought."[36] Belief in the possibility of a direct experience of God or the Absolute is common to abstraction and Grey's *Sacred Mirrors*.

Direct experience is essential for art that claims to be inherently spiritual or mystical. Many of the abstract artists who wanted to explore the spiritual in their works felt that the very process of creating the work allowed them to better explore their own spirituality through the connection to the material. Pollock, for example, was deeply involved in the very physical process of the creation of his art. The dripping and splattering of the paint was as much, if not more, a part of the work as the final product.

The same can be said of Grey's creative process. Though his process of painting the image is not as obviously physical as Pollock's, Grey instead experiences the mysticism of his art through his visions. Grey then transcribes his visionary experiences in his paintings. The visions are Grey's way of directly experiencing the mystical, and his incorporation of them into his work, his way of communicating the mystical to the rest of humanity.

The Methods Utilized by Alex Grey to Ensure Proper Communication with the Viewer (and How These Supersede the Methods of Abstraction)

The fact that a mystical experience is defined by its ineffability, or inability to be communicated, suggests that there is no way for the artist to be able to relay it to the viewer. However, Grey employs several different methods in order to overcome this obstacle. The first is the technique of *apophasis*.

The closest way to get to some kind of description of an ineffable mystical experience is to describe it negatively, employing a technique referred to as *apophasis*. In using apophasis to describe something, one takes qualities *away from*, instead of attributing qualities to it. In other words, one is describing what something is *not*, rather than what it *is*. For example, because nonduality is ineffable, or beyond description, many describe nonduality as

being "not two." To describe nonduality as the idea that "everything is one," would be inadequate, because although we can understand nonduality as a unitary state, saying that it is "one" would still fall short of what it really is. Thus, apophatically describing nonduality as "not two" allows us to begin with a concept we understand—the concept of something being "not two"—yet allows space for a truer understanding of what nonduality is that cannot be expressed in words.

For a mystical ineffable concept such as God or the Absolute, apophatic description begins with something familiar from the phenomenal world in order to point us in the right direction, and then reveals it as opposite to the thing being described. As in Hegel's notion of "determinate negation," apophasis must take us through all of the things which the Absolute is *not* in order to get us to the point where we can go no further and finally reach the ultimate understanding of what the Absolute *is*, which is something we can just *know* as opposed to something that can be described.

Grey's works resemble apophasis in that the imagery and symbolism he uses help point the viewer in the direction of a truer realization of the ineffable understanding he is trying to convey. Instead of attempting to picture those ideas that are beyond the phenomenal realm with which we are familiar, he begins with recognizable imagery with which we can ground ourselves and use as a stepping-off point toward a personal realization of the mystical experience. Take for example the three mirrors representing the "mind" in Grey's *Sacred Mirror* series: *Psychic Energy System, Spiritual Energy System,* and *Universal Mind Lattice*. Grey begins in the *Spiritual Energy System* by depicting a human figure – something all people can immediately identify with and understand. The figure has all of its internal organs and bones and is clearly distinct from its background, illustrating a duality between figure and ground. In the next mirror, the *Spiritual Energy System*, the human figure is still present, but is slowly losing its organic form. The bones and organ systems are no longer evident, and the figure is gradually becoming integrated with its background. The head, feet and even the fingertips are no longer closed off and separated from the background but flow into it, shown through the thick white lines that run through the figure and continue to its surrounding area. The barrier between the figure and background is slowly being broken down.

The *Universal Mind Lattice* is Grey's description of the figure's unitive mystical experience, depicting ultimate nonduality. The human figure is no longer visible, yet understood by the viewer—through the other two paintings—to now be totally integrated into the intricately woven web of thick white lines that seems to continue infinitely, beyond the edges of the painting and well into the background.

Without the first two mirrors, the idea of the total integration of the figure in the third would be incomprehensible to the viewer. Grey had to first

show the human figure and its dualistic relation to its surroundings, which can be immediately understood by the viewer. He then proceeded gradually from this understanding of what the idea behind the *Universal Mind Lattice* was *not* (a duality), to a closer understanding of what the experience of it would be—the experience of the figure and background as completely integrated.

Looking beyond these three paintings, Grey's *Sacred Mirror* series as a whole can be read as progressively apophatic. Grey begins the series with a piece called *Material World*, for which he has constructed the human figure out of lead and etched onto it the symbols of the chemicals and elements that make up the physical human body. The piece itself is created from an actual mirror, but the nature of the mirror distorts the image of what it reflects. The breaking down of the body into its separate, organic elements, as well as the disconnection perceived in the distortion of the mirror, mimic for the viewer the separation that they perceive in everyday life. In this first piece Grey is showing the duality of the phenomenal world at its most obvious.

Grey proceeds next through the systems of the body, still staying with the theme of our bodies as made of separate parts: separate organs, separate bones, and so on. He then moves on to the mirrors depicting men and women from three different races: Caucasian, African, and Asian. These mirrors no longer show the separation within our own bodies, but the duality we experience in relation to other people, particularly people of genders and races other than our own. These mirrors also mark the end of the grouping of mirrors Grey refers to as representing the "body."

In the next three mirrors, as previously mentioned, Grey explores the realm of the "mind," depicting the human figure as gradually losing the sense of duality with its surrounding environment. In the last set of mirrors, the group representing the "spirit," Grey evolves from the figure understanding its nonduality with merely itself and its surroundings, to a nonduality with those figures of the spiritual realm. *Void/Clear Light*, the first mirror in this category, represents the Tibetan Buddhist idea of the Clear Light that illuminates the Void—the state that directly precedes enlightenment, the realization of the nonduality of all things. This mirror then takes us directly into the spiritual realm, with depictions of spiritual figures from several religions and traditions—*Avalokitesvara*, Christ, and *Sophia*. In these mirrors, one can comprehend a union with divine figures from various religions. *Spiritual World*, the final mirror, takes the viewer directly into the realm of ultimate nonduality, and is Grey's most assertive attempt to show not only the viewer's union with the spirit, but also the ultimate identification of the viewer with the Absolute, or God.

Abstraction, on the other hand, maintains the ineffable quality as a necessary component of the mystical experience. Some abstract artists strove to create paintings of forms and lines and color that had no reference as ob-

jects in the phenomenal world specifically because they wanted to separate the idea of the phenomenal world, which is an illusion, from the idea of the Absolute or spiritual world, which is the true reality. For example, Malevich felt that at a certain point his art became "pure," excluding any object with reference in phenomenal reality.[37] As Mark Rosenthal notes, the "subjectivist principle [of abstract art] relies on the expression of feelings to convey a realm of experience unconnected to the surrounding world and independent of the demands of representation."[38]

This separation of worlds, however, works in opposition to the goal of abstraction. By separating this phenomenal world from the world of ultimate reality, the abstract artists are actually *creating* a duality instead of removing it. The world of the Absolute, as many Eastern traditions acknowledge, is not separate from the phenomenal world, but merely veiled by illusion. When one reaches a true realization of reality, or enlightenment, one does not physically leave one world and enter another – it is only the perception of the world that changes. As Wilber states, "the 'other world' of Spirit and 'this world' of separate phenomena are deeply and profoundly "not-two," and this nonduality is a direct and immediate realization which occurs in certain meditative states."[39] By incorporating only the content of one world and strictly excluding the content of another, abstraction maintains the dualism of worlds, making it that much harder for the viewer to get an understanding of the truth.

That the abstract artists wanted to convey their ideas in a manner and style that is consistent with the ineffable quality of a true mystical experience, creating an art that is exemplary of such an experience implies that the art of abstraction *is* the Absolute. Works by artists such as Kandinsky or Mondrian were full of forms and colors that for them expressed the ineffable. However, the ineffable quality of abstract art that arises from its Absolute nature can cause difficulties in its ability to consistently express that nature, given the nature of the Absolute does not permit itself to be communicated or transferable in terms of experience from the world in which we live. Donald Kuspit states in his article, "The Illusion of the Absolute in Abstract Art," "the abstract work of art is equally non-objective and non-subjective; it neither "constitutes" objects nor shows the subject of experience. In this sense, it is absolute, for there is no knowing it concretely."[40] Because abstraction is comprised of forms that most often have no grounding in this world, or in our experience of this world, it can presumably be unknowable to the viewer whose knowledge is, and can only be, of this world.

This form of spiritual art, like Hegel's sense-certainty, as Kuspit supposed, can sometimes fall short in its ability to bring the viewer to a true understanding of the Absolute through art *because of* its strive for ineffability. The ineffable nature of the early abstract works, while accurately emulating the idea of the Absolute, can often leave them unable to communicate that idea to

an audience. Most often, a viewer of an abstract work can only know that the work is meant to convey the spiritual if he or she is told by an outside party that this is the case, or if they read the many writings of the earlier abstractionists detailing the purpose of their paintings. The fact that the only way for one to truly understand the intentions of the works of artists like Kandinsky and Mondrian is to read about them also undermines the works' attempt to be completely ineffable. In order to make sure that their works are fully comprehended, the abstract artists needed to incorporate some form of outside written or oral language. Thus, as in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where one must determinately negate sense-certainty in order to move on to another form of consciousness that can more properly express itself, we find that, while necessary to the modern development of spiritual art, abstraction, too, cannot stand on its own.

Edward Levine describes Mondrian's view of the work as "a plastic object which manifests in visual terms the invisible, objective laws of the universe, much as a mathematical equation does in science."[41] We can see even more clearly now, using Levine's comparison, that the abstract work of art is the manifestation of the Absolute – a mere continuation of it rather than something that can help the viewer understand it—visually metonymical rather than metaphorical. Instead of giving us a comprehensible characterization as to what it is, it merely restates itself as the same thing. In contrast, Grey's mirrors could be understood as a metaphor, replacing a difficult concept with something that is more easily comprehensible. Grey's art uses what we recognize to explain to us a concept beyond our understanding, while abstraction simply shows us the concept itself.

Abstraction's use of ineffability unintentionally encourages the duality of viewer and artwork. Grey uses the nondualistic approach of apophasis to convey his message, whereas abstract art *maintains* an ineffable quality, which can cause a dualistic split between viewer and artwork. The viewer may be unable to connect to the work which has no reference in the viewer's world, and thus a detachment or duality is imposed between viewer and artwork.

It is the viewer whom Grey ultimately seeks to affect—whose experience of reality should be influenced by the experience of Grey's works. Grey's mission for his art is incomplete until it is received by an audience, who then takes part in Grey's mystical experience. Thus, in the role of the viewer, we find Grey's most crucial use of nonduality—that of perception.

Nondual perception is an important aspect of many religious and mystical traditions. A quotation from the Hindu text, the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* reads, "...for there is no cessation of the vision of the seer, because the seer is imperishable. There is then, however, no second thing separate from the seer that it could see."[42] Taoism is also concerned with the nonduality of subject and object, as seen in the quotation from Chuang Tzu:

"Thereupon the 'self' is also the 'other'; the 'other' is the 'self'...But really are there such distinctions as 'self' and 'other,' or are there no such distinctions? When 'self' and 'other' lose their contrariety, there we have the very essence of the Tao."[43] The goal of Grey's art, specifically in the *Sacred Mirror* series, is to establish a nondual relationship of subject and object, both emotionally and physically, between the viewer and the artwork.

Grey realizes that the role of the viewer could not be more crucial to his art. The entire purpose of his artistic process depends on its reception by the viewer—only then is the process really complete. Grey writes, "Part of the function of the vision and the creative process is the *integration* of the inspired moment, via the art object or event, into the world beyond the studio."[44] The communication of Grey's visions to the viewer is what makes the creation of the work worthwhile. Without a viewer, the art, in effect would lose its purpose, for its goal is to transform the viewer in a very powerful way. As Kuspit notes, "His pictures are meant to awaken and catalyze the viewer's mystical potential and thus transfigure his consciousness and body."[45]

When confronting one of his *Sacred Mirrors*, the viewer is invited by Grey to actively participate in the nondual experience of the artwork by standing before the life-size image and mimicking its pose: arms outstretched low with palm facing out toward the image. In this act, the viewer is meant to mentally merge with the image, thereby emotionally breaking down the separation of viewer and artwork – the dualism of subject and object. This process, as noted earlier, is what Grey refers to as "deeply seeing."[46]

In his *Sacred Mirrors*, Grey is achieving subject/object nonduality between the viewer and physical artwork, attempting to create for the viewer a simulation of what it would be like to *actually* unify oneself with those beings and concepts that he is merely representing; for instance, standing in front of one of the mirrors depicting a man or woman of a race different from one's own, one begins to be able to simulate what it would be like to unify oneself with that person. Commenting on his intentions for these six mirrors, Grey states, "Even though they are painted as individuals, whenever they are exhibited together they form the sociopolitical or collective aspect of the *Sacred Mirrors*. This idea is to see yourself in relation to other races and sexes, but also, because they are supposed to be "mirrors," to see yourself reflected in each person."[47] The duality between the people of different races and sexes occurs because people automatically perceive the outward physical differences in skin tone and male or female traits. As the viewer simulates his or her identity with the mirrored image, the viewer recognizes that the difference originally perceived as being *between* people of different races and sexes is in actuality a difference created *within* the individual. Thus the duality of opposites, such as black and white, male and female, become a nondual whole. This application by the viewer of the unity that Grey attempts to communicate through the *Sacred*

Mirror series is a step toward the viewer's realization of the nonduality of all things.

Abstract art can often fall short in its attempt to prove itself as an ultimately spiritual art because its own pure form—while it can be seen as having the qualities of the Absolute—cannot sufficiently convey itself to the viewer, whose inclusion in the artistic process is necessary to fulfill the criteria for spiritual art. Kuspit writes: "In any case, as Hegel notes, absolute or pure being is abstract, being that has not yet begun to live concretely in the world, and so is empty of content. It is majestic only in that it is charged with potentiality, monumental only in that it is sublimely mute, having nothing to say about phenomena."[48] It is abstraction's lack of communication to an audience that could ultimately keep it from enduring as a truly spiritual art.

In commenting on the mute nature of Absolute abstraction, Kuspit declares, "Indeed, to be, and simply be, is on the whole what the abstract work of art 'communicates.' Beyond that, it has no ascertainable message and meaning, for it neither talks in terms of the world nor appeals to an interpreter."[49] As we saw, one could reasonably assert that all the qualities of abstract art could suggest that abstract art *is* the Absolute, manifest in art. There can be difficulties, however, when its Absolute nature prevents the art from actively incorporating the viewer. As Kuspit stated, it can only *be*—as a static, silent work, unable to move freely within the world of the viewer, as if confined to a cage. This stationary nature of abstract art makes it a difficult means for knowing the Absolute because it is not always able to express itself in terms understandable to us.

If verbal description is inadequate for conveying the mystical and the nondual due to its phenomenal origins and dependence on rationality and logic, and abstraction goes too far into the realm of the Absolute to be able to properly convey its meaning to the viewer, then a return to representational art, the recognizably visual, seems to be a better method to convey these otherwise incommunicable ideas. Grey's art effectively expresses his mystical messages representationally by appealing to the viewer's visual senses rather than their reasoning power. As Kuspit comments with respect to the depiction of energy in Grey's art, "it is necessarily represented imagistically, for awareness of it exists below the threshold of verbal language. It is something we know in our bodies, which is the only way to truly know it. Images have visceral appeal, unlike verbal language, which appeals to our intellect."[50] Visual imagery provides a way for the viewer to immediately internalize an idea that cannot be understood by conceptual or rational processes.

One of most crucial moves in Grey's art in an effort to strengthen the connection between art and viewer is his decision to use representational images rather than abstraction, in order to convey his concept of Absolute reality. This decision reflects the nondual interest of Grey's works. Kuspit

writes: "Abstract and conceptual artworks exist to be contemplated disinterestedly as wholes; imagistic artworks are grasped by means of conscious or unconscious interest in the image, which is always partial—at least until the image is experienced as basic. Even then, the image is never contemplated as though it were a whole distanced from the viewer, existing at the end of some ideal perspective; it is always experienced as part of the viewer – the more a part, the more a whole in itself. But it is never so whole in itself that it stands apart."[51] Whereas the abstract work creates itself as a self-contained whole that is separate and distinct from the world in which it exists, the work that maintains the representational image, such as Grey's, maintains a connection with the viewer – a nonduality of viewer and art work.

But Grey does more than merely utilize representational images of things we recognize from nature and our phenomenal world. He goes one step further and also depicts aspects of being and consciousness that are not immediately visible to us: energy fields, auras, and light – the things that we can experience as "felt," but cannot necessarily give physical form to. Grey's inclusion of representations of such abstract notions further assists the viewer through his or her progression toward the Absolute. He bridges the gap between pure abstraction and pure representation, juxtaposing that which we experience and know physically and visually in life, such as the human body, with what we understand on a more subtle level of consciousness. Wilber states, "It's easier to make representational art, but when you get into subjective states, which means states you can feel and see yourself, but only internally, how to you make art actually depict these interior states?...that's what's great and pioneering about [Grey's] art."[52] By giving representational form to these more abstract notions, the viewer is more likely grasp Grey's intention, and more easily allow him or herself to surrender to it.

In short, because abstraction relies solely on the feeling evoked in the viewer by the forms, there is a risk of detachment in the connection of the artwork to the viewer, which completes the artistic process. A viewer could stand before the abstract work and never truly grasp what the artist is trying to express.

The totally imageless abstract work of art is likely to evade understanding and become halted at the level of emotion.[53] An abstract work may generate a particular emotional response in a viewer, but the emotional responses among several viewers may vary. They may also differ from that of the artist, or that which the artist intended to convey. At some point, an abstract work of art can become sealed off from its audience. Without an image to allow viewers to connect themselves cognitively—not only emotionally—with the work, the best the artist can hope for is a purely emotional effect on the typical viewer.

The absence an image to give the viewer some kind of visual clue to

the artist's original intention can cause the work of art to become meaningless for the viewer—nothing more than forms on a canvas. As Kuspit notes, "Not grounded in the image, art at best becomes a virtuoso demonstration of means —an ultimately vacuous technical feat propped by vague 'spiritual' aspirations." [54] The recognizable image serves as an important connection between the viewer and the work. Without it, the intention or meaning of the painting becomes subjective and open to various interpretations.

The exclusion of recognizable imagery in abstract works of art gives rise to countless interpretations of its intention. Roger Lipsey, agreeing with Coomaraswamy, noted that, with abstract art, "One feels threatened...by the possibilities of needing as many theories as there are artists."[55] There have been many various readings of abstraction, not all of which acknowledge the goal of a higher realization or search for the spiritual. For example, the art critic Clement Greenberg saw abstract art only in terms of its formalism—its "purity" of form and effort to be true to its mediums, as opposed to functioning as a "window into another reality." As Suzi Gablik notes, "Greenberg in particular rejected the notion that there is any higher purpose to art, or any "spiritual" point to its production."[56] Greenberg was not the only critic to misunderstand abstraction: Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the main dealer for the Cubist artists, commented that Mondrian's work was "purely ornamental."[57]

Since it could not consistently and clearly communicate its message to those intended to receive it, abstraction was largely misread, and thus often misinterpreted. Peter Fingesten notes in his article, "Spirituality, Mysticism and Non-Objective Art:" "It is regrettable that some critics have attacked non-objective art as expressions of 'terror,' 'chaos,' 'perverted visual trends,' 'spectacles of a continuous nervous breakdown,' 'nihilistic automatism,' mechanical arrangements,' and so forth."[58] If the viewer misses the point of the work of art more often than not, then the work is not able to uphold its position as an art that is consistently able to communicate spirituality to its audience. Kuspit writes: "The problem with the spiritual symbolism used by such painting is that it tends to become a communicative cliché by reason of its cultural familiarity or traditional character or else tends not to communicate spirituality at all, simply becoming a boring, empty shape."[59] Abstraction hangs in the balance between its spirituality and its form. At any given point, it can be understood equally as one or the other, as there is nothing to solidify it as unquestionably, definitively spiritual.

On the other hand, abstraction can also be read as spiritual even when the artist had no spiritual intention in mind. Abstract works cannot consistently be taken to be representative of the spiritual because a spiritual connection is not always the desired outcome. Robert Rauschenberg, for instance, did several monochromatic works, such as his series of *White Paintings*, which were initially seen to have a spiritual implication. However, the idea of inserting

a mystical meaning into a painting runs counter to the theories Rauschenberg actually had on creating art. Rauschenberg preferred to create his works spontaneously, with no prior idea in mind. He also preferred to keep himself out of the work as completely as possible, which would include the omission of any religious or spiritual ideas he might have from the work as well. Rather than intending to display spirituality, Rauschenberg wanted to use materials from life to express life as art, and to encourage his viewers to experience his works in the same manner. Thus, although some critics have read a spiritual intention into his abstract works, the purpose of works such as the *White Paintings* was not to explore the realm of the spiritual at all. It was merely to engage the viewer in the work, to encourage a sort of audience participation.[60]

The lack of a recognizable image in abstract art can also cause the art itself to become too individual—to the point where only the artist can, with certainty, fully comprehend the meaning of the work. For example, Robert Motherwell, a leading American Abstract Expressionist, declared, "I'm interested in expressing basic human emotions....And the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows....they are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them."[61] There is no guarantee, however, that anyone is having the same religious experience that Motherwell had when he created his works. The lack of representation present in his and other abstractionist works would make it nearly impossible for any given viewer to know the *exact* experience that consumed Motherwell during the creation of his paintings—much less to then be able to replicate it in themselves.

Motherwell, who understood without a doubt the mysticism of abstract art, also felt that abstract art was, as he said, "an effort to close the void that modern men feel."[62] However, this mysticism is confined solely to the artist. It does not extend into the realm of the viewer, because the spiritual aspect for the artist is in the creation. By the time the work reaches the viewer, the act of creation is complete and what remains are empty forms that most often hold no real meaning for the viewer.

To some abstractionists, the viewer actually seemed to be the furthest thing from their mind during the creation of their art. Gablik recounts, "Once, when an interviewer asked the American abstract painter Clyfford Still whether he was concerned that his work reach the people, Still replied, 'Not in the least. That is what the comic strip does.'"[63] If the artist is unconcerned with whether the art reaches the viewer or not, then the work cannot be successful as a means by which human beings can experience and know the Absolute, and thus cannot be successful as a spiritual art.

The individualized nature of the abstract art is also a symptom of the artists' decisions to look within themselves in order to find the right form of expression of the Absolute. Gablik, in her book, *Has Modernism Failed?,*

notes, "In opposition to materialist values, and because of the spiritual breakdown which followed the collapse of religion in modern society, the early modernists turned inward, away from the world, to concentrate on the self and its inner life. If valid meaning could no longer be found in the social world, they would seek it instead within themselves."[64] This turn inward, away from what was happening around them, could produce no other result than an art that could not relate to the society for which it was originally created.

The effectiveness of abstract art as a new style conveying a new message seems to have been due largely to its existence in its particular time period. Now, in the 21st century, abstraction is no longer an innovative style. As Kuspit points out, contemporary abstract works are simply recycling the same ideas in a form to which we have become de-sensitized, making it generally less effective to the typical viewer.[65]

While the same basic notion of nondual spirituality is still relevant today, the means by which we receive that idea need to reflect our own moment in history. With the *Sacred Mirrors*, Grey has reinvented the vehicle by which the idea of knowing and understanding the Absolute, our "true nature", is communicated to the viewers of the 21st century.

Conclusion

Thus far we have explored the mystical qualities of both abstract art and the art of Alex Grey, and have shown that while abstract art often falls short of the definition of spiritual art, Grey has created an art that can be considered mystical, while simultaneously conveying its spiritual message to the receptive viewer. Perhaps, though, it is better to regard abstraction not so much as insufficient in its attempt to be a truly spiritual art, but rather as misplaced in the spiritual progression of art. Kuspit agrees with Meyer Schapiro that,

> Authentically spiritual abstract art does not so much "communicate" as "induce an attitude of communion and contemplation." It offers "an equivalent of what is regarded as part of religious life: a sincere and humble submission to a spiritual object, an experience which is not given automatically, but requires preparation and purity of spirit."[66]

If abstract art can be seen to be the Absolute in itself, as suggested, then it seems that the "preparation" Schapiro refers to could be the experience of Grey's art. Grey's *Sacred Mirrors* take the viewer toward a closer knowledge of what the Absolute *is*, after which the viewer is better prepared to view abstract art and intuit its purely Absolute nature.

It could be suggested that there is a natural development of art toward this moment of art history that allows one to arrive at the understanding

of ultimate reality. We receive each artistic style or movement fully, only to realize it is not fulfilling all of the needs of humanity, and thus we must reject it, while—in a quasi-Hegelian manner— also retaining it within the canon of art history, and focus our attention on the next art historical moment.

Let us return for a moment to Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*. Their solid white color and simple rectangular shape qualifies them as abstract pieces, and while I argued earlier that they were not intended as spiritual representations in the way the works of earlier abstractionists' were, they seem to me to represent a new phase in the progression of art towards the Absolute—a phase between abstraction and the art of Grey. By encouraging participation from the viewers in his art, Rauschenberg is communicating with the viewers and encouraging them to develop their own direct experience of his works. Take for example Rauschenberg's interactive work, *Soundings*.[67] The only way for the viewer to actually see this work—which is dark when first approached—is to make noise, which causes the work to light up, revealing numerous images of chairs pictured on the work. By requiring participation and allowing the viewer to become actively involved in the work, Rauschenberg has already destroyed the impasse between viewer and artwork that is often present in abstraction, creating a nonduality between the viewer and the viewed. Rauschenberg even breaks down the physical barrier between viewer and artwork by utilizing reflection in his work in the form of the silvered surface on the piece. Whether it is the viewer's shadow on the blank canvases of the *White Paintings*, or their mirrored reflection on the silvered surface of *Soundings*, Rauschenberg is anticipating Grey's use of the idea of the "mirror" to create the physical nonduality between viewer and art.

Despite the fact that no spiritual message was intended, Rauschenberg's art could be seen as an example of an artistic moment advancing art in the direction of the truly spiritual. As in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, it is only through Grey's art that we can really know the Absolute, and thus it is only on this understanding of the Absolute that we can return to abstraction and understand its true nature.

All of the nondual traditions and religions emphasize the fact the Absolute or the Real world is not separate from the phenomenal world that we experience. All we need to do is realize it, to "awaken" to it. This occurs when one transcends the idea of separateness and understands that all there is *is* nonduality.

This idea of awakening in the Tibetan Buddhism concept of the "clear light," occurs when one approaches the recognition of true Reality. Grey utilizes this idea in his mirror *Void/Clear Light*. Aside from the four elements—earth, wind, fire and water— that he has stylized and placed around the borders of the work, the panel is pure black. In the center, however, is a thin vertical white glow, which represents the clear light. In Buddhism, the Absolute is

regarded as the Void, a way of expressing that there is no-self, only object. The clear light leads one to the realization of the Void. The Void was there the entire time—but now the clear light illuminates it, just as the light illuminates the darkness in Grey's mirror, so that the void can be seen and realized as Absolute Reality.

In each of Grey's mirrors, from the first, which shows our inner organic, chemical similarities, to the last revealing our union and identification with God, Grey is trying to get the viewer to actively realize the nonduality and thus true nature of all things. It is already there inside us—we just need to awaken to it. To attain enlightenment is simply to recognize the true nature of reality, to see it through the ignorance of phenomena that mask it. Just as this recognition is a crucial part of reaching enlightenment in many religious traditions, Grey is trying to show us that Reality, the Absolute, the true nondual nature of all things is right there in front of us, waiting to be recognized.

Perhaps to see most clearly of all the ultimate answer to knowing and understanding the Absolute, we must turn once again to Grey's final mirror, *Spiritual World.* Here, as noted, Grey successfully equated God with the viewer by creating an actual mirror into which the viewer is reflected and by putting the word "God" within a sunburst level with the viewer's heart. The viewer can literally see "God" within themselves, thus reinforcing the idea of being one with God. However, even though placing "God" within the viewer is important in itself, the role of the mirror is of equal and arguably more significance in the viewer's progression toward an understanding of the Absolute through art.

The mirror consumes the majority of the piece: the sunburst and its rays span the entire piece, but do not occupy a large surface area. What viewers mostly see is themselves and their immediate surroundings. By doing this, Grey is even more powerfully suggesting that the key to knowledge and understanding of the Absolute is already in our immediate grasp: it is in our surroundings and within us, which is what one sees reflected in the 21st mirror. The only thing that seems to be in the way of our actual realization of the Absolute through art is *the art*. Grey is beginning to take away the concept of the "painting" by replacing it with a mirror, exposing more of our immediate surroundings and less of art itself. By beginning to remove the concept of the painting and at the same time the art, Grey is coming closer to Wittgenstein's notion of "taking away the ladder." Perhaps the solution to reaching the ultimate realization of the Absolute through art is to remove the art itself, completing the Hegelian cycle, and showing us that the Absolute really was there the entire time.

Notes

[1]Ken Wilber, "Art and the Integral Vision," in *Transfigurations*, by Alex Gray, et al (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2001), 101.

[2]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11.

[3] Jerry Katz, *One: Essential Writings on Nonduality* (Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2007), 64.

[4] Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), 25, from Fromm's *Man for Himself.*

[5] Wilber, *The Atman Project: A Transpersonal View of Human Development* (Wheaton, Ill: Theosophical Pub. House, 1980), 7.

[6] Alex Grey, *The Mission of Art* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1998), 72.

[7] Alex Grey is not the first artist to use the mirror or the idea of reflection in art: for example, artists such as Robert Rauschenberg (discussed later) and Howard Kanovitz are among those who also incorporated the idea of reflection into their art.

[8]Carlo McCormick, "Through Darkness to Light: The Art Path of Alex Grey," in *The Sacred Mirrors*, by Alex Grey, Ken Wilber, and Carlo McCormick (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1990), 38.

[9] The technique of sacred mirroring will be discussed here only briefly, in accordance with its relationship to Grey's *Sacred Mirrors*. For more detailed information on sacred mirroring and nondual wisdom, see John J. Prendergast, Peter G. Fenner, and Sheila Krystal, *The Sacred Mirror: Nondual Wisdom and Psychotherapy* (St. Paul, MN: Omega Books, 2003) and Jerry Katz, *One: Essential Writings on Nonduality* (Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2007).

[10] John J. Prendergast, "The Sacred Mirror: Being Together," in *The Sacred Mirror: Nondual Wisdom and Psychotherapy*, by John J. Prendergast, Peter G. Fenner, Sheila Krystal (St. Paul, MN: Omega Books, 2003), 94.

[11] Prendergast, 90.

[12] Prendergast, 95.

[13] Whether Grey was intentionally thinking of this technique during the creation/ titling of his series is unclear.

[14] Prendergast, 89.

[15] Prendergast, 96.

[16] Mark Rosenthal, *Abstraction in the Twentieth Century: Total Risk, Freedom, Discipline* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1996), 34.

[17] McCormick, 37.

[18] Peter Fingesten, "Spirituality, Mysticism and Non-Objective Art," *Art Journal*, 21/2 (Autumn 1961): 4.

[19] Fingesten, 2.

[20] Fingesten, 3.

[21]Roger Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1988), 328, 332.

[22] Edward Levine, "Abstract Expressionism: The Mystical Experience," *Art Journal*, 31/1 (Autumn 1971): 22.

[23]Grey, 17.

[24]Grey, 21-4.

[25]Levine, 22.
[26] Lipsey, 312.
[27] Levine, 25.
[28] Fingesten, 4.
[29] Dan Merkur, *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 4.
[30] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: *A Study in Human Nature: Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 457.
[31] Jerome I. Gellman, "Mysticism and Religious Experience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 140.
[32] Grey, "The Sacred Mirrors," in *The Sacred Mirrors*, 31.
[33] Grey, 31.
[34] Gellman, 142.
[35] James, 414.
[36]James, 442.
[37] Rosenthal, 21.
[38] Rosenthal, 36.
[39]Ken Wilber, *The Essential Ken Wilber: An Introductory Reader* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1998), 12.
[40] Donald B. Kuspit, "The Illusion of the Absolute in Abstract Art," *Art Journal*, 31/1 (Autumn 1971): 26.
[41] Levine, 22.
[42]David Loy, *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 26.
[43] Loy, 34.
[44] Grey, *The Mission of Art*, 79.
[45] Kuspit, "Alex Grey's Mysticism," in *Transfigurations*, 49.
[46] Grey, 72.
[47] Grey in an interview with Wilber, "Art and the Integral Vision," 104.
[48] Kuspit, "The Illusion of the Absolute in Abstract Art," 27.
[49] Kuspit, 27.
[50] Kuspit, 49.
[51] Kuspit, "In Search of the Visionary Image," *Art Journal*, 45/4 (Winter 1985): 320.
[52] Wilber, "Art and the Integral Vision," 105.
[53] Edward S. Casey, *Spirit and Soul: Essays in Philosophical Psychology* (Dallas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1991), 60. In Casey's examining of the role of imagination in perception in Mikel Dufrenne's theory, for ordinary perception, Casey states that it is likely that Dufrenne would consider imagination to be a crucial middle point between sensible presence and understanding. Casey explains, "On the one hand, imagination...is necessary to the presentation of presence in perception.... On the other hand, imagination is equally crucial for understanding...'understanding can do nothing without imagination.'" (p. 60). In terms of aesthetic experience, imagination is shown as less important to Dufrenne, but this seems to depend on the condition that the "aesthetic object

suffices for itself [and] there is no need for empirical imagination to fill it out." (p. 60). Dufrenne states that "the work succeeds precisely when it restricts imagination within the work's limits, discouraging any further elaboration" (p. 60), as in Grey's art, where the representational aesthetic object indeed suffices for itself.

[54] Kuspit, 319.

[55] Lipsey, 21.

[56] Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1984), 22.

[57] Rosenthal, 41.

[58] Fingesten, 5.

[59] Kuspit, "Concerning the Spiritual in Contemporary Art," in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, eds. Maurice Tuchman, Judy Freeman, and Carol Blotkamp (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 319.

[60] For further information on Rauschenberg's White Paintings, see Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-garde* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003); Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: Menil Foundation, Inc., 1991); Robert S. Mattison, Robert Rauschenberg: Breaking Boundaries (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

[61] Gablik, 22.

[62] Fingesten, 4.

[63] Gablik, 23.

[64] Gablik, 21.

[65] Kuspit, 313-14.

[66] Quoted in Kuspit, 314.

[67] For further information on Rauschenberg's *Soundings*, see Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990).

The Reluctant Muse: Images of "Lucy" in Mark Greenwold's Paintings

Lucy Bowditch

What is the power dynamic between the artist and the model, specifically the artist Mark Greenwold and the reluctant model, and more precisely muse, who happens to be myself? Mark Greenwold is a labor-intensive psychological hyper-realist or hysterical-realist working with triple zero brushes on tight interiors lifted from high-end shelter magazines. The spaces are "populated by a roving group of friends and family" in provocative, steamy situations.[1]

My image made its first appearance in *Why Not Say What Happened* (2003-2004, 19 x 17 inches). The painting was shown at the 2004 Santa Fe Biennial titled "Disparities & Deformations: Our Grotesque" curated by Robert Storr. While attending the opening, someone said to me, "How does it feel to be the subject of a painting?"

Oddly, until that moment I had not thought that much about it. After all, there is the painting, oil on a wooden board. The work is a painting. Just as « Ceci N'est Pas Un Pipe »...Ceci n'est pas Lucy! At the time and to this day I did not think of my figure as portraiture; I did not think of it as actually in any way having to do with me. The off-hand question, however, started gnawing at me.

As an art historian, I was immediately uncomfortable. It is my job to unpack paintings, yet suddenly I felt silenced like a woman from another century.[2] At that point, I became the reluctant muse and began thinking of ways to gain some control over the situation.

In 2006, I delivered a paper titled *Idiosyncratic Space in Mark Greenwold's Psycho-sexual Paintings*.[3] I deliberately avoided addressing

A version of this personal essay was delivered at the 2009 College Art Association conference in Los Angeles in a panel titled "Artists and Models", chaired by Ruth Weisberg.

any of the more recent paintings that made reference to my own image. Instead I focused on earlier work, including *Strategy of the Weak* (1995, 8 ¾ x 11 ¾ inches) in the Whitney Museum of American Art collection. It seemed, in that particular context, that it would be a breach of professional decorum to introduce more recent work that included images of me but self-censoring continued to irritate me.

Ruth Weisberg's call for papers was an opportunity to break the silence and confront the odd situation complicated by the fact that I am not a professional model fully accepting that I might be putty or more specifically pigment in the hands of another. And Claude Lantier certainly was not taking me in on a cold rainy night as Christine in Zola's well-known 1886 novel *The Masterpiece*. On the other hand I was and am a willing participant in the process. I agreed without quite knowing to what I was agreeing.

As one who by profession addresses art works, it was uniquely challenging to be a subject in a painting. I started to ask questions. What does it mean to be a model but resist being a subject? How has my resistance to being a subject affected the work? Can I really resist? How do the images bear meaning in general and in particular? And how does one consider the relationship of painting to image? What is the relationship between one's image and self? When considering other models in paintings, what insights do my empirical experiences give my art historical methodology?

What does it mean to be a model? Sometimes a model may be a muse; a muse and a model are not the same thing although they often overlap. A muse by definition inspires but may not appear in a work. On the other hand, he or she may indeed appear. Mark rarely paints people who are not close friends or family members. In that sense we, all of us in the paintings, are muses.

And certainly I am complicitous. I agree to be in the paintings. Despite knowing what the fate of my image might be—a truncated figure with the body of a cockroach (an x-wife), or a hybrid creature with the body of a lizard (a former and beloved girl friend)—despite this potential fate, I believe in art and the artist; I support the cause in the broadest sense and in the particular.

But then what? When a painter works from life, the model is in a constant dynamic with the artist. There is a kind of breathing, back and forth as documented in James Lord's well-known account *A Giacometti Portrait*, a tale of seventeen days sitting for Alberto Giacometti.

But Mark Greenwold does not work from life; he works from photographs. One agrees to the initial photo session and participates heavily in that session. For example, in *Why Not Say What Happened* (2003-4, 19 x 17 inches) I suggested the mirror, thinking it would be easier to look into the mirror than the camera. I did not see the painting for almost a year which happens to be the average amount of time it takes the artist to make a major painting.

Another example of my participation involves the red turban. One

morning, Mark Greenwold came downstairs with my red scarf wrapped around his head. Looking from the kitchen to the hall way, I was taken by the cranberry red against the celadon green. "Wait," I said, "I have to take a picture." And yes, I was also thinking of Jan van Eyck's *Man in Red Turban* (1433, 10 x 7.5 inches). But then one waits a year or more, not knowing how the image will be manipulated, condensed, morphed, transformed. One has a sense that the work is going well, or badly or very badly. And if the personal dynamic between me and the artist becomes dicey, I start to imagine I'll soon be one of those monstrous creatures. Frankly, at times it feels a bit like blackmail.

In *Study for the Excited Self* (2006, 7 x 5 inches), where we once again see the red turban, the reference to Lucy is in the abstraction above the head which contains an obscure alphabet soup arrangement of the letters: "L" "u" "c" "y" which in this case spells relief.

On the other hand, when I first saw *Never the Same Love Twice* (2006-2007, 20 x20 inches), I was at the time outraged. I had told the artist that I did not want to be naked, although I don't know what could be more naked than agreeing to be on this panel. I thought this is it, no more. I don't agree. Fay Hirsh's 2008 *Art in America* review stated, "She seems to be listening, amused; Lucy, wearing a clinging dress, stands nearby in an echoing pose, her nipples erect."[4] I did not think my body parts should be discussed in the art press. But again, it is not Lucy, it is a painting which includes an image. Ahh but the power of images! I will return to that point shortly.

In a portrait/painting of the artist's shrink *Edmund* (2006, 13 ¾ x 10 ¾), my image becomes the embodiment of distress and angst, not exactly the Olympian calm I was specifically educated to emulate. Yet, having an absolutely transparent face, by which I mean the polar opposite of a poker face, my visage does become great raw material to make an image of distress.

Again, the face or image is just a vehicle for something else. When—at a 2007 ten year retrospective of the artist's work at D.C. Moore Gallery in Manhattan—Edmund's wife, whom I had never met, asked me, "What are you doing sitting in my husband's lap?" I spontaneously responded, "I'm just a stand in for Mark." And also, the composition allows for a "gender-bender" spin on a Christian image of Madonna and child.

So why do it? Why agree? Well, being seen is so soothing, so affirming. It is almost synonymous with being loved. When someone sees you, there is a personal affirmation. Infants have been known to refuse to eat unless the mother figure is actually looking at them. To walk into a room or group and have every one greet you feels great; to have no one acknowledge you can feel shameful. Being seen is a primitive and deep kind of love. It is hard to resist-even when what the other party sees is not quite what you would like him or her to see. There is always the promise of the person looking again, the very root of the word "respect."

Here I might also mention the recent controversial article in the *New York Times Magazine* about females responding to attention.[5] And then further back in time, one might think of the first reality show from 1970s *The Loud Family* in which the wife ends up having an affair with the camera man. He certainly was looking at her.

To recap, there is something deep and appealing about being considered, observed, but there is also on my part ambivalence. So, where—if at all—does the resistance play a part? On a practical level, all I do is keep my clothes on. That act or position is one kind of resistance. Consequently, the artist brings in others who will be naked as in *Passionate Friends* (2008, 11 x 14 inches). By not being totally pliable, I flatter myself in thinking my position adds a point of tension and restraint that is welcome in such hot house environments.

Recently, though, I asked my students, who are studio and graphic design majors, does the model have any control over the artist? There was a unanimous cry of absolutely not! The artist is in total control. Am I deceiving myself then in thinking that the history of art is riddled with reluctant muses?

What about the infamous Victorine Meurant in Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) staring back and the then even more strident two years later in *Olympia* (1865)? Certainly, the curiosity the figure arouses in the attuned observer drove Eunice Lipton to write *Alias Olympia*? —How strident and assertive the figure is compared to that melancholy, compliant bar maid in an admittedly equally mysterious painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881-2) where Manet employed a totally different model.[6]

The other famous case that comes to mind immediately is Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz about whom a great deal has been written.[7] My only contribution is that years ago, when I was researching Edward Steichen, I visited one of the elderly Strauss family members who showed me a photograph by Stieglitz of hands. The hands were in a similar pose to those that Stieglitz later made of O'Keeffe's hands but the photograph did not work. The hands were not convincing; they were not expressive. What I thought at the time was he needed the right muse to complete the idea. Yet in the case of O'Keeffe there too was resistance. She ultimately left for Santa Fe to escape the heavy Stieglitz air in New York and oh so green Lake George.

The broader point is that my own experience has given me an unexpected sensitivity to the inner workings of certain paintings and their process. A painting is not merely an expression of the artist. At some point, the work claims or sustains its own ontological independence. At that point, perhaps, the reluctant muses have agency. What might we say about Saskia, Marthe, Dora Maar, Quappi, or Ada? Scholars *have* addressed the topic: I am thinking in particular of Ruth Butler's book *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: Model-Wives of Cézanne, Monet & Rodin.*[8]

At this point, rather than exploring the rich art historical examples, I would like to address the philosophical image problem, the problem of representation that becomes so poignant when it is your own image at stake. In *A Moment of True Feeling* (2004-5, 21.5 x 32 inches) "I" am again confronted with fundamental questions about identity and even religion.[9] What is our relationship to images? to images of ourselves made by others? Is there such a thing as the discrete self? Recent theory has us questioning such a quaint modern notion. Is it just a power game, the one who has the most control over image circulation wins? —Maybe. Does this painting exist more as an image or a painting? Well, that depends on how and where you see the work.

Intellectually we know that as a painting and an image *A Moment of True Feeling* is not equivalent to the persons represented (Lucy, Katia, James, Mark and a Ken/Chuck hybrid) and yet if there is a psychological truth to the work due to precise observation and the labor intensive process that richly rewards close examination and recognizes specifics—that is my blue wool bathrobe in the painting and I have owned it for over 20 years—then one's most primitive side, dare I say "self" wonders is not a bit of the soul being stripped away? —Isn't this why there is such a strong prohibition against image making in certain religions? This condition does cause in me reluctance and yet, and yet still believing in *the painting* more than the image, I continue to be equally dismayed and delighted by the next work.

In conclusion, there is something profound about being a model/muse. There is an experience of being used, but also of something being offered. As such there is collaboration and the muse-model does indeed affect the spirit of the work. Contrary to my students' conviction, the muse/model is a catalyst for the unnamed thing,—dare I say Eros—that drives a painting and makes world transformations possible.

Notes

[1] In the interest of full disclosure, Mark Greenwold and I dated for seven years.

[2] Elizabeth Hollander mentions this pre-feminist condition in her essay "Working Models." See Elizabeth Hollander, "Working Models," *Art in America* (May 1991): 153.

[3] The paper was delivered in Strasbourg, France at the 2006 annual conference of the International Society of Philosophy and Literature.

[4] Faye Hirsch, "Greenwold's Confessions," *Art in America* (February 2008): 114.

[5] Daniel Bergner, "What Do Women Want?" *New York Times Magazine*, 29 January 2009, p. 6 of 8, online.

[6] Ruth E. Iskin, *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38.

[7] See: Belinda Rathbone, *Two Lives, Georgia O'Keeffe & Alfred Stieglitz: A Conversation in Paintings and Photographs* (New York: Callaway Editions in associa-

tion with the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C., 1992); Peter-Cornell Richter, *Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz* (Munich: Prestel, 2001); Richard Whelan, "Georgia O'Keeffe," Part IV in *Alfred Stieglitz: A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press 1997).

[8]See: Ruth Butler, *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: The Model-Wives of Cézanne, Monet, & Rodin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[9] Religious texts have unequivocally taken a stand. The image is not the thing and heaven help you if you confuse the two. The passage from T*he New American Bible*, Book of Wisdom, Chapter 13, verse 10 reads: "But doomed are they, and in dead things are their hopes, who termed gods things made by human hands..." To confuse image with the "real thing" is to commit idolatry, to worship a false god. The biblical text is referring to God and false gods; I am referring to each one of us and our respective images; I am making a secular analogy with the religious model.

tion of her career. In New York starting in the 1950s, Sokolow's choreography retained the urgency of presenting fairness for humanity, but it shifted thematically to represent more universal themes, with movement drawn, in the tradition of the Stanislavsky Method, from performers' own experiences to craft their characters within the context of each work.[5]

During the 1950s, Sokolow gained widespread recognition as a leading choreographer of the twentieth century. This was also a time of assimilation for American Jews, who increasingly moved from cities to the suburbs. Upward mobility and privilege came with assimilation. Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson introduces the social and political construction of Jews as Caucasian in the postwar era, with the advantage of white privilege.[6] In the postwar era Jews were considered Caucasian in the U.S., a shift tied to upward mobility and class as Russian-immigrant New York Jews transitioned from working-class status on New York's Lower East Side to white-collar suburban jobs. Jews on the concert stage experienced a similar shift. There is a connection between the assimilation of the American Jewish community, the changes in Sokolow's choreographic themes, and the critical dance establishment's acceptance of Sokolow as a prominent artist; the arc between *Kaddish* and *Rooms* illustrates this development. In the 1930s, leftist and mainstream critics alike championed Sokolow's choreography with varying attentions to her politics, which aligned with Communist ideology. In the 1940s, aligned with trends in dance criticism, mainstream critics at times marginalized Sokolow through the racialist language they used in their reviews; they termed the work "ethnic," which diminished the aesthetic and communicative importance of Sokolow's dances with Jewish themes, even though she used modernist craft to make them. Dance scholar Naomi Jackson acknowledges this ethnic/high modernist dichotomy, stating, "when it came to the 'other,' it seemed as if ethnicity and race were often read as significant and by implication subtly dismissed as less 'pure' than the modern dance of the Big Four... the very label, 'Jewish dance,' in a way exists as a subtly deprecating term."[7] Sokolow shed this negative label in the 1950s, where critics largely hailed Sokolow's new work, specifically the non-narrative *Lyric Suite* (1954) and *Rooms* (1955), as examples of modernist craft.[8]

Sokolow originally choreographed *Kaddish* in 1945 in Mexico City. During World War II, many American Jewish choreographers made dances with Jewish themes to stand in solidarity with Jews worldwide during the Holocaust. This was the first time the majority of these secular dancers choreographed work with overt Jewish themes. In a 1943 interview in which she discussed her work *Songs of a Semite*, Sokolow said that she was "one of the people who never thought particularly about being a Jew until the war started and now she wants to express herself passionately on the subject."[9] These themes reflected Biblical stories and Jewish culture, but did not directly refer-

ence the Holocaust. During World War II, choreographers in the U.S. did not use the Holocaust as thematic material. Many Americans did not know the details of the concentration camps, and there was social resistance, stemming largely from within the Jewish community, to making art about it. American Jewish artists and dancers feared rising U.S. anti-Semitism between 1940-1946.[10] Jewish dancers who escaped the Holocaust were discouraged from putting those images into their work on U.S. soil, as according to dance scholar Judith Brin Ingber, the Holocaust "was a taboo to dance or to discuss."[11] While some believe that because artists in the U.S. had not seen Holocaust images, they could not create visual art in response to them,[12] others challenge the opinion that Jews, in large cities at least, did not know what was going on in Europe.[13]

The World War II era also ushered in a new discourse of inclusive representation for the American Jewish community, despite the U.S. government's initial denial of European Jewish refugees. Through the Progressive Era, Jews, along with other European immigrants, were considered non-white and a threat to morality and Christian values; however, with the rise of Nazi Germany, American Jews were instead racially brought under the umbrella construct of Caucasian for protection as Nazi actions called racial policies into question.[14] Additionally, a larger acceptance of Jews as integrated into United States society at the end of World War II related to a postwar religious pluralism in addition to (or perhaps part of) whiteness.[15] While Jewishness intersects with discourses of whiteness throughout American history, I also use the construct of whiteness here as it relates to representation in mid-century modern dance.[16]

Kaddish was the last in Sokolow's series of wartime Jewish-themed dances. The title references the Jewish Mourner's Kaddish, and the piece was a memorial for Holocaust victims. The Allied victory in Europe and the liberation of Holocaust concentration camps occurred in May of 1945. While many European Jews remained in Displaced Persons camps at the time of the *Kaddish* premiere on August 20, 1945 in Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes, the war was over.[17] Mourning continued for the international Jewish community as more details of the death camps surfaced. The American premieres of *Kaddish* came nearly a year later, on May 4, 1946 in Boston's Jordan Hall, and on May 12 at the 92nd Street Y, where the Holocaust and its aftermath remained at the forefront of Jewish discourse in New York City.[18] While the Mexican premiere of *Kaddish* carried no details about the dance, a program note at the American premiere stated, "Prayer for the Dead."[19] *Kaddish* does not depict concrete images of the Holocaust, but nonetheless shows understanding and accusation of its atrocities. Unlike Sokolow's other wartime Jewish dances based on Biblical metaphor to portray images of strong, independent women of historical agency and little compromise, in *Kaddish* Sokolow makes a direct social statement about the Holocaust which was later echoed in her postwar Holo-

caust indictments in *Dreams* (1961), *Steps of Silence* (1968), and *In Memory of. . . 543246* (1973).

In the five-minute solo, Sokolow wore a dark tunic belted by a white rope, and *tefillin* (phylacteries), vestments made up of a leather strap and small prayer box, worn exclusively by Orthodox and Conservative Jewish men around their left arm and head during prayer. In the 1940s, women were forbidden to wear *tefillin*; thus, Sokolow's defiant choice opened a space for women's power in secular American Judaism, and in its representation in modern dance.[20] *Kaddish* is set to Maurice Ravel's *Deux Mélodies Hébraiques*, a breathy violin solo of minor notes in conversation with stark piano chords, with expectant pauses between phrases. In some versions of the solo, the performer bases the dance's internal timing on the rhythm of the Mourner's Kaddish. The Kaddish prayer, which Jews recite in the original Aramaic instead of in Hebrew, retains a soothing, refraining, comforting, pattering rhythm. The accompaniment of Sokolow's version possibly included a chanted version of the Kaddish paired with the Ravel score, as dance critic Margaret Lloyd noted the "wailing tones of voice" at the Boston premiere in 1946.[21] Sokolow felt that Ravel's music added depth to the piece, and she believed that one does not have to be Jewish in order to understand the Kaddish prayer.[22] She also explained in a 1990 interview, "Kaddish is the Hebrew prayer for the dead, so that the theme of the dance is a prayer. How Ravel uses it, the first section is almost like someone singing it. For me, the second section is the inner feeling about it."[23] The dance, a "quavering lament,"[24] includes spiraling turns, oppositional pulls and twists through the torso, a floor section rising onto knees and hips, impatient thrusts from the gut, and contemplative moments, wherein pain meets anger and emerges with quiet hope and defiance. The movement pairs strength with vulnerability; there is internal turmoil from the quick, weighted body rotations, the labored steps, and the inner changes in direction.[25] In a 1946 review, critic Albertina Vitak noted that Sokolow "still retains the intensity that first won her recognition in some of her early dances of protest and social significance, and that intensity is now more controlled and skillfully used."[26] This intensity carries through the contemporary re-settings of this dance. While many gestures, including beating the breast and tearing one's collar,[27] or shielding eyes from the heavens,[28] relate to Jewish ritualistic movements, the larger shape of the full-bodied movements, from torso contractions to throwing the body over a folding waistline, to recruiting limbs in the service of the back, are characteristic of the abstract shapes of mid-century modern dance.

In *Kaddish*, Jewishness and gender inform each other. Many aspects of Jewish ritual and culture are proscribed specifically for men or women, and prior to mid-twentieth century changes in progressive denominations of Judaism in the U.S., Jewish rituals and identity were tied closely to gender and to gendered power within Jewish culture.[29] As a member of the secular "second

generation" of American Jews, Sokolow was exposed to non-normative gender roles. Jewish women of Sokolow's mother's generation both headed the household and worked outside the home to support the family.[30] Many, like Sokolow's mother, participated in union activity and leadership, and Sokolow's 1930s Workers/New Dance League leadership aligned her with many aspects of Jewish women's activism.[31] In addition to "growing female liberation" in American Judaism,[32] Sokolow was privy to a period of strength in women's actions and agency during her time in postrevolutionary Mexico, experience that also reinforced her use of art as a mobilizing, revolutionary force.[33] *Kaddish* comes from a cultural moment where, for Sokolow, social action, Jewishness, and women's power converged.

Kaddish is powerful because in it, Sokolow transgresses her position and takes on a man's agency as a necessity in the face of larger tragedy, and she also crafts an aesthetic statement through a secular art medium. While Jewish law prohibits women from wearing *tefillin*,[34] and it seems, as dance scholar Naomi Jackson comments, that "nothing could be farther from Jewish tradition than a woman dancing around a stage in bare feet wearing *tefillin*,"[35] *Kaddish* does reflect Jewish tradition and Sokolow's connection to Jewishness therein. Sokolow mobilized the historical strength of Jewish women within the context of revolutionary women's actions to make a dance that was at once a pointed political statement, and an intimate yet public prayer that became a point of pride for a healing Jewish community. Jews were not allowed to have *tefillin* in concentration camps; the Nazis stripped Jews of all visual symbols of Jewish significance and replaced them with yellow Stars of David.[36] In *Kaddish* Sokolow reclaims *tefillin* for those who were denied them, while also making them a marker of religious freedom. So many Jews were killed in the Holocaust that there were not enough people to say Kaddish for the dead. In *Kaddish*, Sokolow becomes a universal everyperson, reclaims Jewish ritual, and says *Kaddish* for those who had no one to say it for them.[37] The words of the Mourner's Kaddish do not mention death, but peace. Through her embodiment of male space, the use of her body as both a political site and one of ritual, and the way she crafted *Kaddish* within the aesthetic conventions of concert dance, Sokolow twisted patriarchal traditions to suit contemporary needs.[38] Through this action Sokolow not only defined herself as a Jew, but she also brought female identity into Jewishness where it was previously unacknowledged while creating a wide-reaching appeal for peace.[39]

As I introduced above, in her first performances of *Kaddish*, Sokolow reportedly lay *tefillin* around her arm.[40] However, 1946 reviews of the piece do not mention the *tefillin* at all,[41] and in photographs included with publicity materials from 1948 Sokolow removed the *tefillin* altogether.[42] How, then, did the audience—specifically the Jewish community—respond to the *tefillin*? Perhaps Sokolow's use of *tefillin* was altogether not as controversial as it may

seem.[43] In the weeks that followed Sokolow's 1946 performance of *Kaddish* at the Jewish cultural institution of the 92nd Street Y, the *Y Bulletin* carried no mention of *Kaddish* or of any fallout from Sokolow's performance.[44] Mention of Sokolow's dance did not appear in the *Jewish Daily Forward* in the weeks following her concert, and New York reviews neglected to mention the *tefillin*.

Reviews from Mexico City and Boston reflect a similar lack of reaction to a woman donning *tefillin*. In a review reprinted in *Tribuna Israelita*, a secular Mexican Jewish periodical, José Herrera Petere exclaims mostly about how Sokolow's concert opened his eyes to how modern dance could be an empowering vehicle of social statement, especially for Jewish voices in the wake of the Holocaust.[45] Jules Wolffers focuses on the formalist aspects of Sokolow's performance in Boston's *Jewish Advocate* of Sokolow's May 4, 1946 performance there, and simply notes that the Jewish dances on the program were "intelligently worked out."[46] Most likely, Orthodox Jews did not attend a secular modern dance performance, and the Jews who were there did not find it significant enough to be bothered.

While the lack of negative response to the *tefillin* suggests it was not an issue, I argue that the *tefillin* represent a larger current in American Jewry that at once addresses the Holocaust and foreshadows the postwar assimilation of the "second generation." The *tefillin*, which are a sign of Jewishness, which was outside mainstream society, were also a tool of empowerment. Jewish concert dancers like Sokolow faced an increasingly progressive Jewish audience who expected superb modernist craft, even—or especially—in dances with Jewish thematic material.[47] *Jewish Life*, a national monthly periodical that began in 1946, highlighted Jewish artists, included prose and poetry, encouraged debate, and reported recently-surfaced stories of ghetto uprisings across Europe during the Holocaust—all in an apparent concerted effort to unite American Jews with a new pride in their common Jewishness in the wake of World War II's destruction. The magazine engaged a progressive, secular Jewish population, and as such the art discussions revolved around form and technique as much as they addressed Jewish content.

During this time many Jews, especially Holocaust survivors, questioned or turned away from religion due to their disillusionment from the Holocaust. Most likely, Sokolow's progressive Jewish audiences saw the *tefillin* as a marker of Jewishness, and nothing more. Since Sokolow was a prominent high art choreographer, moreover, the *tefillin* probably gave her Jewish audiences a sense of pride for her visibility as a Jew in an otherwise mainstream modernist context. In a mixed audience of Jews and non-Jews, the *tefillin* were possibly a silent triumph for the Jewish community instead of an ignition of religious scandal.

After Sokolow premiered *Kaddish* on her 1945-1946 tour, she infrequently presented the dance through the 1940s. In the 1970s, she started to

thetic and thematic shift in the late 1940s. Following dance critic Gertrude Lippincott's 1948 call for apolitical abstract expressionism in modern dance,[63] 1950s modern dance began reflecting modernist ideals of universality that many choreographers had not emphasized since the early 1930s. Abstraction abounded in the work of younger choreographers, while more established choreographers like Martha Graham and José Limón used universalized representative narrative in line with what dance scholar Susan Manning terms mythic abstraction.[64] While the 1950s abstraction was perhaps an attempt to shield the dance community from the perils of McCarthyism, the lack of a storyline became suspect. The mid-1940s-1950s saw clear storylines and proscriptive plots in art and literature, while abstract expressionism, such as the work of Merce Cunningham and Alwin Nikolais, was initially viewed as suspect because it had no storyline.[65] Sokolow's 1950s work included elements of both narrative story and abstract expressionism. Her work did not feature the intricate narratives or mythic abstraction of Graham's epics, and she shared the thematic embodiment of Cunningham's work. However, unlike Cunningham's work, Sokolow constructed non-linear narrative structures based on her dancers' characters' plights. *Rooms* is one of these dances.

In the 1950s, Sokolow's work shifted from leftist and Jewish themes to universal themes of alienation and isolation, while using a movement vocabulary that both came from creating characters that included arched backs, reaching arms, and dropping body parts into the floor, and those that included rounded, codified shapes which closely reflected the dominant, classical modern dance techniques of the Big Four (Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm). Dance scholar Gay Morris discusses how modernism in dance, once a liberating force in the 1930s, had become limiting by the 1950s but the choreographers did not yet break the modernist rules as they would in the 1960s with early postmodern dance.[66] She identifies a 1945 shift in modern dance and its historically political overtones in the context of the early Cold War: "Modernism, which largely had been intended to give artists control over their work, was by 1945 being actively co-opted by the very forces it had been meant to counter."[67] While Sokolow's 1950s work retained the angst and statements about humanity of her pre-1950s work, she began working under a more polished movement veneer that reflected the choreographic rules and techniques of 1950s high modernism, and she made statements in more universal, instead of specific or personal, terms.

Sokolow's 1950s work also reflects the whiteness assimilation of the American Jewish community. In the 1950s Jews faced what anthropologist Karen Brodkin terms "ethnoracial ambivalence," a white ambivalence to which Jews were now privy.[68] Instead of distancing themselves from blackness, as they did in the previous generation's assimilation efforts, Jews had to choose how far, if at all, to distance themselves from *Yiddishkeit*.[69] While Sokolow's

Yiddishkeit-influenced ideals, prominent in the 1930s, remained in her 1950s work, her choreography visually changed to look more like the abstract expressionism of Lippincott's abstraction call. Sokolow's Jewishness remained, however, in the works' layered yet dissonant structures and in their open endings with many answers.

For this discussion, I focus on the middle three sections of *Rooms*: "Escape," "Going," and "Desire," with a brief mention of the "Finale." The piece retains the values of high modernism; these values reinforced Sokolow's development as a choreographer and her acceptance by the modern dance establishment. This acceptance reflected her larger assimilation into concert dance and, as a Jew, into American society. Although Sokolow was a popular choreographer with both the leftist and mainstream presses in the 1930s, critics represented her 1940s work, which included a series of traditional Mexican-themed dances, in addition to the Jewish-themed dances, as Other in their reviews. The critical establishment's re-acceptance of her work in the 1950s cemented her (assimilated) place in the concert dance canon.

"Desire," the central section of *Rooms*, begins with three men and three women, seated in chairs clumped together in the middle of the stage, angled to face different directions. Slightly slumped in their chairs with their upper torsos arched to the ceiling, the dancers slide and retract their feet along the floor on the beat of the music. Their arms rise to rest, extended, in front of their torsos and are then affected by spiraling pulls through the dancers' backs. The dancers' chins rest on their chests before they shoot their left legs out behind them; they each grasp the back of the chair while dropping their heads backwards. Soon, the dancers lie supine on the floor, paired into parallel couples, lined up heads to feet. They roll back and forth, cupping their bodies into long, full-body contractions, which eventually pull them to their elbows, where they lift a leg and entwine it with one of their partner's. After this seemingly painful orgy, the dancers retreat to their chairs, grasping them for dear life before rising to sit again, where they repeat the movements from the beginning of this section, as their sliding heels keep time. "Desire" ends with the dancers each standing on their chairs, looking down at the floor.

In "Escape," the soloist woman begins seated in a chair at stage left. She prepares to go out, or fondly remembers a date, as she returns several times to a mimed hand-held mirror. Her initial head circles grow into larger circles of her full torso with bent, broken elbows before she runs through the empty scattered chairs. In quick, syncopated snatches, she grabs folds of her skirt over the opposite knee, crossing her arms through the double grasp before she releases the fabric as she thrusts her arms into a skyward V shape, with her sternum following. She bends her elbows downward in quick succession, covering first her right, then her left eye with her flat palms, creating asymmetrical angles in her upper body under her covered face. As her hands

rain down her sides, her pulsating right hip keeps a syncopated beat against the music. The dancer runs from chair to empty chair, pausing here, sharing a leg lift with a chair there. She collapses on one chair, splaying her legs. She rocks back and forth before scooping the air up with her hands and closing everything into her center, then throws it all skyward. The soloist rearranges two chairs to face each other, creating a long surface bookended by the chairs' backs. She sits down on one of these chairs, sharing a rocking embrace with the opposite chair's invisible inhabitant. After a frustrated, unanswered moment, the woman walks away from these chairs to return to her empty one.

The following solo for a man, "Going," was triumphed in reviews as a solo of jazz dance. The score, which until this section consisted of a lonely trumpet against pounding drums of varying intensity, now shifts to an orchestration reminiscent of big band swing with a quickly syncopating snare drum. The dancer begins, seated cross-legged in front of his chair, snapping and popping his shoulders to the beat. After rising and sharing some quick weight shifts with the chair, he walks forward, crouched over, and snaps his fingers on the downbeat similarly to the opening of *West Side Story*. The dancer performs a series of "trenches," wherein the body cantilevers forward, the arms are out to the side for balance, and the legs swiftly take turns kicking behind the body. These trenches lead into an intense boxing match, with syncopated punches over quick feet against an imagined opponent. The solo ends as the dancer sits back on the floor with his back against his chair. His torso arches skyward, and his arms extend to the low space next to his hips. He snaps his fingers and isolates his shoulders on the beat as he brings his arms up to meet his gaze.

This section not only features the jazz score, but many movement elements idiomatic to jazz dance, which grew out of the Africanist tradition in the United States. The dancers in all sections of *Rooms* have an intense, complacent focus that has a shade of the Africanist-influenced hot/cool focus that dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild identifies as one of the elements present in American jazz forms, with hot energy underneath a cool composure.[70] Dance scholar Kariamu Welsh-Asante identifies seven movement aspects central to Africanist-based dance, of which jazz is a form, including isolation and syncopation.[71] The irony and dissonance in the movement from the jazz presence lends Sokolow an additional compositional layer. Additionally, the words Gay Morris writes of *Lyric Suite* are also true of *Rooms*: "Her theme made its effect through accumulation, one segment added to another to reinforce a point, rather than through a series of causal events."[72] This idea of movement accumulation to "reinforce a point" is also an element of dance of Africanist origin as defined by Welsh-Asante, in furthering intensity through repetition.[73] Sokolow uses these Africanist and jazz elements elsewhere in her choreography, but they are especially clear in "Going."

The final section of *Rooms*, "Finale," features all eight dancers, writh-

ing in the alienation of their isolated lives and in their lonely apartments. After building on movement patterns repeated during the full piece, they all sit silently in their chairs with their hands resting on their thighs. As seven dancers are still, one woman circles her right arm and seems to wave her hand over her head. She slowly walks around her chair and gingerly returns to her seat. Did she just decide not to jump out her window or hurl herself off the top of her building? The concluding blackout allows all unanswered questions to linger.

In a review of his second viewing of *Rooms*, critic George Beiswanger compared the piece to the work of Dante, Sartre, Thornton Wilder, and Dostoevsky, discussing the contemporary hell that Sokolow successfully portrays. He wrote, "Certainly one 'gets' *Rooms* the first time. . . . But to get it again and again, as one did the first time, one must face up to the dance's artistic demands."[74] Later in the review, which filled nearly three pages of the periodical *Dance Observer*, Beiswanger praised not only the thematic impact, but also the craft of the work: "*Rooms*, too [like Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*], is tied together: it has a basic vision and a grand design."[75] Not only did Beiswanger herald the dance as worthy of inclusion in the high modernist dance canon, but he further held it up as a peer to high literary culture, putting Sokolow on par with widely respected thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Critic Doris Hering also praised the crafted structure of the work: "The strength and vitality of the choreographic structure could not help but encase the whole in a cloak of affirmation."[76] Additionally, Hering wrote of this "beautiful new work", "but underlying its bleakest moments is the current of human generosity and kindliness that illuminates true art."[77] The comment about "true art" links Sokolow to the celebrated universality of modern concert dance. The darkness of *Rooms* began Sokolow's reputation as a choreographer of darker themes, to the point that critic Clive Barnes quipped in the 1960s, "Anna Sokolow is prophet of doom. . . . Fun she hasn't. Intense and honest she is."[78]

Sokolow's use of alienation and jazz helped brand *Rooms* as American in the 1950s. Both jazz and urban settings related directly to modernity, and jazz and alienation were woven into American society and identity. According to Morris, "Alienation had always been closely connected with modernity, but the concept took on particular force in the 1950s. . . by the end of the decade, it had worked its way into the general vocabulary of the country."[79] *Rooms* reflected this, and this is another way that Sokolow's work reflected society.

Jazz also became associated with the notion of being American in the 1950s. Penny von Eschen discusses the decision of the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA), part of Eisenhower's President's Emergency Fund for International Affairs, to export jazz as American, whereby jazz was "embraced by U.S. officials as a uniquely American art form. Government offi-

cials and supporters of the arts hoped to offset what they perceived as European and Soviet superiority in classical music and ballet, while at the same time shielding America's Achilles heel by demonstrating racial equality in action."[80] This jazz-as-American notion was also prevalent in the dance community, as critics praised Sokolow's use of idiomatic jazz as something "American" and contemporary. Dance critic Selma Jeanne Cohen expressed this sentiment in a review of Sokolow's *Session for Eight* (1959): "Miss Sokolow continues her jazz studies as the true expression of our age."[81] The marriage of modern dance movements as whiteness, set to jazz from the Africanist tradition, bears mention. Sokolow, like other artists of the time, incorporated Africanist vocabulary into her work. While this appropriated element was not acknowledged as such at the time,[82] Sokolow's connection to it is significant in light of her own assimilation.

There is also an element of Jewishness in *Rooms*, as with *Kaddish* and nearly all of Sokolow's works. She finished her dances with rough open endings, and often finished a dance with a question or an accusation of the audience. In an interview from the film *Anna Sokolow: Choreographer*, Sokolow remarks about the ending of *Rooms*, where the dancers' fates are unclear: "That's the Jew in me. Ask the world a question, and you get no answer."[83] This comment relates to the Jewish tradition of teaching through questioning, and it also reflects many Jews' sentiments in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The Jewishness in *Rooms* melded with the modernity of the movement patterns and the jazz of the music and some of the movements; this reflects Sokolow's assimilation, both as a modernist choreographer and as an American Jew.

Rooms shows how Sokolow's 1950s work reflected the larger developments in the assimilation of the American Jewish community. In the dance, Sokolow's longstanding radicalism comes through in her scathing comment on the alienation of 1950s society. Her 1950s work, praised by the modern dance establishment for fitting more closely to its ideals, gained its modernity and a sense of Americanness through urban themes and the use of jazz. Whereas the idea of being Jewish as a general American cultural aspect came to the fore in the 1950s, especially in comedy routines and in popular culture,[84] Jewishness also formed new tenets of modern dance for the second half of the twentieth century. Sokolow began to define concert dance as she worked: her choreography from the 1950s onward defined a generation of modern dancers and set new standards for teaching and choreographic composition in American concert dance. *Kaddish* stood as a beacon for the American Jewish community as it faced the Holocaust's atrocities, and the dance later became a solo to embody Jewish identity. *Rooms* defined a generation of Americans burdened by the tensions associated with postwar affluence. The thematic development and changes in critical reception from *Kaddish* to *Rooms* reflected

comparable changes in American Jewish identity and assimilation in the post-war era.

Notes

[1] The "second generation" included the largely secular children of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who settled mostly in New York City during the immigration wave of 1881-1914. See Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 4-5, and Beth Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 7. Wenger expands this definition to include the general time period of the 1920s through the postwar era, extending the term to include the idea of "a cultural generation."

[2] See Julia Foulkes, "Angels 'Rewolt!': Jewish Women in Modern Dance in the 1930s," in *American Jewish History* 88/2 (2000), 233-252, and Linda Tomko, *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999) for the relationship between Jewish women and modern dance in the early 20th century.

[3] See Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997) for a full study of the workers dance movement.

[4] U.S. Department of State, Case control number 200001994, Sokolow, Anna. Obtained under Freedom of Information Act Exemptions (5 USC 552). New Dance Group Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Additionally, Michael Denning notes, "The IWO grew out of the socialist Jewish subculture that had blossomed in the immigrant ghettoes in the early decades of the century, particularly among garment workers, and that was represented by the Workmen's Circle, a Jewish mutual aid society." See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 74.

[5] Sokolow studied the Stanislavsky Method first during a trip to Russia in 1934, with the Theatre Union in New York in the 1930s, and later through her work with Elia Kazan and the Actors Studio in New York in the 1950s. Graff, 70-74; and Larry Warren, Anna Sokolow: *The Rebellious Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company Publishers, 1991), 51-60, 116.

[6] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 94-5.

[7] Naomi M. Jackson, *Converging Movements: Modern Dance and Jewish Culture at the 92nd Street Y* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 205.

[8] Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm—collectively referred to as the Big Four—created codified dance techniques. They represented the white, universalist dance establishment with a belief in transcending time and place in their choreography.

[9] Beth McHenry, "Anna Sokolow: Trip to Mexico," *Daily Worker*, September 20, 1943, 7, The Ohio State University Libraries.

[10] Matthew Baigell, *Jewish-American Artists and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 17; and Josh Perelman, "Choreographing Identity: Modern Dance and American Jewish Life, 1924-1954," (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 263.

[11] Judith Brin Ingber, "'I Wouldn't Cross the Street to See That': Modern Dancers Who Survived the Holocaust in America," in 2004 *Proceedings of Society of Dance History Scholars*, comp. Susan C. Cook (Society of Dance History Scholars, 2005), 65.

[12] Baigell, 18.

[13] Bette Roth Young, "The American Jewish Response to the Holocaust – a Reconsideration," *Midstream*, March/April 2007, 29-34.

[14] Jacobson, 103, 187-188.

[15] Deborah Dash Moore and S. Ilan Troen, "Introduction," in *Divergent Jewish Cultures: Israel and America*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore and S. Ilan Troen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 20-21. See also Daniel J. Elazar, "Changing Places, Changing Cultures: Divergent Jewish Political Cultures," in *Divergent Jewish Cultures: Israel and America*, 319-331.

[16] Performance studies scholar Richard Dyer notes, "This property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the source of its representational power." See Dyer, "White," in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 127. Dance scholar Susan Manning illustrates this representational power of whiteness, central to the work of the Big Four, in the postwar era, in her definition of whiteness in concert dance: "the performance convention whereby bodies in motion exercise the privilege of representing the culturally unmarked body, the universal or the individual body, rather than the culturally marked body, the body that bears the burden of representing a social or ethnic collective." See Manning, "*Ausdruckstanz* Across the Atlantic," in *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research*, ed. Susanna Franco and Marina Nordera (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 54.

[17] Presented by the Institute for Mexican-Russian Cultural Exchange, the program featured Sokolow and her Mexican-based dance group. Program, *El Instituto de Intercambio Cultural Mexicano-Ruso presenta el lunes 20 de Agosto de 1945 a las 21 hs. en el Palacio de Bellas Artes un Recital de danza moderna por Anna Sokolow y su grupo ballet*, Programs File, The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[18] On May 12, the day of Sokolow's New York *Kaddish* premiere, the "Arts" section of the Jewish Daily Forward featured photographs of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust. See "The condition of the surviving Jews in Poland is reflected in this picture," *Jewish Daily Forward*, May 12, 1946, Section 3, 1. Similar coverage appeared through at least June 2, 1946.

[19] Program, *The Dance Center of the Y. M. & Y. W. H. A. Season 1945-46 presents Anna Sokolow in a Recital*, May 12, 1946, 92nd Street Y Educational Department Records.

[20] Today, women in Reform and Reconstructionist denominations of Judaism may

lay *tefillin*, yet those in Orthodox and Conservative denominations are still discouraged or prohibited from doing so.

[21] Margaret Lloyd, "Dance Recital Presented in Jordan Hall," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), May 6, 1946, 4. Microtext Department, Boston Public Library.

[22] Anna Sokolow, interviewed on *Jewish Women in Dance*, VHS, pres. International Committee for the Dance Library in Israel (1990). Collection of Dance Library of Israel, Tel Aviv.

[23] Sokolow, *Jewish Women in Dance*.

[24] Doris Hering, "Anna Sokolow, YM & YWHA, February 1, 1948," *Dance Magazine*, March 1948, 41.

[25] I gleaned this observation through embodying the movement by reading the Labanotation score of one version of this dance. Through this embodiment, knowing Sokolow's work with the Stanislavsky Method, I can apply my own experiences of instability, and as an American Jew, my knowledge of the Holocaust, to inform the structure of the movement from the notation. Anna Sokolow, *Kaddish*, notated by Lynne Weber, 1974 (New York: Dance Notation Bureau, 1980; repr., 2007).

[26] Albertina Vitak, "Anna Sokolow, May 12 at the YM&YWHA Dance Theatre, N. Y.," *Dance News*, June-August 1946, 6.

[27] These movements appear in reconstructions of this work, specifically in those by Zall and Hadassah Segal. *Three Dances: Deborah Zall*. DVD, performed by Deborah Zall, produced by Deborah Zall and Niramon Ross (2007). Gift of Deborah Zall; Anna Sokolow, *Kaddish*, VHS, performed by Deborah Zall, produced by Michael Mandell (New York: Forest Hills Space, 1990). The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Anna Sokolow, *Kaddish*, performed by Deborah Zall, Anna Sokolow 100th Birthday Tribute, presented by Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble, February 14, 2010, 92nd Street YM/YWHA, New York City; and Anna Sokolow, *Kaddish*, unpublished videocassette, performed by Hadassah Segal (Ohio State University, 2000). Collection of The Ohio State University Department of Dance.

[28] Marthe Krueger, "Anna Sokolow in her *Kaddish*," photograph, 1948, Sokolow Dance Foundation.

[29] See Ann Pellegrini, *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt, eds., *Judaism Since Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); and Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, eds, *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) for discussions concerning the interrelations of discourses of gender and Jewishness. Additionally, clear gender divides between men and women remain in orthodox denominations of Judaism in the early twenty-first century.

[30] While women were the cultural guardians of Judaism, charged with keeping a Jewish home and raising Jewish children, in Orthodox and Conservative Judaism they were prevented from praying alongside men in synagogue. In Reform congregations, Jewish women gained power through their charitable work with

sisterhood organizations, but they were still wholly restricted from men's prayer space. In secular American society, leftover prejudices from late nineteenth and early twentieth century racialist discourses effeminized Jewish men. In a sense, Jewish women were thus doubly alienated, as their devaluation as Other replaced Jewish men as feminized Others. See Warren, 2; Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1995); Pamela Nadell and Jonathan Sarna, eds., *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press/ University Press of New England, 2001); and Alice Kessler-Harris, "Organizing the Unorganizable: Three Jewish Women and Their Union," in *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, ed. Pamela Nadell (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), 102-103, and 111. See also Ann Pellegrini, *Performance Anxieties* and Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, eds, *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* for discussion of the feminization of Jewish men and what space is left for Jewish women when Jewish men were considered feminine.

[31] See Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 107 for gender equality ideals of the Bund, the General Jewish Labor Union of Russia and Poland, and the political leadership of women associated with *Yiddishkeit*. See also Alice Kessler-Harris, "Organizing the Unorganizable"; Paula E. Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902," in *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, 116-128; and Wenger, 114-127. Additionally, Sokolow's mother was an active Socialist and one of the many Jewish women active in the ILGWU. See Warren, 4-6.

[32] Naomi Jackson, "Searching for Movement Metaphors: Jewishness in American Modern and Postmodern Dance," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 20/1-2 (2000), 141.

[33] While the Mexican government did not fully grant women suffrage until 1953, following a failed vote in 1939 under President Lázaro Cárdenas's swiftly-turning conservative government, and as such, women were not full citizens under the law, they performed their postrevolutionary citizenship through their embodied actions in ways more active than many women in the U.S. at the same time. Sokolow was in postrevolutionary Mexico during the aftermath of the initial defeat of women's suffrage, and was present during this time of strength in women's actions and agency. See Sarah A. Buck, "The Meaning of the Women's Vote in Mexico, 1917-1953," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910-1953*, ed. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience Schell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 73-98; Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); and Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, eds., *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

[34] Rabbi Shimon D. Eider, *Student Edition of Halachos of Tefillin* (Lakewood, NJ:

Halacha Publications, 1985), 3, 87, 89, 99, 103, 127.

[35] Jackson, *Converging Movements*, 16.

[36] Elie Wiesel, interviewed on *The Jewish People: A Story of Survivial*, PBS, June 2008.

[37] Thank you to Matt Goldish for this insight.

[38] While an examination of *Kaddish* seems to beg for a reading of *tefillin* as drag, they are less an instrument of theatrical travesty and more an instrument of transgressive political power. The *tefillin* do not render Sokolow's performance as the tension between male and female, as would a pair of *peyes*, but rather as a woman doing a man's job: praying in a way from which women were traditionally excluded, or literally embodying a privilege from which women were barred. While Sokolow's performance challenges a gendered reality, it does not mimic Jewish women's drag performance of the early twentieth century, wherein some dancers, including Pauline Koner and Belle Didjah, performed as Jewish men or as androgens. See Rebecca Rossen, "Dancing Jewish: Jewish Identity in American Modern and Postmodern Dance" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2006), 73-87, 93-95, and 144 for a full discussion of this construct, for Koner's performance of *Chassidic Song and Dance*, and for Didjah's performance of *Bar Mitzvah*. See also Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860-1920* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 40-60, 133. Erdman examines how Jewishness was performed and received on commercial American stages, both by Jews for non-Jews and vice versa, and thus how representations of Jewishness in the United States were constructed from these representations.

[39] Riv-Ellen Prell argues that in mid-twentieth-century sociological studies, Jewish women's and men's experiences were assumed to be the same, even though the studies undervalued women's contributions to Jewish life, and as a result women's experience was written out of Jewishness. See Riv-Ellen Prell, "American Jewish Culture Through a Gender-Tinted Lens," in *Judaism Since Gender*, ed. Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 79.

[40] Warren, 104 and Jackson, *Converging Movements*, 15, 194.

[41] David Zellmer, "Anna Sokolow: Y. M. & Y. W. H. A. May 12, 1946," *Dance Observer*, June-July 1946, 75-76; Walter Terry, "Four Solo Recitals Here Called Indicative Future of Dance," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 19, 1946, Dance Scrapbook, The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; Doris Hering, "Two Concerts," *Dance Magazine*, June 1946, 23-24, 26; and Vitak, 6.

[42] Two images of *Kaddish*, photographed by Martha Krueger (Sokolow Dance Foundation), which have been the most prominent in recent scholarly print, feature the *tefillin* on Sokolow's left arm, and her long, wavy hair is loose. In 1946, Sokolow sent one of these photographs to Bessie Schönberg, with a note on the back inviting her to the May 12 performance. Anna Sokolow to Bessie Schönberg, n.d., Box 11, Folder 17, Bessie Schönberg Papers, The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. While neither of these Krueger photographs are dated except by the date

of the *Kaddish* premiere (1945), Sokolow's dated note to Schönberg places that photograph as existing prior to May 12, 1946. In two later photographs of *Kaddish*, also by Martha Krueger (Sokolow Dance Foundation), Sokolow wears the *Kaddish* costume but without the *tefillin*. Similarly to the first two Krueger images with *tefillin*, these photographs are also dated with the 1945 date of the *Kaddish* premiere. However, one of the images accompanies Doris Hering's review of Sokolow's February 1, 1948 performance of *Kaddish* at the 92nd Street Y (and the original copy in the Sokolow Dance Foundation has the specifications for magazine publication written on the back), while the other is on a flyer advertising the February 1, 1948 performance at the 92nd Street Y. Doris Hering, "Anna Sokolow YM & YWHA February 1, 1948," *Dance Magazine*, March 1948, 41-42; and Flyer, *Dance Theatre presents Anna Sokolow in a program of New Dances Sunday Afternoon February 1st at 3:30*, 92nd Street Y Educational Department Records. It appears that Sokolow removed the *tefillin* from *Kaddish* between her American premiere of the dance and her next performance of it two years later, for reasons still unknown.

[43] Deborah Zall (dancer, teacher) in discussion with the author, October 17, 2009, New York City.

[44] Steve Siegel (92nd Street Y archivist) in email communication with author, January 21, 2010.

[45] José Herrera Petere, "¡Aleluya! en México," *El Nacional*, 24 August 1945, reprinted in "What the Mexican Press Says," *Tribuna Israelita*, 15 September 1945, 22-23. Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library.

[46] Jules Wolffers, "Anna Sokolow in Dance Recital," *The Jewish Advocate* (Boston), May 9, 1946, 22. Microtext Department, Boston Public Library.

[47] See V. Platon, "Thoughts on a Dance in Progress," *Jewish Life* 4/1 (1949), 36.

[48] Ze'eva Cohen (dancer, choreographer, teacher) in discussion with the author, February 14, 2010, New York City.

[49] Rona Sheramy, "'Resistance and War: The Holocaust in American Jewish Education, 1945-1960," *American Jewish History* 91/2 (2003), 297-298.

[50] Rossen, 144-209.

[51] Sheramy, 303-305.

[52] Sheramy, 301.

[53] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (1996; repr. Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1998), 14-15. Dixon Gottschild defines high-affect juxtaposition: "Mood, attitude, or movement breaks that omit the transitions and connective links valued in the European academic aesthetic are the keynote of this principle."

[54] Dixon Gottschild, 31.

[55] For this description of *Rooms*, I consulted the following versions: Anna Sokolow, *Rooms*, VHS, performed by Contemporary Dance Systems (1975). Collection of Dance Notation Bureau Extension Office, The Ohio State University; and Anna Sokolow, *Rooms*, performed by José Limón Dance Company, Anna Sokolow's *Rooms: The Centennial Celebration*, presented by José Limón Dance Foundation, Inc., February 9, 2010, Baryshnikov Arts Center, New York City.

[56] Deborah Zall (dancer, teacher) in discussion with the author, June 28, 2010, New York City.

[57] Gay Morris, *A Game for Dancers: Performing Modernism in the Postwar Years* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 88.

[58] Warren, 116 and 119-20.

[59] Anna Sokolow, quoted in Jean Battey, "The Dance – Choreographer Works Slippers Off Dancers," *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1967, n.p., Alan M. and Sali Ann Kriegsman Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[60] Jonathan Franzen, introduction to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, by Sloan Wilson (1955; repr. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002), viii.

[61] See Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*; Michael C. C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); and Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

[62] David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 528.

[63] Morris, 5-8; and Graff, 167.

[64] Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 118. Manning defines "mythic abstraction" as a choreographic convention which "staged universal subjects without the mediation of bodies marked as culturally other. . . [with] layered mythic narrative and abstract action."

[65] Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 238.

[66] See Morris, A Game for Dancers.

[67] Morris, *A Game for Dancers*, xiii.

[68] Brodkin, 185.

[69] Brodkin, 185.

[70] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Stripping the Emperor: The Africanist Presence in American Concert Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 335-336.

[71] See Kariamu Welsh-Asante, "Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, 144-151.

[72] Morris, 102.

[73] Welsh-Asante, 150.

[74] George Beiswanger, "New London: Residues and Reflections," *Dance Observer*, February 1957, 21.

[75] Beiswanger, 23.

[76] Doris Hering, "An Evening of Dance Works by Anna Sokolow: 92nd Street 'Y' February 24 and 28, 1955," *Dance Magazine*, April 1955, 77.

[77] Hering, "An Evening of Dance Works by Anna Sokolow," 75.

[78] Clive Barnes, "Dance: Anna Sokolow, Prophet of Doom," *New York Times*, n.d., n.p., Anna Sokolow Clippings, The Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The same article ran in the

Washington Post as "Anna Sokolow, Poet of Chaos." Clive Barnes, "Dance: Anna Sokolow, Poet of Chaos," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1968, 40. Alan M. and Sali Ann Kriegsman Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[79] Morris, 97-98.

[80] Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6.

[81] Selma Jeanne Cohen, "Anna Sokolow Dance Company, York Playhouse; Dec. 26-Jan. 3," *Dance Magazine*, February 1959, 28.

[82] See also Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*; Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance,* and Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[83] Anna Sokolow, interviewed on *Anna Sokolow: Choreographer*, VHS, produced and directed by Lucille Rhodes and Margaret Murphy (1980; Pennington, NJ: Dance Horizons Video, 1991).

[84] Brodkin discusses Jewish comedy in the 1950s, and the development of the American feeling that anyone could have a Jewish mother. See also Joyce Antler, ed., *Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 1998).

Looking and Moving: Kinesthetic Empathy, Dance and the Visual Arts

Robert R. Shane

> The painter "takes his body with him," says Valéry. Indeed we cannot imagine how a *mind* could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.
>
> —Maurice Merleau-Ponty[1]

> Living is an adventure, a form of evolvement which demands the greatest sensitivity to accomplish it with grace, dignity, efficiency. The puritanical concept of life has always ignored the fact that the nervous system and the body as well as the mind are involved in experience, and art cannot be experienced except by one's entire being.
>
> —Martha Graham[2]

As I stand before Henri Mattise's mural-sized painting *Dance (I)* (1909) in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, over a hundred years after its creation, I watch five dancers' nude bodies propelling off of the green earth into an expanse of blue sky, and I am liberated as my body is swept up into their circling movement. I feel myself moving with the painting. How is this sensation of dance—the sensation of leaping through space, the feeling of boundlessness, the pull of gravity on the body—expressed in this inanimate, two-dimensional object? The concept of dance is, of course, expressed literally through the title and the clear rendering of five people dancing in a circle. But

these do not constitute the origin of the feeling of dance movement that is generated within my body.

The answer to this question lies in part with Matisse's expressive application of paint. I can see and feel his hand's gesture. Over time, as I retrace his movements, I re-mark the terrain of the canvas with the artist. Faint orange lines between the legs of the figure on the far left reveal where in space and time that figure used to be, where the artist used to be, until he and his figure moved elsewhere. At certain moments, drips of paint slide down the surface of the canvas, pulled back to the earth by the same force of gravity acting upon the dancers themselves. In the texture of the green color-field below the dancers, I can feel the loose and energetic marks that the artist performed with his hand, his arm, his body across the entire canvas. I can hardly describe this to another person without gripping my hand as if holding a brush and wildly marking the air with my gestures.

But in addition to the painter's movement—which is perhaps not altogether different from the movement of a dancer—the sensation of dancing is expressed through form, or what Matisse called the "diverse elements at the painter's command to express his feelings."[3] The line my eye follows as it travels from one figure to the next whiplashes and undulates: the taught line of the figure on the left, which runs from ankle to breast like a bow, dips as it nears the armpit, then crawls upward in a tight turn around the elbow gaining tension, until its potential energy is released in a sudden burst that catapults it sideways across the top of the canvas; it coasts along the waves of the dancers' arms until dropping suddenly; pulled back by gravity down the right-hand side of the composition; but only to rise again, steadily, laterally across the canvas, always preparing for its next leap. Here my experience of the line, of a purely formal, painted element, is felt in my body as movement; a movement that is as exhilarating as watching the fall and recovery of José Limón's dancers in their play with gravity—a choreographer who incidentally began his career as a painter.

My experience of dance in Matisse's painting is an embodied experience. Witnessing the canvas as witnessing a performance—a performance both of the lived painter, but also of the painted elements that continue to perform with their own lives—my body is moved. I have become synchronized with Matisse's "state of condensations of sensations which makes a painting."[4] This is not a condensation of optical sensations alone, but of all the body's senses. My whole being is dancing, even when only my eye appears to be moving.

I.

Ut picture poesis, color as "inner sound" (that is, painting as music),

l'art pour l'art..., in the various combinations of comparing and contrasting the arts—or segregating them from one another—one combination that needs to be treated in greater depth is that of art and dance. We live in a time in which there is a renewed interest in the body and its affects in philosophy and art. There has been a revival of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the academy; psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's work is frequently used within philosophical circles; and the body has been a medium for some of the most significant art of our time, such as performance art (Vito Acconci, Carolee Schneeman) or abject art (Kiki Smith). Yet in trying to understand the body's relationship to art, it will be helpful not only to examine painting, as Merleau-Ponty did, or literature, as Kristeva has done, but also the form of art in which the body itself is the medium: dance.

Ultimately, I hope this paper to be a contribution to the study of the visual arts. I wish to do so, not merely by way of analogy between art and dance (as say, analogies have been made between literature and painting, or painting and music), but rather, by resituating the *origin of aesthetic experience in the movement of the body*. I will be claiming that the aesthetic experience the viewer has with "purely" visual works of art is, in fact, rooted in the lived and moving body. I am defending an assertion made by psychologist Miriam Roskin-Berger that kinesthetic empathy, a term used in dance therapy, plays "a role as the core of all dance and all nonverbal communication."[5] I am including art, specifically painting, as one of the forms of nonverbal communication that is rooted in kinesthetic empathy. My claim is informed by phenomenology, namely the work of Merleau-Ponty,[6] and an analysis of the discourses of twentieth century choreographers, artists, and critics.

A noteworthy text comparing art and dance is Elizabeth Watts's *Towards Dance and Art: A Study of Relationships between Two Art Forms*.[7] Among her many insights, she demonstrated that children's first drawings are driven by a kinesthetic motivation rather than a purely visual one, which usually develops later. The child first draws because she enjoys the pleasure of moving; and because scribbling continuous movement pathways on the wall, for example, is a way for the child to discover and define her body's relationship to the space around her.[8] Watts also showed how choreographer Rudolf Laban's theories of movement could be used to analyze the Abstract Expressionist paintings of Jackson Pollock.[9] Watt's primary concern was with the artist's *production* of both art and dance; she was showing how despite their differences, both mediums are expressions of childhood movement and adult kinesthetic awareness. In this paper, I would like to approach the topic by focusing on the viewer's *reception* of the two art forms, that is, I want to show how we as audience members view dance and art with our bodies, and how visually perceived movement—whether the dancer's movement, the painted gesture, or the abstract movement among forms in a composition—is meaning-

ful because of its relationship to our lived bodies.

The critical link between art and dance is established when we begin to think of the body as "the intertwining of vision and movement" as Merleau-Ponty described in the epigraph with which I prefaced this article. Movement is meaningful to us even when we the viewers do not actually move, because when we watch movement we still feel it in our bodies and with our entire being. Once this core idea has been established, then we can understand how it is that we are able to feel movement by merely looking at a painting.

II.

Modern choreographers and dance critics have tried to explain how the viewer experiences the movements and emotions of a dancer on stage. Their observations are significant for my study on art and dance presented here, because they will provide a foundation for explaining how the viewer can experience movement by merely watching something else move; this I believe can then be extended to an analysis of the process by which visually perceived forms in painting are experienced by the viewer as movement. In this section I would like to survey the theories of the German choreographer and dancer, Mary Wigman (1886-1973); American choreographer and dancer, Martha Graham (1894-1991); and the dance critic and proponent of modern dance, John Martin (1893-1995). Then I will try to unite their theories in light of recent research on kinesthetic empathy being undertaken by Dee Reynolds.

Mary Wigman was a part of a number of *Ausdruckstanz* ("expressionist dance") choreographers working in Germany in the early twentieth-century. As an expressionist, she believed that art could not be divorced from inner life, and that it was the primary task of the dancer to consider how she could transmit her inner life to the audience:

> The primary concern of the creative dancer should be that his audience not think of the dance objectively, or look at it from an aloof and intellectual point of view,—in other words, separate itself from the very life of the dancer's experiences;—the audience should allow the dance to affect it emotionally and without reserve. It should allow the rhythm, the music, the very movement of the dancer's body to stimulate the same feeling and emotional mood within itself, as this mood and emotional condition has stimulated the dancer. It is only then that the audience will feel a strong emotional kinship with the dancer: and will live through the vital experiences behind the dance-creation. Shock, ecstasy, joy, melancholy, grief, gayety, the dance can express all of these emotions through movement. But the expression without the inner experience in the dance is valueless.[10]

The dancer's movement and its corresponding mood are felt within the bodies of the audience members in Wigman's theory. "Dance, like every other artistic expression, presupposes a heightened, increased life response,"[11]that is, it becomes capable of enhancing our experience of living and being

Similarly for the American modern choreographer Martha Graham, dance divorced from its human element—an element which is both physical and psychical as she asserts in the epigraph at the beginning of this article—was meaningless. The goal of dance training was nothing less that to prepare the dancer "for the virtue of living."[12] Dance is an art, according to Graham, because it enhances one's "entire being." To view art with one's entire being, one needs to employ the mind and the body. She called the process by which the dancer transmits his or her experience to the audience "theatricality" (in her use this term does not imply exaggeration or melodrama):

> *What I say is based on one premise—dance is an art, one of the arts of the theatre.* True theatricality is not a vain or egotisic or unpleasant attribute. Neither does it depend on cheap tricks either of movement, costume, or audience appeal. Primarily, it is a means employed to bring the idea of one person into focus for the many. First there is the concept; then there is a dramatization of that concept which makes it apparent to others. [13]

How is it possible for the audience to identify with the inner life of the dancer as intimately as Wigman and Graham wished? For John Martin, an American dance critic and proponent of Graham and Wigman, the physical and emotional connection that the audience feels for the dancer is rooted in the body:

> Because of the inherent contagion of bodily movement, which makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertions he sees in somebody else's musculature, the dancer is able to convey through movement the most intangible emotional experience. This is the prime purpose of modern dance; It is not interested in spectacle, but in the communication of emotional experiences...[14]

Martin called this connection between the dancer's and viewer's minds made by their bodies "metakinesis." In concordance with Graham's theories, Martin insisted that we cannot split the mind and the body in our experience of dance, rather the two are always intertwined: "...we find that there is correlated with kinesis a supposed psychic accompaniment called metakinesis, this correlation growing from the theory that the physical and the psychical are merely

two aspects of a single underlying reality."[15] Martin claimed that metakinesis is what makes dance meaningful to us as viewers:

> Without [metakinesis] audiences would have had no more delight in watching a ballerina balance herself on one toe in defiance of gravity than they would have had in watching feathers float on the air. It was their own consciousness of gravity which held them to the earth that made them applaud the feat of someone else in defying it.[16]

The viewer brings to the dance her own body, and feels the dancer's movement within herself through metakinesis. According to Martin, a dance without metakinesis would be merely superficial, lacking in meaning.[17] (While metakinesis has always been operative between dancer and audience, Martin went on to credit modern dancers, beginning with Isadora Duncan, as the first to consciously employ it in the history of Western dance.)

The key concept from the aesthetic experience of dance that I believe is applicable to the aesthetic experience of art is the role of the vision within the body. I take delight in the dancer's defiance of gravity, and my body identifies with it through *watching* the dancer. Merleau-Ponty claimed that, "The visible world and the world of my motor projects are both total parts of the same being."[18] We can understand how events in the visual sphere are able to transmit tactile sensations and the feeling of bodily motion, if we follow Merleau-Ponty's lead and do not artificially isolate vision from the rest of the body's senses.

Most recently, Dee Reyonlds, scholar of modern languages, art history, and dance aesthetics, has been the principle researcher on The Watching Dance Project, a multi-disciplinary project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It includes researchers from diverse fields, such as neuroscience and art history, from University of Glasgow, Imperial College London, University of Manchester, and York St. John University.[19] Kinesthetic empathy is the key concept under investigation in The Project's work and can be used to unify the observations and theories of Wigman, Graham and Martin. Reynolds's work on kinesthetic empathy builds on the work of nineteenth-century German aesthetician, Theodor Lipps (1851-1914). In his two-volume *Ästhetik*, he explained his theory of *Einfühlung* or "in-feeling," usually translated as "empathy," that unites the mover and the watcher. As Reynolds translates and explains:

> "Einfühlung" is closely bound up with dynamism and involves inner mimesis or "Nachahmung," where the subject's identification with the object is indissociable from his/her imaginary enactment of its dynamics. In watching the acrobat, for instance, "I feel my-

> self in the optically perceived movement of the acrobat, so that in the acrobat as I perceive him, I feel myself striving and inwardly active." Because of this imaginary identification, contemplation of the object becomes inseparable from contemplation of the subject's own inner "activity."[20]

Reynolds demonstrates, by way of Lipps, the notion that vision and movement are intertwined in our bodily experience of the world, as Merleau-Ponty also argued. As we see the dance we imagine it in our bodies. (I will return to the topic of imagination below.) The bodily reactions that are initiated by the act of vision are a fundamental component of dance aesthetics.

III.

Empathy theory originated in the work of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German aestheticians like Lipps and Robert Vischer (1847-1933) before him. These theorists were developing a *Stilpsychologie*, or "psychology of style," which was a way of trying to answer a simple yet profound question: How is it that inanimate objects, such as paintings, can express feelings and meaning to us? It might appear rather easy for the viewer to identify with the dancer because of what Martin called "the inherent contagion of bodily movement"; but how does the viewer identify with a painting, which before it is a still-life, figure or landscape, is essentially pigment, oil and varnish on a flat canvas?[21] And how does the viewer identify with pure abstract painting which does not even have a real-world referent? What would cause a human viewer to be so moved by a non-human object as we so often are by art objects? At the end of the previous section, I concluded by way of Reynolds that it is not simply the viewer's identification with the body of the dancer that makes dance meaningful (as Martin claimed), but the imaginary process by which we receive visual stimuli from the dance and recreate them as movement within our bodies; that is to say, in Lipps's words, "optically perceived movement" is felt by the viewer as "striving and inwardly active." I would like to argue that when we speak of movement in painting—whether the trace of the artist's gesture on a canvas, or the compositional movement our eyes perceive as they are directed by a certain arrangement of shapes—then we are responding to painting in the same way that we respond to dance; the same kinesthetic empathy operative in our experience of dance is operative when we view a work of art. Or as Elizabeth Watts articulated this situation:

> A moving person who wishes to communicate by means of his movements must consider their visual projection; and in order to receive his communication, an observer must use visual percep-

tion.

> In this respect, dance and art share the medium of space, in which they are perceived by others as visual images.[22]

I quoted Reyonds's translation of Lipps above in relation to the movement of the acrobat, but Lipps also treated painting and nearly all of the arts through the lens of his empathy theory. His analysis of color is a good example of how empathy is operative in our experience of painting. As Reynolds summarizes: "In the process of 'Einfühling' [empathy], the subject feels totally at one with the object, and the object (for example colour) can be experienced as a living being."[23] To put this in the language of twentieth-century phenomenology, we could say, as Merleau-Ponty described: "Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence..."[24] As we were beginning to observe with respect to Wigman, Graham and Martin, the senses are not as differentiated as we generally think of them in the modern, Western tradition. We connect to other people's bodies and to the motion of their bodies through our sense of vision.[25] So too our bodies can establish connections with other sources of visual stimuli in art and the environment:

> Since things and my body are made of the same stuff, vision must somehow come about in them; or yet again, their manifest visibility must be repeated in the body by a secret visibility. Nature is on the inside," says Cézanne. Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them.[26]

While an art object may hang motionless on the wall, the painting that is happening within the borders of its frame is far from static. I experience its elements as form in motion through the same process of identification and imagination operative when viewing the body of a dancer moving on stage. For example, in Kazimir Malevich's painting *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918, Museum of Modern Art, New York) the artist positioned, slightly askew, a cool white square on a warm white canvas. The negative space below the square is greater than that above, so the shape appears to float; its diagonal placement makes it feel like it is moving upward and across the composition, heading into infinite space beyond the edges of the canvas. I feel the motion of this square resonate in my body; I feel its boundlessness as it moves through space. Through purely visual means, I have a kinesthetic experience akin to my experience of the dance; in both cases the work of art—whether human or abstract—provides an opportunity for my projection into and identification with visual stimuli in order to awaken kinesthetic resonances in my body.

An underlying premise here is that art is "doubly creative," as Henry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou explain in their reading of Kant in their introduction to *Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893* (an anthology of primary sources on empathy). There is, of course, the creative act of the artist which produces the artwork, but there is also the creative act of imagination in the person experiencing the work.[27] Here the lessons of dance aesthetics are critical to our understanding of art, particularly Graham's and Martin's warnings not to divorce the mind from the body. In an art form in which the medium is the body, it is easy to understand how the emotions and thoughts of the mind are intimately linked with actions of the body; but this link is not unique to dance. I view art with the same body and in the same way that I view dance: my body is ostensibly stationary, my eye follows the movement, and then I feel the movement in my own body. Imagination is an *embodied* process which recreates the activity of the art in my being. Merleau-Ponty, in a critique of the mind/body dualism of Western thinking, which parallels Graham's critique, justifiably located the imagination in the lived body. He wrote, "The imaginary is nearer than the actual body, because it is in my body."[28] Where else could the imagination exist if not inside my body; and what could it imagine if it did not have a sensible body from which to draw experiences and within which to creatively imagine them? (Such a way of thinking about the imagination means that even dream symbols can be read as projections of our bodies.)[29]

I do not want the connection between painting and dance to be read as a figurative analogy, but rather as a *literal* analogy. I am claiming that painting and dance belong to the same sphere because their locus is the intertwined relationship of vision and the lived body. This is the case for both the production of dance and painting—as Watts argued, even drawing requires an awareness of the feeling of the paper and movement as a dancer is aware of space[30]—and, as I have been arguing here, in the audience's reception of them.

IV.

There is the conception that the performing arts, such as dance and music, exist over specific spans of time, while the plastic arts exist in their entirety in the present. Watts claimed that dance requires a new act of visual perception at every moment, whereas painting is always seen in the whole at any one instant.[31] Accepting this distinction has had significant effects on our conception of the plastic arts. One thinks for example of Michael Fried's famous critique of Minimalism. The experience of Minimalist objects was for Fried no different than experiencing other objects in the world; we move around them through space and in time. Part of Fried's grievance with Minimalist "theatricality" is that it is an experience that happens over a duration of time;

modernist painting, by contrast, Fried argued is outside of time: "Presentness is grace" are the closing words of his article.[32]

I would like to contend, however, that while the experiences of time in painting and dance are not completely the same, they are not in fact as altogether different as generally assumed. Here it is helpful to recall the philosopher Henri Bergson's distinction between measured time (or clock time) on the one hand, and duration (or lived time) on the other.[33] Duration, Bergson claimed, "is real time, perceived and lived."[34] I do not believe that the viewer's experience of time in a modernist painting is part of an eternal present, but rather that it belongs to the lived time of duration. My experience of painting is very near to the experience of dance. I cannot tell how much measured time has passed after I have stood before a painting by Hans Hofmann and have lost myself in its color vibrations, gestural movements, and pulsating forms, any more than I can be sure of how long Doug Varone's *Lux* lasts as I am enraptured by the ecstatic movement of the choreographer's entire ensemble. The time of the painting is recreated in my body as the performance of shapes and color vibrations finds its "internal equivalent in me" just as the movement of the dancer arises in me a carnal-emotional empathy over a duration of time. Of course, I cannot rewind Varone's *Lux* the way I can shift my eye back to a particular shape in a Hofmann painting; but even when I do go back to that painted shape, my experience of it is new. I hold a history of having viewed it before, but I do so in the same way that I might recall a repeated motif in a dance. That shape is no longer the same for me after seeing other parts of the painting and holding them in my memory (much the way I hold the preceding notes of a melody as I encounter the present one). The experience of both painting and dance is recreated in real, lived time within my body.

Merleau-Ponty claimed that "...the art of painting is never outside of time, because it is always within the carnal."[35] The creative work done in my body by my embodied imagination happens in lived time; this is to say that the plastic work of art is not an inert object, rather it is always happening in lived time as I view it. As the American philosopher John Dewey observed:

> A work of art no matter how old and classic is actually, not just potentially, a work of art only when it lives in some individualized experience. As a piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains (subject to the ravages of time) self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art, it is recreated every time it is esthetically experienced.[36]

If we accept Dewey's claim, then the time of painting is like that of a performance and therefore very similar to the time of a dance. (Dewey continued by making a direct analogy between the experience of a painting and the recre-

ation of music every time a score is performed.)[37] We should not think of painting as temporally static or as being presented completely in a singular instant; rather, we must conceive of painting as continually happening. We should, as Merleau-Ponty asked us to do: "Consider, as Sartre did in *Nausea*, the smile of a long-dead monarch which keeps producing and reproducing itself on the surface of a canvas."[38] The experience of time in painting is an event, like the experience of a dance. As the elements of the painting recreate themselves on the surface—be they a monarch's smile or Malevich's square—they are performing.

V.

With respect to the creative act of experiencing a work, art and dance are structurally very similar. In each case, the experience of the work is a primarily visual event that I experience in time with my entire body. Compositional movement within a painting is visually perceived and corporally felt by the same process of empathy that is operative when watching dance movement. The embodied experience of painting is clarified when we think of painting in terms of dance aesthetics (an aesthetics that has always been concerned with the relationship between its artistic medium and the viewer's body). I have claimed that a common ground for the comparison between art and dance is possible because the origin of aesthetic experience is rooted in the movement of the body. Graham and Wigman believed that dance was not an art separate from our everyday bodies; rather in dance the dancer simply specializes in intensifying bodily experiences for the audience. "I have always thought first of the dancer as a human being," wrote Graham;[39] the difference between the dancer and the lay person is simply one of "degree and intensity" with respect to the application of movement principles.[40] Or as Wigman wrote:

> I feel that the dance is language which is inherent, but slumbering in every one of us. It is possible for every human to experience the dance as an expression in his own body, and in his own way. What we expect from the professional dancer is the creative dance in its most intense representation. We never insist upon such an intense representation from the lay-dancer.[41]

The same can be said of art: it is not isolated from our bodies' experiences in the world, but rather it is an intensification of them. Our bodies encounter the interactions of color, form, space, and in everyday life, but they are focused and intensified in our experience of a work of art. Through painting, the artist brings to the viewer a new intensity of looking and moving. If we conceive of the arts as aspects of our total creative human experience instead of as isolated

mediums—and if we see the arts as an intensification of aspects of our entire being—then it is impossible to simply pair-off and then segregate each art form with a single sense, (that is, to fallaciously claim dance is solely about movement for movement's sake and art is solely concerned with optical experience).

An aesthetic theory of the body and a kinesthetic theory of aesthetics call for an approach to the study of art and art history that is interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary studies are increasingly undertaken in academia, but they are still seen as an adjunct to specialized and established fields, such as art history. But if the body is the origin of aesthetic experience, then perhaps an interdisciplinary study of arts with respect to the body should be standard. The problem thus far has been that mainstream modernist doxa from the eighteenth-century German philosopher, Gotthold Lessing to the twentieth-century American art critic, Clement Greenberg has failed to address not only the bodily ground for the shared experience of the arts; but more significantly, with regards to the discipline of art history, it has relegated collaborations between artists and choreographers to curiosities at best, and heretical violations of the autonomy of art forms at worst. However, re-examining modern art in practice, one does not find a simple trajectory in which each medium purifies and isolates itself, as Greenberg once claimed,[42] but rather a rich history of collaboration among the arts. I believe artists and choreographers have understood intuitively the bodily resonances between their art forms. In the next few paragraphs I will list just a few of the many intersections between these two mediums and cite in the endnotes a sample of the current literature on the topic.[43]

Dance movement has been a concern for most of the canonical figures in modern art. Mattise, in addition to his paintings of dance, made costumes for two pieces by Léonide Massine in 1920 and 1939. Pablo Picasso, at one time married to ballerina Olga Kokholva, worked on seven ballets (six for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes) from 1917 to 1924. His first work was for Léonide Massine's *Parade* (1917) for which he also contributed to the libretto. Picasso even made movable décor for the dancers to manipulate in the ballet *Mercure* (1924). He also returned briefly to ballet again from 1960 to 1961. The cubist sculptor Henri Laurens designed sets for Darius Milhaud's ballet *Le Train bleu* (1924). The surrealist painter Salvador Dalí created the librettos, décor and costumes for three ballets: *Bacchanale* (1940), *Mad Tristan* (1944), and *Gala* (1961), (the first two were choreographed by Massine, the last by Maurice Béjart).[44] A year before his death, Béjart choreographed *La Vie du danseur* ("The Life of the Dancer") (2006) in which the performer, costumed like Dalí with moustache and all, performed a biographical homage to the late artist.

To truly understand modern architecture and design, we must look at the intersections between architects, designers and dance. For example we must look at the Bauhaus in terms of the lived body, a concept that seems at

odd with its pure, geometric design and unabashed use of industrial materials, until we read that its director, Walter Gropius, spoke of the arts' service to the body: "The guiding principle of the Bauhaus was therefore the idea of creating a new unity through the welding together of many 'arts' and movements: a unity having its basis in Man himself and significant only as a living organism."[45] The purification of form in Bauhaus design was in service of an intensification of the body's experience of that form. Likewise, Bauhaus painter and choreographer Oskar Schlemmer's paintings and ballets can be read as studies of the body in space.[46] As Schlemmer wrote: "[the human body] should still define the general centre and measure of things."[47] The pure abstraction of Mondrian cannot be understood without giving proper attention to his love of dancing. *Broadway Boodie-Woogie* is seen very differently when we take into account the "boogie-woogie:" the fundamental primary colors and fundamental axes (vertical and horizontal) create a composition that dances; those fundamentals are felt in the viewer's lived body. In fact, dance played a vital role in the development of De Stijl beyond Mondrian as well, such as in the works of Vilmos Huszar and Theo van Doesburg.[48]

In the United States one cannot fully understand the work of Graham or the sculpture of Isamu Noguchi without looking at their collaborations. Noguchi, who first started collaborating with dancers in 1926, made twenty sets for Graham from 1935 to 1967. These include some of the classic pieces of American modern dance, such as *Appalachian Spring* (1944) and *Night Journey* (1947). Beyond just an exploration of materials, Noguchi was concerned with "the activity of sculpture, real or illusory." Thinking of the activity of sculpture in terms of dance aesthetics provides a richer understanding of his work.[49] And of course, many of Graham's collaborations with Noguchi are known to us visually through her collaborations with the photographer Barbara Morgan. When we look at her photographs outside of dance, *Energy and the Neurotic Man* (1940) or *Corn Leaf Rhythm* (1945), we cannot help but see the parallel between dance movement and the compositional movement of formal elements within all her work. Looking at Graham with respect to American Abstract Expressionism, broadens our understanding of how these arts grew in response to American culture and politics during and after World War II, as Stephen Polcari's work demonstrates.[50]

Artist Robert Rauschenberg, composer John Cage, and choreographer Merce Cunningham's collaborations were significant in the development of each of their forms. Rauschenberg was the resident lighting, set and costume designer for the Merce Cunningham company from 1954 to 1964. Roger Copland has show how an aesthetic of collage is at the core of both of their artistic practices.[51] Other artists, such as Jasper Johns, Bruce Nauman, Neil Jenney, Mark Lancaster, and Robert Morris also collaborated with Cunningham. Morris's own Minimalist work, concerned with the viewer's relationship to the

art object, comes out of his experiments with avant-garde dance, as Virginia B. Spivey has shown.[52]

Even today in American art there are many crossovers between art and dance. Notable choreographer Stephen Petronio and artist Cindy Sherman have collaborated on several occasions. Sherman designed a costume for Petronio's most recent work *I Drink the Air before Me.* Photographer Lois Greenfield continues of a tradition of Morgan's collaborative photographic works with dancers as she captures them in compositions that integrate modern dance with traditions in classical and baroque sculpture.[53] No doubt an analysis of contemporary installation art could benefit from a thorough understanding of dance aesthetics and its emphasis on the body, particularly as the viewer becomes a performer within the space.

I believe that the history of art and dance collaboration does not consist of a few random encounters, but rather, that artists and choreographers have understood intuitively the intimate way in which these mediums are linked through our embodied experience of them. By returning to the body as the "intertwining of vision and movement," we can understand the ways in which the visual perception of art and dance is experienced as the sensation of movement in the body of the viewer. Instead of experiencing works of art and the history of art with our individual senses amputated and isolated from the others, we can, as Graham implored, experience the art of the modern period—and our of time—with our entire being.

Notes

[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, Galen Johnson, ed. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 123-124.

[2] Martha Graham, "A Modern Dancer's Primer for Action," from *Dance: A Basic Educational Technique* (1941) in *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*, Selman Jeanne Cohen, ed. (Hightstown, NJ: Dance Horizons, 1992), 137.

[3] Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter" (1908), in *Art and Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 70.

[4] Matisse, 71.

[5] Miriam Ruskin-Berger, foreword to Carol Press, *The Dancing Self* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press), xii.

[6] See Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987) for a phenomenological study of dance.

[7] Elizabeth Watts, *Towards Dance and Art: A Study of Relationships Between Two Art Forms* (London: Lepus Books, 1977).

[8] Watts, 10-11, 36.
[9] Watts, 91-94.
[10] Mary Wigman, "The Philosophy of Modern Dance" from Europa (1933) *in Dance as a Theatre Art*, 152.
[11] Wigman, 149.
[12] Graham, 137.
[13] Graham, 140. Italics hers.
[14] Martin (1946), 22.
[15] Martin (1933), 23.
[16] Martin (1933), 24.
[17] Martin (1933), 25.
[18] Merleau-Ponty, 124.
[19] See The Watching Dance Project at http://www.watchingdance.org/
[20] Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 21. Reynolds's quotations of Lipps are taken from his *Ästhetik*, vol. 1, (Hamburg and Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1903), 120, 123.
[21] I am of course paraphrasing Maurice Denis here: "We should remember that a picture—before being a war horse, a nude woman, or telling some other story—is essentially a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a particular pattern." Maurice Denis, "Definition of Neo-Traditionalism" (1890) , in *Art and Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Jason Gaiger, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 863.
[22] Watts, 69.
[23] Reynolds, 20. See Lipps, p. 441 for original.
[24] Mereleau-Ponty, 126.
[25] See also Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) for a theory of vision as a medium of connection people subjects.
[26] Merleau-Ponty, 125.
[27] Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou, *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 6
[28] Merleau-Ponty, 126.
[29] For an example of just how far the notion of an embodied imagination can extend, see Mallgrave and Ikonomou's discussion of Vischer's empathy theory, nineteenth-century dream interpretation, and Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 23-25.
[30] Watts, 71-75.
[31] Watts, 69.
[32] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967), in *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, 836-845.
[33] Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity* (1921), in *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey, eds. (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), 208-209.
[34] Bergson, 208.

[35] Merleau-Ponty, 145.

[36] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934), (New York: Perigee, 1980), 108.

[37] Dewey, 108.

[38] Merleau-Ponty, 130.

[39] Graham, 141.

[40] Graham, 141.

[41] Wigman, 150.

[42] "Guiding themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, by a notion of purity derived from the example of music, the avant-garde arts have in the last fifty years achieved a purity and radical delimitation of their fields of activity for which there is no previous example in the history of culture. The arts lie safe now, each within its "legitimate" boundaries, and free trade has been replaced by autarchy. Purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art." Clement Greenberg, "Towards a New Laocoön" (1940) in *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, 566

[43] A notable work on the role of the body in art and dance in the early modern period (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) is Sarah R. Cohen, *Art, Dance and the Body in French Culture of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[44] See Frédérique Joseph-Lowery, *Dalí, Dance, and Beyond* (New York: Godwin-Ternbach Museum, 2010).

[45] Walter Gropius, *The Theory and the Organization of the Bauhaus* (1923) in *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, 311.

[46] See Susanne Lahusen, "Mechanical Ballets?," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, 4/2 (Autumn 1986): 65-77.

[47] Oskar Schlemmer, "Diary Extracts" (July/August 1923), in *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, 309

[48] Nancy J. Troy, "Figures of the Dance in De Stijl," *The Art Bulletin*, 66/4 (Dec. 1984): 645-656.

[49] See Robert Tracy, *Spaces of the Mind: Isamu Noguchi's Dance Designs* (New York: Limelight, 2001).

[50] Stephen Polcari, "Martha Graham and Abstract Expressionism," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 4/1 (Winter 1990): 3-27.

[51] Roger Copeland, "Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of Collage," *TDR* 46/1 (Spring 2002): 11-28.

[52] Virginia Spivey, "Sites of Subjectivity: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and Dance," *Dance Research Journal*, 35-36/2-1 (Winter 2003-Summer 2004): 113-130.

[53] For an analysis of Greenfield and photography/dance collaborations in general, see Matthew Reason, "Still Moving: The Revelation of Representation of Dance in Still Photography," *Dance Research Journal*, 35-36/2-1 (Winter 2003-Summer 2004): 43-67.

Lorraine Shemesh's Dancers: The Figure As Grand Abstract Gesture

Donald Kuspit

> Who can tell the dancer from the dance?
>
> —W. B. Yeats

They stretch their bodies to the limits, strain themselves to the utmost, intimately at odds as they dance together. Sometimes Shemesh's dancers loop together in a circular movement, as in *Hook*, 2007; sometimes they're pressed together tightly, body flush with body, as in *Zipper*, 2008; and sometimes they're locked together in what seems like a violent struggle, as in *Lock*, 2009. The dancers are brilliant performers, and what they are performing is their own bodies, as though to perform it, to show its power of movement and strength, was to create it anew. And indeed there is a remarkable sense of freshness to Shemesh's figures, no doubt due to their seemingly inexhaustible vitality, not to say instinctive energy.

But Shemesh's figures, while undoubtedly unique, are not entirely unprecedented. They can be regarded as the consummate statement of the Renaissance attempt to represent the body at its most dynamic—completely flexible, vigorously muscular, heroically natural. The excruciating tension between Shemesh's dancers—they're at odds yet similar, a conjunction of opposites that remains a disjunction—makes a famous first appearance in Antonio Pollaiuolo. *Zipper* brings to mind his bronze sculpture of *Herakles and Antaios*, c. 1475—their bodies are pressed together in a similar way, and Shemesh's bodies have a sculptural presence—and *Lock* brings to mind the two fighting figures in the lower left hand corner of Pollaiuolo's notorious engraving of the *Battle of Naked Men*, c. 1465.

As in Pollaiuolo, Shemesh's figures are uncannily alike, however obviously distinct, and shown at the peak of their power. In both cases the figure is shown in a state of maximum tension, valorized as an end in itself. Both the dancers and fighters are paired off, forming a sort of dynamic balance, but the

balance is precarious because the tension between them remains unresolved. The figures mirror each other, but they're in conflict. Pollaiuolo's and Shemesh's figures are in formal harmony, but it is informed by the drama of their opposition—in Shemesh relentlessly repeated in the pitch black and pure white pattern of the dancers' costumes. The pattern is the telltale sign of their incompatibility. They may dance together, but their "marriage" is fraught with tension, suggesting that their dance is an enactment of their incompatibility.

Existential harmony is not as easily achieved as formal harmony—the lack of the former and the clarity of the latter makes Shemesh's pictures all the more unsettling. The figures physically touch and go, suggesting that they are unable to emotionally bind—except for the fleeting moment when they "connect," or, as Shemesh says, "intersect." However unwittingly, Shemesh shows their relationship at the breaking point, even as she shows their intense togetherness. Convincing dance enacts the contradictoriness of human relations by way of the body. I could not help but free associate to Oskar Kokoschka's troubled couples, physically together but emotionally at odds: Shemesh's dancers are also "expressionistic." They may not be fighting to the death, as Pollaiuolo's are, but they seem to be emotionally at war, however much they move in tandem—like Pollaiuolo's figures—and so paradoxically embrace.

Why represent such hyper-expressive vital bodies—convey the lived experience of the body that only a physically fit dancer can fully have—in an increasingly robotized world? Shemesh's organically perfect bodies resist that mechanically perfect world, implicitly criticizing its indifference with their intensity. They embody the dynamics of feeling in defiance of the dynamics of technology. They are rich with metaphoric meaning—their relationship suggests the war of the sexes—but the point I want to make is that they aesthetically read as grand abstract gestures: abstract expressionistic gestures. I am arguing that Shemesh's dancers have the same physical presence, bold fluidity, inexhaustible energy, and expressive power as abstract expressionist gestures. Her bodies are clearly more coherent and whole (and wholesome) than those of de Kooning, and less abstract than Franz Marc's *Fighting Forms*, 1914—to take an extreme example—but they have the same drivenness.

Recalling the dancers in Oskar Schlemmer's *The Triadic Ballet*, 1921-23 (which I saw re-performed in New York some years ago), with whom Shemesh's dancers invite comparison, one realizes the significance of her achievement. Both designed the abstract costumes for their dancers, and both regard dance as an abstract art form. But they have very different ideas of abstraction. For Schlemmer, the "abstract possibilities" of dance, as Shemesh calls them, are purely mechanical. For Shemesh, they are organic: dance is an art form that abstractly codifies—and expands, as her dancers show—the repertoire of bodily expression. Thus Schlemmer's bulky costumes inhibit the

dancers' movements, reducing them into robots. They were abstract machines going through prescribed motions rather than dancing creatively and inventively, as Shemesh's dancers do. Their remarkably flexible bodies are fluid with feeling, while Schlemmer's rigid bodies convey feelingless sterility. Rejecting the early modern machine-model of the figure, Shemesh restores the brave new world of emotional expression first explored by Kandinsky, suggesting that new feelings remain to be discovered—as Kandinsky thought—but now through the figure, stretched to its dynamic limits, rather than through the act of painting alone. In a sense, she is more "original" than Kandinsky, for she recognizes that feeling originates in the body, while the gesture that evokes feeling is merely it symbol.

Shemesh admits to being influenced by Pollock's all-over gestural paintings: it is as though she has transformed one of his peculiarly concentrated grand gestures into a dramatic figure, making its viscerality more explicit. Dramatizing the body, Shemesh's dancer becomes a bizarre gesture, ironically restoring the power the pure gesture lost when it became redundant—decadent—as it is did when it was past its creative prime, that is, when it become fourth, fifth, sixth, etc. generation Abstract Expressionism. Like Pollock's uncannily fluid gestures, Shemesh's dancers form uncannily fluid curves, which link in irksome intimacy, as Pollock's do. It is worth recalling that Schlemmer's angular dancers never touch the way the dancers do in *Zipper*, with its sexual tension, and in *Checkmate*, 2008, with its ironic togetherness.

Shemesh's dancers stand to Schlemmer's the way what Winnicott calls the True Self—creatively alive because it is rooted in the organically created body—stands to the False Self, which functions mechanically because it is socially compliant. While Shemesh says she's interested in the "co-dependence of machines and humanity," the fact of the matter is that her figures are more human than machine-like. To me this suggests that she is using their vital bodies to criticize the machine culture we inhabit—and that Schlemmer and the Bauhaus adulated. The zipper that holds their costumes together is a simple modern machine, moving in a straight line, in contrast to the convoluted dynamics of the dancers, symbolizing their complex emotional relationships—existential relationships that are as urgent as their bodies. The zipper is simply a detail subsumed by their movement; its straightforward movement is secondary, their intricate movement is primary—like the movement of an abstract expressionist gesture. In both the dancer's body and the abstract expressionist gesture physical twisting and turning are isomorphic with psychic twisting and turning: Shemesh is concerned with psychosomatic gesture—one might say controlled restlessness—not simply mechanically moving kinetics, as Schlemmer was.

Another crucial difference: the costumes of Shemesh's dancers are skintight. They not only outline the body's form and emphasize its presence,

but its spontaneous movement. Interestingly, Shemesh's costumes are as geometrically abstract as Schlemmer's but much more "minimalist." But unlike standard Minimalism, which uses one module repeated ad infinitum, Shemesh uses two modules—the black and white bands—which alternate like a metronome marking time. They underscore the rhythmic intensity of the dancers' movements, even as their difference reminds us of the dancers' different bodies.

The dancers may be black and white, but their setting is luminously colored and richly textured. Shemesh's paintings resonate with what she aptly calls "painterly acumen." The bright colors surround the black and white dancers (a social metaphor as well as a perceptual tension?), suspending them in atmospheric space, and often subtly informing them, even blurring their edges to suggest the "flashiness" of their movement. The blues that edge the figures in *Crossing* are particularly striking. They seem to emanate from the figure, like an aura making its energy evident, so that we seem to experience its movement and tension firsthand. This "edge tension," as Shemesh calls it, is her way of "holding on" to the "temporality" of dance, as she says. And immortalizing it—immortalizing the sense of forceful movement, which is what Boccioni wanted to do.

But Shemesh's movement is that of the human figure not the "futuristic" machine. Her "edge tension" conveys the organic presence of her figures, making them oddly elusive—ethereal?—for all their sculptural character. "Dancing is an ephemeral act that pushes against gravity, while simultaneously denying and embracing it," Shemesh writes, but I think her flashy "edge tension" neither denies nor embraces gravity, but suspends it in mid-process, as it were, suggesting that her paintings have a certain affinity with Muybridge's filmic studies of motion, analytically distilling each detail of it in a single frame. But Shemesh's dancers move with uncanny grace, despite the strain their positions put on their epic bodies, in contrast to Muybridge's everyday figures with their banal bodies. It is this unself-conscious grace that suggests that they are inwardly in control of themselves despite their ambivalent desire for each, conveyed also through the black and white design of their costumes.

Perhaps nowhere is this ambivalence more ironically evident than in *Checkmate*, 2008. The legs of the resting figures are tight together, one between the other, but their upper bodies are kept apart, a separateness emphasized by the fact that the white and black bands on the legs of their costumes are at cross-purposes. It is worth noting that all of Shemesh's figures are covered from head to toe, and as such masked and muted. Every dancer's body is hidden from view, even as we feel its strong presence and movement. The dancers see each other through vizor-like openings in their face masks, but it is as though they look through a glass darkly, for the openings are veiled. The costumes depersonalize the dancers, making them anonymous mysteries,

but they re-personalize themselves by silently relating through the openings, and of course through their intimate dancing, which is also peculiarly silent. Music must accompany their dancing, but it is unheard; it is Keatsian music. The dancers remain silently concentrated on their dancing, cocooned in their body language.

The organic language of the body is at odds with the geometrical language of the costumes, but their "intersection" confirms the paradoxical character of dancing. The insistent geometry of the costumes asserts that dance is a conceptual art, while their skin-tightness asserts that it is the consummately physical art—and, more subtly, suggests that it involves making contact with the "inner body" under the skin. That body ego is the foundation of every other ego, as Freud reminds us, and one cannot dance with existential conviction—and Shemesh's dancers radiate conviction—unless one lets it dance. Their dancing is a form of body worship, and what they worship is the ego of the elemental body. It is because their inner body is doing the dancing that they move with such daring intensity, making organically risky movements, rather than simply going through the motions—perhaps with mechanical exactitude—and calling the effort "dancing." I am saying that Shemesh's paintings grasp the inner significance of dancing—and the profound significance of the body—whatever its outer form.

The abstract geometry of their costumes also suggests the discipline and training necessary to dance as seriously as they do. They fetishize the body through dance, aesthetically actualizing the abstract possibilities of movement viscerally encoded in it. Both "action painting" and "action dancing" are processes that bring unconscious feelings about the body to expressive consciousness, giving us a preconscious sense of immediately being. Dancers engage their bodies with a radical immediacy, and action painters do the same with paint, which is not without its bodily qualities. But for all their visceral immediacy and amplified presence—each makes the other grander than it is by itself, however urgently grand it is in itself—Shemesh's dancers are self-contained, as the costumes that contain their bodies suggests. They are deeply engrossed in their bodies, but remain master of them, however irrationally intense their movements seem.

Shemesh's costumed dancers are much more sophisticated than the naked dancers in Matisse's *Dance*, 1907. They are primitive and simple-minded—the simple geometry of the circle in which they dance suggests as much—while Shemesh's dancers are intellectuals in all but name, as the dialectical intricacy of their dancing implies. Nonetheless, Shemesh's dancers are more peculiarly instinctive—oddly "Fauvist"—than Matisse's dancers, for their movement is much more forceful, indeed, passionate. Matisse's dancers are relatively easygoing figures compared to Shemesh's, who are also more streamlined and "slithery" than Matisse's have been said to be. They confront

us with their presence, while Matisse's recede into the distance, flattening into the panoramic space. Shemesh's figures have much less space in which to move, and they are more uncannily distorted, as their manneristic foreshortening and elongation indicates. Apparent distortion is a sign of hidden pressure—the pressure of instinct building up to discharge. The moment of maximum tension—the moment when the bodies of the dancers bizarrely intersect in absurd intimacy (are the dancers in *Checkmate* relaxing after the grand climax?)—is the moment when discharge is imminent.

This same maximum tension is evident in Shemesh's swimmers, who not only *Loop* and *Link*, both 1999, and *Zig-Zag*, 2003—to refer to her exquisite drawings—but swim in what can only be called an intensely "gestural water," as the abstract animation of the expressionistic water in *Amoeba*, 2005, makes clear. Shemesh's remarkable sense of fluidity—the shifting flow of forms, verging on formless chaos, never finalizing into a stable form—is also evident in the drawings of her dancers, where pure gestural line as well as bodiliness is at stake. But Shemesh's dancers and swimmers—she never abandons the figure to pure expression, or rather anchors it in the body, indicating that it is always derived from the body—are as stable and solid as statues, however baroquely abstract their moving positions may seem.

Shemesh's dancers are not children of nature, and as such at one with themselves, like Matisse's dancers, but have been expelled from the paradise of togetherness, which they try to re-constitute through their dancing, without ever succeeding. The black and white of their costumes suggests their divided—and abstract—consciousness of themselves and each other. They support each other, as though trying to keep the other from falling, but it seems clear that they are about to fall together, as they appear to have in *Checkmate*, where they sit together on the floor, barely holding themselves upright. For Shemesh dancing is abstract psychodrama, all the more so because her dancers are perfectionists. All her performers—her swimmers are also dynamic performers—have perfect figures, suggesting her own will to dynamic perfection, which she has achieved with these new paintings.

Falling Apart And Holding Together: Kandinsky's Development

Donald Kuspit

Let's take a fresh look at Kandinsky's works, forgetting the standard spiritual reading of them which has become de rigueur, while not denying that his early works bespeak what he himself called an "inner mood" of "decline," in which "desperation, unbelief, lack of purpose" prevail, even as they also convey the manic excitement that defends against it and which has been misread as spiritual aspiration. Wieland Schmied has called Kandinsky's pre-World War I paintings "apocalyptic landscapes," arguing that they are informed with apocalyptic destructiveness, but also the elated expectation of post-apocalyptic redemption. The intense colors on which Kandinsky placed so much esthetic and expressive hope have redemptive power, even as their brightness is sometimes streaked with painful shadow. The forceful black lines, sometimes stylized squiggles and typically at odds with each other, while awkwardly framing the eccentric patches of color, create an effect of what Kandinsky called "dissonance," suggesting apocalyptic destructiveness.

The apocalypse is a kind of breakdown—the apocalyptic mentality involves what Donald Winnicott called the fear of breakdown, masking annihilation anxiety or fear of death (sudden and unexpected), often leading to the feeling that one is slowly going mad, that is, disintegrating, along with the world around one—while post-apocalyptic redemption brings with it a fresh sense of structured self and a fresh start for the world, that is, a wonderful new world and a self happily living in it as though in a heavenly paradise.

But self and world breakdown and self and world redemption—the rendering of falling to pieces and of coming together in glorious new form—tend to be in uneasy artistic balance in modern as well as traditional representations of the apocalypse. Violent destruction tends to be rendered with more artistic conviction—esthetic vividness and expressive intensity—than redemption. The difference between *The Dragon* and *The Woman Clothed with the Sun*—symbolizing the spiritual rebirth that is redemption—in *The Silos Apocalypse*, ca. 1091-1109 suggests as much. Similarly, in Blake's *The Great Red*

Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun, ca. 1805, the terrifying male dragon is more esthetically fascinating and emotionally arousing than the golden woman, perhaps because of the sexual implications of the work—a monstrously ugly satyr about to rape a beautiful virginal woman, suggesting the triumph of the forces of devilish darkness over the forces of light and innocence. Redemptive beauty and the destructive beast seem about to embrace—note the woman's arms raised in alarm yet also in perverse welcome—even as they remain dramatically at odds.

And that's the point: destruction is more dramatic than redemption—the dragon is more dramatic than the woman clothed with the sun, however much the sun's rays dramatically inform her hair, making it standing on end like a golden crown. Similarly, Redon's *Death on a Pale Horse*, from his series of twelve lithographs of *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 1899—the image is based on Dürer's woodcut of *St. Michael Spearing the Dragon*, 1498 from his *Apocalypse*—is much more dramatic than Redon's *Woman Clothed with the Sun,* however dramatic the contrast between the pure light and pitch black darkness that surround her. The same difference is evident in Dürer's *The Woman of the Apocalypse and the Seven-Headed Dragon*, 1498, one of the series of fifteen woodcuts that form the most aesthetically masterful—exquisitely complex—and famous illustration of the *Apocalipsis Cu[m] Figuris* (the title of the 1511 edition) ever produced.

I increasingly think of Kandinsky's abstract apocalyptic landscapes (some with a sprinkling of "sacred" figures) as a clumsy entropic reprise of Dürer's figurative apocalyptic scenes, which are as ingeniously abstract as they are eloquently spiritual. "Clumsy" not only because there is a complete breakdown of pictorial order, but because they lack redemptive grace—the grace signaled by the woman clothed with the sun. In Ludwig Meidner's contemporary *Apocalypic Landscape*, 1912 there is a disruption rather than collapse of pictorial order: it doesn't completely fall to pieces—so that the picture doesn't disappear (or one doesn't "get the picture," which thus fails the viewer, or else becomes a picture puzzle in which the viewer has to pick up the pieces and construe the picture)—as Kandinsky's apocalyptic landscapes do. Nor does pictorial order collapse into irreversible disorder in Stanley William Hayter's six engravings of *L'Apocalypse*, 1932, with their abstract figures, Frans Masereel's three drawings of *The Apocalypse of Our Time*, 1940-44, with its wartime realism, or Edouard Goerg's surreal *L'Apocalypse*, 1945, with the fantastically evil *Beast that Ascendeth Out of the Bottomless Pit [and] Shall Make War Against Them, and Shall Overcome Them, and Kill Them.* In killing the figure, whether a surreal beast or beautiful woman or the apocalypse's victims, caught between them, Kandinsky killed art, if art means the esthetic creation of a pictorial order, whether realistic or abstract, self-evident or subliminal.

The incoherence of Kandinsky's apocalyptic landscapes—the messiness left after a so-called emotional storm, a destructive tornado that suddenly appears, an angel of death who comes out of the blue, that is, a horseman of the apocalypse (which is what Kandinsky's and Marc's "Blue Rider" is [he has been associated with St. George who killed the dragon, but he quickly changes from a graceful realistic rider in an early representation to a demonic abstract rider in a later representation)—is the expression of the disintegrative terror and traumatic horror of the apocalypse. They convey the psychic truth that one has lost control of one's consciousness and has no control of the world and thus become helpless.

I suggest that Kandinsky's apocalyptic landscapes are deeply personal (after all, he said that his art was based on inner or subjective necessity): the nihilistic breakdown of representation in his abstraction—or at least the crisis of representation signaled by his abstract assault on it—is the artistic objective correlative of a so-called psychotic crisis, involving what Wilfred Bion calls "catastrophic change, characterized by violence," often explosive, and "subversion of order," meant to be provocative. I am arguing that Kandinsky—and through him art—suffered not simply an identity crisis, but the insanity of a complete breakdown, and that his apocalyptic landscapes are its abstract expression. Abstraction is not only the apocalypse of representation, but of sanity—not simply the ordinary sanity of the false self, with its compliance to conventional perception, but the mature sanity of the true self, capable of what Winnicott calls the creative apperception that alone makes life worth living.

It is not self-evident that Kandinsky's abstraction involves creative apperception, for if, as Winnicott says, in creative apperception the self and the world become real, in Kandinsky's abstraction art alone is real—almost, for it is not clear that his apparent focus on its so-called formal factors (color and line) was a matter of creative apperception or realization and recognition of them or an artifact and byproduct of his apocalyptic annihilation of the pictorial order and the representation of external reality. It may be that Kandinsky is what Bion calls a "mystic genius," and as such "creative and nihilistic" at once—destructive of "certain laws or conventions," and with that "disruptive" of "coherence" and "promoting [revolutionary] change," overthrowing the existing order to create a new order after passing through an apocalyptic period of disorder (thus the old order of representational art, decadent because it has exhausted its creative possibilities and nerve, is to be replaced by the adventurous new order of abstract art, in which new creative apperceptions become possible)—but it also seems clear that he is stuck in apocalyptic disorder, or, to be polite, apocalyptic idiosyncracy. I will argue that he never came out of it, but rather reified and ritualized it by giving it geometrical form, or if one wants, ordering it geometrically. The dynamic gestures of the early ab-

stractions become geometricized mannerisms in the later Bauhaus-influenced work, that is, they lose their flashiness—their exciting flash-in-the-expressive-pan look—and become static forms, which is why they no longer cut to the expressive quick but are emotionally superficial. Kandinsky was able to impose geometrical order on his gestural disorder, which brings it under superficial control without changing it. The late geometrical works are abortive attempts to create a clear and distinct abstract picture rather than a sort of creative apperception—or at least introspective awareness—of his own breakdown.

What happens during a complete breakdown—when one goes mad? One fragments, meaning the self and the world are reduced to a mess of entangled, indigestible, unmanageable impulses, feelings, sensations, avoiding total chaos (the irreversible disorganization that is the final madness) by agglomerating in what Kandinsky called "improvisations," where they exist in unstable, tentative, momentary relationship. Kandinsky's improvisations are structureless inner worlds, bizarrely "informal" yet compulsively enacted. His so-called "compositions" struggle to bring structure into the "mad picture"—impose enough structure to suggest that his informal "gestures" are consciously formed and calculated (one had to wait for the contrived geometrical compositions for that to occur) and thus not arbitrary and meaningless (an expressive storm signaling nothing) and carefully placed rather than randomly dispersed with pseudo-spontaneous freedom—implying a certain esthetic and self-mastery. But one has the sense that his "gesturing" has become a kind of grasping at visual straws of structure, as though its shreds could lift him out of the abyss of total madness—they do, for the illusory moment when they seem to cohere into a singular structure, or at least form a recognizable if incomplete pattern. Structure is attenuated and ramshackle in the compositions rather than the sign of a structured self and world. The centrifugal falling apart tendency in *Composition VII*, 1913 is much greater than the centripetal coming together tendency—the de-structuring, destabilizing, disintegrative effect overwhelms the re-structuring, stabilizing, integrative effect. There is no clear structure integrating all the fragments while allowing them their distinctiveness. They go their own random disordered separate ways, however much a few sometimes cluster, tentatively and without binding, in a "formal" order.

A pictorial order is a mature container in which raw impulses, feelings, sensations are coherently organized and made thinkable and comprehensible, and thus no longer the expressions of unthinkable, incomprehensible annihilation anxiety—no longer evidence of disintegration, intimations of death. Such informal, primitive, psychosomatic phenomena have to be disturbing, for the inability to contain and store them in a formal order makes them intolerable and intimidating. They cannot be endured let alone reflected upon; the only way to survive them is to defensively expel them as soon as they occur, as Bion said.

It is this process of instant expulsion that we see in Kandinsky's apocalyptic landscapes—psychically regressive however supposedly esthetically progressive works of art—and that is responsible for their apparent intensity. It is the direct expression of his lack of inner control over them. The impulses, feelings, sensations flood the improvisations in the form of seemingly arbitrary, indeterminate gestures, marks, or traces. At their most intense, they seem to move beyond the physical limits of the canvas—spill into our space, as though our own psychotic projections.

But formal containment gives them purpose—they crystallize into meaningful concreteness, losing their meaningless flimsiness. They can be named and their psychic effect can be analyzed; thus Kandinsky's discussion of the "Effects of Color" in *On the Spiritual in Art*. They become bearable, and one can think about them, hold them in one's mind—such holding is the beginning of mindfulness—and finally contemplate them objectively, realizing that they are external to one, and thus link them together or creatively integrate them in a coherent composition. Are Kandinsky's geometrical abstractions such thoughtful coherent compositions, offering colorful forms for reverential contemplation, as their iconic character suggests? I don't think so. However geometrically shaped, memorialized, and refined the impulses, feelings, sensations—however much geometrical order is imposed on them, in effect idealizing and rationalizing them—the geometrical compositions are too stylized for their own expressive good, and remain as fragmented as the apocalyptic landscapes, but without their ruthless discharge of energy. Their dynamics has become routine and schematic, suggesting that Kandinsky has run out of creative ideas, even become creatively sterile, however geometrically inventive. His geometrical abstraction is more hygienic than his expressionistic abstraction, and with that more socially palatable, not to say emotionally comfortable. But to impulsively express feelings and sensations that seem incomprehensible because one can find no form that can contain and nail down them down—fix them in place as though they were dead butterflies—seems, after all, more creative than to reduce them to decorative fixtures. Without their swift flutter and unconscious shudder, Kandinsky's abstractions become clever visual thinking. His geometrical abstractions are anti-climactic, and suggest that abstraction has lost its madness, and become as sane and conventional—and pompous—as the decadent representation it replaced.

Simon Schama, *The Power of Art.* London: BBC Books and New York: HarperCollins, 2006. 448 pages.

Reviewed by Donald Kuspit

It was once said that "the artist is the rock star of the eighties," and, if Simon Schama's *The Power of Art* is any indication, he's still rocking in the new millennium. And, to overwork my metaphor, he's been a revolutionary rocker for millennia, at least since Caravaggio "specialized in the unexpected," making him in effect the first avant-garde artist. So does "Caravaggio's self-dramatization" in his art, "a calculated gesture... challenging and aggressive to the conventions of art," not to say of society, which struggles to suppress the aggressive (more broadly instinctive) side of the self for the common good (20). All of Schama's artists are self-dramatizers, and Schama uses them to dramatize himself—maybe even give, or at least strengthen, his own sense of self by way of total, it not completely uncritical, identification with them. More on this later, for Schama is the not so secret hero of his story of the fitful, difficult coming into being of modernism or avant-gardism, told by way of the milestone artists who marked its way—or some of them, for he passes over many of them, particularly those associated with Abstract Expressionism, for example, Kandinsky and Pollock. Schama has given us his canon of modernist-type art, and it is seriously inadequate.

Schama is fascinated, even obsessed with the against-the-grain artist's persona, whether conveyed by way of "breakthrough" creativity or outlaw-like behavior, both sticking a "contemptuous...dirty thumb" in the public's innocent eye. Nonconformist instinct, such as Picasso's aggressive, not to say predatory sexuality (363-64), and conformist and controlling, not to say "classicizing" rules, such as those in Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses* (1820), whom William Blake said "was born to kill art" (252), strike an uneasy balance in Schama's artists, adding to the fascination of their works and personalities. Schama even implies that their aggressive and sexual instincts create their own expressive rules, which initially seem unruly and beyond the artistic pale but, through intense and open-minded looking, reveal their own uncanny, even sublime logic. To Schama's credit, he's not entirely taken in by the artist's self-privileging as a narcissistic renegade, for he shows the self-defeat such grandiosity can lead to: the ill-fortune that can accompany fame, the self-destructive psychopathology that can go hand in hand with artistic originality and creative plenitude, as in the suicides of Van Gogh and Rothko, two of Schama's other artist-heroes, all subtly tragic, with the exception of Bernini (although he had his own temperamental problems).

Schama's book is a lively read, as one might expect from a made for television thriller, with a bit of supplementary "reflection," as he tells us, giving the script a depth of meaning it might not otherwise have, presumably without compromising its documentary and popularizing intentions. The cast of artists includes two Italians (Caravaggio and Bernini), two Dutchmen (Rembrandt and Van Gogh), one Englishman (Turner), one Frenchman (David), one Spaniard (Picasso), and one American (Rothko). They come on stage—Schama's book is overloaded with references to theatre, drama, performance (he worries whether Rothko's, and no doubt his own, "theatricality smacks of visual posturing" [437], not to say self-glorifying acting out—in chronological order, and often unexpectedly change costume on stage.

Thus Rothko changes from an impoverished Orthodox Jew riding the New York subway to, in his last paintings, a rather well-to-do "god-like" personage "presiding" over the miraculous "moment of creation, dividing the light from the darkness" (which may not be much of a change) (437). "David, who had made a career insisting that art's highest purpose was public and moral"—during the French Revolution he not only "designed inspirational propaganda" (218), but was a highly placed if opportunistic Jacobin, indeed, a "member of the political police committee—the Committee of General Security—that signed death warrents, dispatching the convicted to the guillotine" (217) (he dispatched former patrons and friends, including the famous chemist Lavoisier, whose portrait he had painted)—"now tried to start another one by reasserting its autonomy," (228) for the Reign of Jacobin Terror had begun to feed on itself. "Five days after Robespierre's execution David was himself denounced in the Convention as a 'tyrant of the arts' and a traitor. Imprisoned and tried, "the traumatized 'Pageant-Master of the Revolution' suddenly had another conversion, this time out of, rather than into, politics. When interrogated, he claimed (of course) that he confessed to nothing more than naivety; to having been led astray by wicked, much cleverer men whose despotism he had never seen" (227). "The Art Defence worked," (231) and David was released, painting himself as "the honest soul in anguish" (228). He no longer sat "on the 'Mountain', the high benches from which men such as Robespierre and St-Just denounced" aristocrats guilty of "crimes against the people," (213) but began to paint "beauties" and "retreads of old masterpieces" (231).

On the other hand, in 1935, becoming increasingly aware of the threat of Civil War in Spain, "Picasso moved further and further away from the purity of modern art," (367) "abandon[ing] his modernist indifference to politics and history" (368). Two years later he created *Guernica*, "a contradiction in terms: a modernist history painting" (368) —a grotesque, nightmarish political art that allegorically summarized his nightmarish women problems and implied, no doubt unwittingly, that "modernism's search for an art liberated from time and place, history and subject matter; an art that was purely itself and therefore

universal" (367) had become a bad and futile dream—certainly a sign of artistic hubris.

Schama's book is full of such wonderful tidbits of information and accounts of moments of conversion—the word recurs in various chapters, sometimes linked with theatricality (as in Caravaggio's St. Paul and Bernini's St. Teresa)—indicating that Schama's central interest is the coincidence and reciprocity of personal and artistic conversion, that is, of self- and creative transformation. They invariably involve a confrontation with social power, which becomes transformed into an art powerful in part because of its confrontational character, making it seem all the more "visionary"—ideas which appear again and again in Schama's text. The power of art stands up to the power of society—whether in the form of the Church or the State or the Capitalism that bothered Rothko even though it supported him—or rather, as I would argue, identifies with it, in the desperately defensive way a victim ironically identifies with the aggressor, thus unconsciously acknowledging his dependence on the aggressor.

Indeed, Schama's artists not only identify with the social power that supports, sustains, and privileges them, giving them sufficient self-confidence to allow their creativity to unfold, but are so overidentified with it that they unconsciously grasp its underlying aggressiveness: their art makes manifest, in sensuous and symbolic form, the resourceful aggressiveness that gave the patrons their social power and riches in the first place. The artists are not so much in conflict with their patrons and society, as Schama often suggests, but in fact envy and embody their power, to whatever stunning aesthetic effect. They are true believers in power whatever particular stylistic faith they have. The works Schama celebrates as formally innovative are convincing because they resonate with the social authority and absolute power of their patrons.

Rothko may have been an immigrant Jew, but he also painted when America was at the height of its power—a world-power—and bespeaks the glory of that power. His paintings have the pretentious grandeur of America; they imply that Rothko has at last completely assimilated, however much, as Schama suggests, the later ones convey Rothko's mourning for the Holocaust, and with that, I think, his unhappiness with the fact that he was born Jewish. As Schama shows, Rothko wanted them to dominate the viewer; thus their "monumentality"—their "intimacy" is a cover for this ambition—much the way America dominated the world. Van Gogh may have been a sick Dutchman, but his work turns the inner light of Rembrandt's paintings inside out—paintings made during the Golden Age of Dutch painting, when the Netherlands was the greatest seafaring and commercial power in the world. The inner light is the auratic expression of Dutch power. It may be "the inner light, mysteriously potent, Rothko believed had originated with Rembrandt, which is why when he taught a course on 'Contemporary Artists' at Brooklyn College it was

with Rembrandt that he began," (424) but it is also the glaring klieg light in which Rembrandt's Dutchmen theatrically posed, the picture of glorious prosperity and worldly success.

As Schama acknowledges, he searches out the fortuitous moment "when power meets inventiveness and the two produce pictures"—"rare convergences that don't come along very often." (411) But he neglects to notice that power uses artistic inventiveness to glorify and validate itself, and the inventive artist identifies with power, distilling and mythologizing it until it seems like a higher "mystical" power," conveyed by the "mystifying" light that suffuses the works of Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Turner, Van Gogh, Rothko, and is even immanent in the luminous stone of Bernini—he "alchemically" turns hard stone into dramatically soft light—and the fire light of Picasso's *Guernica* and the candlelight of the *Minotaurmachy*. The profane light of catastrophe is as much a revelation of social power as the sacred light that shines in nature and pure color—although it also has the potential to cause emotional catastrophe rather than epiphanic enlightenment.

Schama tracks the ups and downs of the artists' careers as well as their creative process, but he is sometimes too quick to dismiss their "post-heroic" works as creatively inadequate and expressively bankrupt, as in the case of David and Picasso. I think this is a failure of Schama's own creative imagination, or perhaps just an artifact of his interest in the officially "great" telegenic achievements. Max Frisch writes, in his *Sketchbook, 1946-49*: "How little are genuine artists concerned with their artistic prestige! Their primary concern is not the masterpiece, but the ability to create, to remain alive, even when this may often push them down below heights previously achieved." I think Schama focuses on influential "star" works by "star" artists because in the end he is more interested in stardom than art—which is a vehicle for his own stardom.

This is no doubt an erroneous overstatement, particularly in view of his many interesting—if unoriginal—insights into the works and artists he engages, but then it seems to me significant that, near the end of his book and his account of Rothko, he writes: "An American actress friend of mine (from a long line of butchers), about to film a famously difficult part on location in Texas some years ago, decided to get into the role by spending the night in the Rothko chapel—an experience that would not, I suspect, have most of us on our toes in the morning, bright, breezy and ready for action. But no, she said, it was wonderful: 'Coming out, I felt so light.' (435). This takes us right back to Bernini's St. Teresa, who was also a bit of an actress and star. She was a Jewish convert to Catholicism, and had sexual issues; they seem to be resolved in Bernini's sculpture, where sexual orgasm and spiritual conversion—visitation by an angelic phantom lover—are theatrically conflated.

Schama's actress friend is no doubt "sexy" and "seductive"—among

the terms he uses to characterize Rothko's pre-chapel color field paintings—as well as daring and tough (no doubt because of her butcher heritage). And certainly spiritual, for she saw the light in the darkness of Rothko's penultimate paintings, theatrically posed in a spare modernist chapel the way Bernini posed St. Teresa in his lush Baroque chapel. Schama's actress was thus saved without having to change her act—which, along with her other attributes, makes her the perfect woman, sexually desirable as well as spiritually superior. Or was her remark an act, in platitudinous recognition of the fact that opposites evoke each other—they're the flip side of the same psychic coin, as Freud said—and are even magnetically attracted to each other despite repelling each other? Or was she simply trying to get Schama's attention and approval, being a narcissistic poseur—for theatrical people are always playing someone other than themselves—in need of an audience? Or perhaps she was just expressing relief at having come out of the dark chapel into the daylight, suggesting there was less to her remark—that it was more banal—than Schama's inflated appreciation of it suggests. But then she too is an artist—a fellow actor like himself, working in the same medium (suggesting he's also an artist)—and thus worthy of Schama's admiration.

What audience does Schama want for his TV series? He wants the professional art historians, as his wealth of art historical and anecdotal information indicate (he makes nodding acknowledgement of a few favored art historians), but above all the great unart- educated masses. *The Power of Art* is a tour the force of populist educational TV, and a communicatively convincing one, as the swift fluidity of its writing and entertaining informality indicate. No stiff British upper lip and upper class pretensions here, even though Schama wants to lift the masses into the higher realm of art. The one audience he doesn't want is the critics—people like Clement Greenberg, whom he mentions contemptuously in passing, but whose appraisal of Picasso's *Guernica* as "a battle scene from a pediment that has been flattened under a defective steamroller" is much more sharp-eyed and insightful than his own appraisal of it as "Cubism with a conscience" (376).

Again and again Schama dismisses the critics (and patrons who rejected works they commissioned) as rigidly bogged down in old-fashioned ideas of art—largely classical—and thus resistant to "experimental" change and the creative evolution of art. But the validity of modernism does not invalidate classicism—Picasso's traditionalist Ingres-style work cannot be dismissed so easily as beside the main point of his art, as Schama does (all the more so because it was innovative in its own way, and suggested a crisis in modernism, or at least uncertainty about it, and perhaps about its enduring value, which is perhaps why Picasso was always assimilating and modernizing masterpieces of proven value, as though to prove that modernism had value because it could latch onto tradition).

Was Michelangelo Titmarsh, aka William Thackeray, so wrong and blind when he "denounced" a painting by Turner as an "absurdity" (242), however absurd his preference for a realist work—"let it hang in the National Gallery along with the Hogarths"—which has today been devalued might seem to a contemporary public that has come to take what Schama uncritically calls the provocative "liberties" of modernism for granted? It may have been "sacrilege to pierce the mystic shell of colour in search of form," as Turner said of Rembrandt, (267) but was "the patron who...complained about the indistinctness of the image" in a Turner painting (269), so wrong in wanting a distinct image? Schama doesn't have the critical consciousness to address such questions, but dismisses the patron as a backward-looking stuck-in-the-mud-of-past-expectations conservative with no creative imagination—rather than a different kind than Turner's. Schama is celebrating and defending modernism—fetishizing and idolizing it—not bringing it into critical question, now that it has spent itself and become a period art, indeed, reified by institutionalization.

Who exactly is Schama? Well, he's Jewish. He has a "Jewish eye," as he tells us, (173) which is perhaps one of the reasons his book climaxes with Rothko, "the Jewish modernist" (434). And why he dislikes "the amorality of the eye" in Boucher's *Mademoiselle O'Murphy*, 1751, Louis XV's lovely young mistress, and dismisses it as a "diversion," (184) resists the temptations of her "coyly blushing derrière" and naked body as though it was the Golden Calf, and why he prefers David's moralizing *A Marat*, 1793, even though, as Schama makes clear, the latter is political propaganda and a visual lie, for it "transfigures" the malevolent paranoid Marat "into a neo-classical quasi-biblical hero," reducing his "terrible psoriasis" and "deep tearing gash inflicted by [Charlotte] Corday" to trivial blemishes (221).

Is Jewishness why Schama prefers Van Gogh's moralizing paintings to Gauguin's hedonistic paintings? Is it why he prefers Van Gogh's "dense and textured" colors to Gauguin's "two-dimensional and vaporous" colors, (321) promising "a trip into the tropics of the mind on Spaceship Purple" rather than an earth that was a pseudo-heaven? ("Van Gogh wants to pull heaven down so that it becomes indistinguishable from the earth.") Van Gogh's suffering and idealism—he sacrificed himself to his beliefs—appeals to Schama, and makes him superior to "the worldly, cynical, self-consciously swaggering Gauguin," who (paradoxically) wanted to mystically "swim in pure sensation," take "the beholder into a blissed out state of alternative consciousness." But isn't achieving a state of alternative consciousness what modernism is about—what all of Schama's artists aimed at? Isn't that what he describes in every case history?

As Schama tells us, he was once drawn to Pop Art, but saw the modernist light, which is a version of inner or spiritual light. Does he regard the

central lightbulb in the darkness of *Guernica* as the uncanny climax of the painting because it unconsciously reminds him of the lightbulb in front of the tabernacle in a synagogue? Concluding his discussion of Rothko, Schama speaks of himself—and implicitly all "us ordinary human beings" (439) (in contrast to the extraordinary artists whose creativity was often tripped up by the all-too-ordinary human failings he documents)—as a "participating presence" (437) in the art, much as a worshipper participates in God's presence in a certified sacred space. But only certain saintly artists have a place in Schama's temple of art—certainly not the "anal old Mondrian," even when he finally "took the nails out of the grid, and let it slide and jiggle wherever the hell the rhythm of the city [New York] took it" (412)—and only the naïve will uncritically believe that the works he designates as unquestionable masterpieces are the most significant works of the artists. Schama's hierarchy of values is seriously flawed, and his designation of Mondrian as "anal" suggests just how cavalier and facile he can be.

Arshile Gorky. *Arshile Gorky, Goats on the Roof: A Life in Letters and Documents*, Matthew Spender (ed.). Ridinghouse, London, 2009. 510 pages, illustrated.

Reviewed by Martin Ries

Goats on the Roof documents the story of Arshile Gorky's life through personal letters, private correspondence between family and friends, and significant contemporary reviews. The volume includes many previously unpublished texts by and about Gorky, compiled and introduced by Matthew Spender (author of *From a High Place: A Life of Arshile Gorky,*" artist, married to Gorky's daughter Maro, and the son of poet Stephen Spender).

This collection of notes and documents shows Gorky's devotion to his family, his Armenian heritage relationship, and his struggle for recognition. In the village on Lake Van in Armenia where Gorky was born and raised, goats could disturb a night's sleep by jumping onto the flat clay roof to steal the precious drying apricots. Gorky used this phrase to express his feeling of odds with his new world. Gorky's gradual reception by the art world is seen implicitly through art reviews, personal accounts, and interviews. Just barely after his death he was acknowledged as a seminal figure in the development of Abstract Expressionism and an essential part of American culture.

No startling new revelations, but certainly Gorky is rendered in a more human and personable temperament before his tragedies. When he talked about his past, he never referred to the siege, the Genocide, or his desperate conditions. Instead he talked about "my country," meaning the village of his boyhood where all sorts of wonderful and exotic things had taken place. His stories were not meant to be categorically comprehended and they were certainly not meant to be probed by questions; he preferred to talk about "goats on the roof."

Beyond the near-impossible task of establishing the facts of Gorky's early life, we have no knowledge of his attitude to his Armenian heritage. In a succession of books published in the 1970s, Karlen Mooradian, the son of Gorky's younger sister Vartush, published translations of some letters allegedly written by his uncle. Gorky's success enabled many Armenians to claim "external validation" for their national identity. After Karlen's death, the original letters could not be found, and most scholars agree that they were fabricated by Karlen. Vartush and her husband Murad were Communists in a predominantly Armenian Revolutionary Federation family. Murad was a U.S. citizen and had fought in World War I; Vartush was not a U.S. citizen and had no right of return but Gorky arranged passage through a refugee association.

The present book contains the letters from Gorky to Vartush "that we know are by him." These include fresh translations of his letters with transcriptions of the original Armenian in an appendix by Father Krikor Maksoudian. This makes clear that Gorky's writings are everything that the Karlen letters are not. For better or worse, a complex vision of Armenian history, political beliefs, and cultural identity is conspicuously absent from Gorky's authentic documents.

Spender's book is divided into fifteen chapters, from "Childhood and Youth" to "After Gorky's Death," followed by "Language: Gorky's Armenian Writings", a thorough elucidation of Armenian syntax edited by Father Krikor Maksoudian, Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America in New York City, where Gorky's letters, in the original Armenian, are located. Father Maksoudian discusses Gorky's "mastery of Armenian and the level of education this implies."

In 1915 Gorky's childhood came to a traumatic end when the Armenian population of Ottoman Turkey was slaughtered or sent into exile; thousands of Armenians starved to death, including his mother. Arshile Gorky was born Vosdanik Adoian in 1905, and stayed with relatives in Massachusetts after his arrival in America in 1920. He completed his education promptly and set about turning himself into a painter. He attended the New School of Design in Boston, moved to New York City and changed his name to Arshile Gorky (a reference to Maxim Gorky). Although he occasionally pretended to be related to Maxim Gorky and to have studied with Vasily Kandinsky in Paris, in his last résumé he describes himself more accurately as "self-taught."

As a young teacher of painting at the Grand Central School of Art in New York, he was bright, humorous, and confident, "walking back and forth ... telling his long fanciful delightful tales of his boyhood in Russia." During the early 1930s, when he had abandoned teaching at Grand Central School, Gorky took on two private pupils, Ethel Schwabacher and Mina Metzger, with whom he remained in contact for the rest of his life. In the mid 1930s he became a leader of abstract artists of NY, a minor hero who had completed the largest commission of abstract art financed by the Federal Government, the WPA mural for the Newark Airport in New Jersey.

Throughout the 1930s there was a prevalence of meetings, petitions, picket lines, detentions, Artists' Committee for Action, Unemployed Artists' Group, and other artists' activities. But Gorky's interest waned as the political agenda of these groups took over. In Stuart Davis's recollection of Gorky in *Magazine of Art*, February 1951, he wrote, "I was in these things from the beginning and so was Gorky. I took the business as seriously as the situation demanded ... Gorky was less intense about it and still wanted to play." "Play" has been interpreted by many critics to mean Gorky was less interested in politics and more interested in developing his painting. A footnote by Spender

further explains that the break between Davis and Gorky was deeper than either side admitted.

Gorky met his first wife Marney George at an exhibition at the Municipal Gallery in the Rockefeller Center, which was an attempt to create a museum of contemporary art. But the show was dogged by scandal. Nelson Rockefeller, who loaned the premises, withdrew his support when he was harassed by protesters for destroying the mural he had commissioned from Diego Rivera. The fact that the protests were backed by Communists was unacceptable to Rockefeller and Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. Marney George writes an interesting account of their days together in a 1951 letter to James Thrall Soby: "How many personal symbols in his last paintings have an unbearable clarity for me."

Agnes Magruder's father was a Commander in the U.S. Navy; in 1938 the Magruder family was in China where she heard reports of the Long March and the declaration of war against the Japanese by Mao Zedong. Agnes could not understand why the U.S. insisted on backing the Nationalists. Eventually she rebelled against her tradition–bound parents and eventually traveled to New York in 1940 to study painting. There, she met Willem de Kooning who introduced her to Gorky. During the early months of her relationship with Gorky she worked for *China Today*, a magazine supporting the Communist cause. Gorky gave her the name 'Mougouch' an affectionate Armenian term meaning "strong little one;" she thought he meant Mickey Mouse. They were married in 1941.

Many personal letters shed unexpected light on Gorky's paintings. Visiting her parents' farm in Virginia, Mougouch wrote to Jeanne Reynal in the summer of 1944, always in a stream-of-conscious style, that "Gorky has been thrashing over two particular canvases & having now ravaged & worn them down like an angry sea he has left them to go out and draw - draw - draw. Today he is heart broken because the farmer has cut the weeds to let the grass grow for the cows & all looks too park-like for Gorky who loved the purple thistles & great milkweeds & ragweeds - Poor dear he always gets slugged - He stood on the hill watching the tractor down in the bottom land moaning 'They are cutting down the Raphaels...'"

Mougrouch recalled that Gorky overheard someone remark about a flour mill, and mistook "flour" for "flower." Gorky said about his *Water of the Flowery Mill* [1944, Metropolitan Museum] "...down the road, by the stream, that Old Mill, it used to grind corn, now it is covered with vines, birds, flowers." In his Introduction Spender mentions how fellow painter Roberto Matta Echaurren had tossed turpentine over his canvas to wipe it down and start over; he liked what he saw and continued working. "Such openness to accidents was unknown to Gorky." The effect was liberating; the "flowery" title echoed the use of brilliant hues and the thin application of paint applied like

liquid watercolor. "The titles of his paintings were Gorky's own, chosen haphazardly because to him a title was a superfluous addition ... The Diary of a Seducer [1945, Museum of Modern Art] is an exception, there Gorky did ask Max Ernst for a title, he always admired Max's titles and was delighted with this one."

In letters to Ethel Schwabacher, Mougouch explained: "... G drew directly from nature, a group of trees, hills, a telephone pole and never used people in nature. He saw fantastic animals and menacing heads in the shapes of trees and felt the earth as a swell, a bosom, an expansion like a sigh. many of the shapes in the final drawings or paintings were arbitrarily picked out or unconsciously drawn from the tensions he felt between the branches of different trees for instance. The tree completely not seen as a tree. there are some drawings which I can actually see as a certain place, the fundamental arrangement of shapes in nature serving as a base. The song and the plough is of a field that goes up from the barn or what was the barn. there is no waterfall the intestinal shape or whatever you call it (Maro called it a big worm to Gorky's delight) was a collapsed haystack. Haystack field and sky are the elements." Perhaps this refers to *The Plough and Song* [1947, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin Ohio]. "G himself did not always know what he intended and was as surprised as a stranger at what the drawing became after an hour of work. it seemed to suggest itself to him constantly, the way it does to children except of course he had all the techniques and mastery of his art and other idioms at his fingertips."

"The aesthetic intention as seen from Gorky's point of view is practically impossible to define .. in the first place G himself did not always know what he intended and was as surprised as a stranger at what the drawing became after an hour of work. it seemed to suggest itself to him constantly, the way it does to children except of course he had all the techniques and mastery of his art and other idioms at his fingertips ... When he painted from his drawings it was different from drawing from nature because he was editing his own emotion and adding and using all his conscious knowledge of his art. This produced some wonderful paintings but he sometimes said he wished he could eliminate that art and make the painting as direct on the canvas as the emotion was within him in front of the nature."

In January 1946, many paintings, drawings, art books, etc., were completely destroyed by fire in his Connecticut studio. Mougouch wrote a moving account to Jeanne Reynal: "I sobbed and cried ... Gorky sounded so hollow I think my heart broke ... I was so afraid for him - & when he walked into the studio [in New York] ... he was wonderful – he has been wonderful ever since He says it is all inside him ... Gorky is a most awesome phoenix. ... The fire was awful, breathtaking, but I have never seen Gorky so strong, so calm, so free as he was that next day. The studio was destroyed but the paintings, he said, were

all in him. He would make better ones." Gorky repainted many canvases for his scheduled exhibition, and some of the paintings, such as *Plough and Song,* were replacements for works lost in the studio fire.

Then in February Gorky was stricken with a colostomy for rectal cancer. Mougouch sent a letter to Jeanne Reynal, "... he had the very best surgeon. Several doctors were there. 2 of them friends of ours & they have told me it was a very fine piece of surgery – Jesus What an expression..." She writes explicitly and in considerable detail about breaching "a hole on the side of his belly to make up for what they had to take away ... I wish this had happened to me. I love him more than I have ever dreamed it was possible to love ..."

Two years later an automobile accident left his neck fractured and his painting arm paralyzed (Julien Levy, his dealer, was driving but was uninjured). Mougouch, worn out by his rage, depression, hostility, and violent behavior, and out of desperation rather than betrayal, had a brief affair with Matta. His jealousy and aggression were made worse by his tragedies and the marriage failed under the strain. On 21 July 1948, he wrote, "Goodbye, my beloveds" in chalk on a wooden crate in his Connecticut studio and hanged himself. In a footnote Spender remarks that another version is "Good-bye my `loveds` ... Levy's words, including the odd quotation marks, are more consistent with Gorky's writings ... `Goodbye, my beloveds` were words Alexander Pushkin wrote "the night before he was killed in a duel."

In Clement Greenberg's review in *The Nation*, in early 1945, he had written, "He has had trouble freeing himself from influences and asserting his own personality. ... He became one of those artists who awaken perpetual hope the fulfillment of which is indefinitely postponed." Almost as soon as Gorky died, Greenberg wrote that he regretted "a good many of the things I said then, largely out of pedantry. " Spender adds: "The word 'pedantry' covers the numerous questions that Greenberg was trying to answer, as it were, through Gorky. Once the artist himself was no longer there, it became clear that these questions had no bearing on Gorky's work." Indeed, Greenberg reviewed the Whitney Museum Annual exhibition in *The Nation*, 10 January 1948: "The Calendars" [1946-47, Nelson Rockefeller Collection (destroyed by fire in the Executive Mansion, Albany, N.Y., 1961)] "is the best painting in the exhibition and one of the best pictures ever done by an American."

Interestingly, there is no mention of Harold Rosenberg or Thomas B. Hess in the letters or documents.

In a very candid and unpublished critique of Ethel Schwabacher's biography of Gorky (1957), Mougouch, no longer in her stream-of-conscious writing, wrote a synopsis of their life and times, and took exception to much of what Schwabacher wrote. "Mrs Schwabacher's book does not make clear how passionately American Gorky was. Gorky had hoped the Surrealists' attention

would bring him the recognition he wanted. ... when Breton went back to Paris, Gorky turned hopefully toward Europe – surely they would call him? – but they didn't." If Gorky had lived ten years longer and joined Breton in Paris as he had planned, he may well have been eliminated from the history of American painting. "I can only say of Mrs. Schwabacher's account of his early life and the 1930's that its just as he told it to me - with a few exceptions - his ommissions [sic] but very important ommissions to him. I never knew, for instance, that his true and given name was not Arshile Gorky until after he died - nor that he had a father in Providence, Rhode Island, until I read Mrs. Schwabacher's book. The father he told me of had given him a pair of little red shoes at the age of five on the edge of Lake Van and ridden away into the morning mist never to return. No joy, no black despair ever wrung from him the admission that he was born Vostanig Adoian: he was the painter Arshile Gorky to the very limit of his life, of his love, entire personality a pure creation of the will to paint. ... When Mrs. Schwabacher says on page 133 that by the Fall of 1947 Gorky was exhausted, emotionally bankrupt, she should say no more; she shouldn't drag it on for another 15 sordid pages. ... To live beyond this is hell on earth, and hell he was in."

Filled with valuable information about American culture in the early twentieth century, the art public will learn much about the livelihood and business of being an artist, or being married to one. With an informative Introduction, a Bibliography, Sources, and Index, this is an important book for scholars and writers of the rise of Abstract Expressionism, a valuable addition to any university library, and an adjunct to Matthew Spender's and Hayden Herrera's biographies of Gorky.

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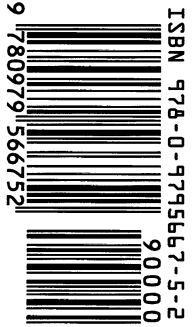
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