VOLUME 24, NUMBER 1

ART CRITICISM

Art Criticism

Art Department
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400
The editor wishes to thank Art and Peace, The Stony Brook Foundation, President Shirley Strum Kenny, Provost Eric W. Kaler, and the Dean of The College of Arts and Sciences, James V. Staros, for their gracious support.

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ISSN: 0195-4148

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Art Criticism is published by:
Department of Art
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400

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painting viable on American soil. Famously, Morse's mother rebuked his religious and mythological paintings from a practical standpoint: "You must not expect to paint anything in this country, for which you will receive any money to support you, but portraits."[2] Morse, Thomas Cole, Washington Allston, and a few other artists of that generation attempted an occasional biblical theme, but America's taste for history painting of any sort – religious, mythological, and literary themed – was rare. Instead the major themes of artists became the unbridled land of the newly founded country, portraiture, and genre scenes depicting the lives of the people, if not out of interest in painting such topics then for the monetary compensation such works rewarded. Without a heritage of religious iconography, most twentieth-century American artists also ignored the biblical vein.[3] Focused on issues of modernism and life in the big city, artists of the past century explored industrialization and ultimately abstraction and alternate media, especially in the second half of the century. In contrast, a disproportionate number of Jewish artists actively engaged in making the Bible a viable means of representation in twentieth-century America.

While best known for his satirical paintings of corrupt politicians and other social realist topics, the Boston-born Jack Levine has been just as engaged with biblical themes. In 1940, Levine painted the first of over one hundred biblical narratives, *Planning Solomon's Temple*.[4] This ten by eight-inch painting is an homage to Levine's recently deceased father, a man nicknamed Rabbi Solomon the Wise by his friends. In the painting, the great art patron King Solomon talks with the artisan Hiram about plans for a temple in Jerusalem. Hebrew labels identifying the expressionistically rendered robed figures hover above the pair's heads. A crowned and turbaned Solomon, "a symbolic portrait" of Levine's father, holds the temple plan.[5] Hiram, modeled loosely after the artist's own physiognomy, carries a trowel, angle iron, and compass.[6] Modestly dressed in a white robe and shown in profile, Hiram steps toward King Solomon. Levine explained the genesis of *Planning Solomon's Temple*: "My father's death in 1939 started me on the path of painting these Jewish sages. I was doing much of this biblical stuff because I was very much involved with the way the Flemish painted, and the way the Persians did. It wasn't Judaism bursting out of me but a kind of museumology. It brings me closer to some kind of artistic precedent I have my eye on."[7]

Levine consistently asserts that his biblical paintings are a means to work through the formal and material concerns of the Old Masters he admires and aspires to emulate, not a reflection of his Jewish identity. There is no question that Levine engages with the history of art, but his preoccupation with the Bible's stories transcends a desire to claim a place in art history. Of late, Levine has been more forthcoming about his reasons for painting Jewish themes. In January 2005, Levine explained that he is not a religious Jew, but rather a lover of Israel and a patriarch, much like his father: "I figured this out

recently. I'm a Jew. I'm a patriarch. I don't give a hoot about the religion, but my parents are what mattered. The Fifth Commandment . . . that one is okay with me."[8] Levine's respect for his parents' faith encouraged both his use of the Bible and Jewish custom as a source of solace following his father's death. Levine's early biblical works, including *Planning Solomon's Temple*, were a means, he said, of "scoring points for my father."[9]

In *Planning Solomon's Temple* Levine has interpreted a Jewish text and made it relevant to modern times, specifically to his own life. His visual critique, citing the importance of art in the life of his father's namesake, has been reworked in a personal manner and in accord with the methods of the Jewish sages. Indeed, Levine adopts a variation of the two thousand-year old tradition of Midrash. As written commentaries on the biblical text that engage in exegesis but are especially concerned with creating new meaning, in part Midrash attempts to make the Bible's stories relevant to modern life.[10] Levine's Midrash, however, has been made with the brush not the pen.[11] *Planning Solomon's Temple* is the first of many paintings in which Levine employed what Michael Fishbane terms the new voice of the biblical scholar: "This new voice is also engaged in prolonging the words of the ancient text. . . . Scholarly discourse may therefore rightly be seen as a kind of supercommentary, analyzing texts with the ideas and methods of one's own historical situation, and integrating them into new orders of significance."[12] For Levine, the biblical story of Solomon building the Temple served as the perfect artistic prototype to illustrate Jewish patronage of the arts while also honoring his father, who was always supportive of his son's artistic aspirations even if they conflicted with his own values as an observant Jew.

Planning Solomon's Temple (and Levine's subsequent biblical paintings) also addresses themes of living in the Diaspora. Levine's relationship with his father was somewhat tension-filled as his Lithuanian-born, observant parent hoped that his son would live a more Jewish life. To be sure, the American-born offspring of European immigrants, as well as transplanted children who did not have strong associations with the old country, assimilated much more easily than their parents. While Orthodox Jews such as Levine's father enjoyed America's autonomy by openly acknowledging and practicing Judaism, the younger Levine chose to eschew religiosity, forgoing his Bar Mitzvah. This generational conflict may have led to Levine's biblical paintings, for as he explained, *Planning Solomon's Temple* was instigated by his father's death. Samuel Levine's passing also impelled him to engage in at least one traditional Jewish practice; the younger Levine's Jewish psyche could not be totally dismissed, for even if the artist does not believe in the religious elements of Judaism, his allegiance to his father led him to recite the Jewish mourning prayer (the *Kaddish*) thrice daily for eleven months after his parent's death.[13] Of all his siblings, Jack Levine was Samuel Levine's only child to affirm this impor-

by fashioning a discourse that did not simply add to the dominant paradigm but endeavored instead to revise and resist it, so does Rivers in this fascinating painting.[22] As a narrative painter in the last decades of the twentieth century, as a Jew, and as an artist on the margins of America, Rivers rewrites art history by creating art that negates what has in reality heretofore been the story of one people. Through the adaptation of biblical imagery, *History of Matzah* reveals the limitations and contradictions of western art history – which has excluded the Jew's body from the traditional canon.

Several other twentieth-century Jewish American artists privileged the Bible's narrative at some point, many in a midrashic fashion. Because space does not permit enumeration of the many examples of Jewish American biblical art, a few additional instances will suffice. George Segal used the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac as a Midrash when in 1978 he designed a sculpture of the story to commemorate the four Kent State University students killed in 1970 by National Guardsmen while protesting the Vietnam War.[23] Ben-Zion first turned to the Bible in 1935 with his canvas *The Prophet in the Desert*, a painting that was followed by many others such as *Joseph's Dreams* (ca. 1939) and *Moses and the Tablets of the Law* (1952).[24] In all, Ben-Zion painted over one hundred and fifty biblical subjects, reflecting the Yeshiva education of his early years in Eastern Europe. When thirty-nine of his strongly linear, expressionistic paintings were shown at a retrospective held at the Jewish Museum in 1959, Ben-Zion characterized his biblical art in a way that unites the past to the present in a manner that implies a midrashic approach: "I know of no other book in which the apocalyptic and elementary conflicts, as well as the psychological complications of our time come to a stronger symbolic expression than in the Bible."[25] Similarly, Raphael Soyer fused modern day imagery with the biblical text in *Amos on Racial Equality* (1960s), a drawing developed into an edition of lithographs that comments on repression and racism.[26] Here Soyer portrays a contemporary woman and black baby accompanied by the biblical verse Amos 9:7, inscribed in both Hebrew and English, to make the case that scripture extols us to treat all peoples equally: "Are you not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?" Finally, with an estimated one-third of his works describing religious or biblical themes, critics consistently note the important influence of Judaism on Abraham Rattner's art.[27] As John I. H. Baur observed in a 1959 exhibition catalog:

> Art, for Rattner, is never primarily an esthetic activity. It is a means to an end, an expression of what he repeatedly calls 'livingness,' and a search for the divine in man. It is colored by his own deeply religious, if unorthodox, nature, by his immersion in the old testament and a sense of his rich Jewish heritage.[28]

Biblically themed paintings including figures such as Ezekiel, Moses, and Job appear in Rattner's work on multiple occasions. For example, *Job No. 2* (1948) is a characteristically color-infused, jewel-like canvas, for which Rattner is best remembered.[29] Rattner, however, did not turn to biblical matter until the rise of fascism and the onset of World War II. Distraught by the war, Rattner responded with a series of Crucifixion paintings conceived in what would become known as his signature style. *Descent from the Cross* (1942) depicts a Cubist-inspired, dead Jesus being taken down from a bright red cross by two geometrically delineated figures.[30] The segmented figures, painted with exaggerated limbs and oversized features, form a colorful contrast to the thick black lines separating the rich hues. Like Aronson and Rivers, Rattner recognized Jesus as a Jew, and for the latter artist Jesus embodied Jewish martyrdom.[31] One critic observed that Rattner's "Christ was a suffering Jew who personified the entirety of modern humanity being tortured and extirpated by the war."[32]

In the midst of Rattner's experimentation with Crucifixion images, Samuel Kootz published *New Frontiers of American Painting*, choosing Rattner's Crucifixion canvas *Darkness Fell over the Land* (1942) as the cover for the text. Within the book Kootz described Rattner as imbued with "a deeply religious ethical inwardness. He suffers a profound pain–not self-torment–at the injustices of the world, an almost Biblical anguish at war and its causes. He is morally implicated in everything he does."[33] Rattner himself described his turn toward personal subjects and disavowal of abstraction as a reaction to World War II in a 1968 oral interview:

> It affected me personally very much. . . . anti-semitism [sic] was sharply underscored. It was something that troubled me very much personally. And it affected me in this way that I grew further away from the aesthetic thing. I had to keep my balance because my emotional response to these feelings that were stirred up in me went back to my anti-semitic [sic] experiences here in America. And I never could get over them because it left an awful mark on me. . . . And now Hitler's voice disturbed me. It disturbed me in what I wanted to do. And I knew I could not keep on with abstraction, I could not keep on with the intellectual searching after an aesthetic direction, that I had to do something about this emotional thing in me.[34]

Several Jewish American artists responded contemporaneously to Nazi oppression in their art, frequently making images that referred to the book of Exodus to express their fears and hopes.[35] Beginning in the late 1930s the Russian-born William Meyerowitz, a prodigious painter-printmaker and artist who experimented with a variety of styles, made several etchings based on the

second book in the Bible, some showing exhausted wanderers trekking through unidentified tracts of land.[36] As Meyerowitz's wife, Theresa Bernstein, recalled in one of her journals:

> The *Exodus* series was completed in the Nazi era of Jewry's uprooting and destruction. The Exodus, William said, represented not only Moses's rescue and freeing of the Jews from Egyptian bondage, but an exodus of the two thousand-year pilgrimage after the destruction of the temple.[37]

The events of World War II also influenced Seymour Lipton's subject matter and materials, which evolved from specific figurative themes in wood to more timeless abstract comments on the human condition in metal. One of his last representational sculptures responded to the news of Nazi persecution of the Jews. *Let My People Go* (1942) was titled after an utterance by God in Exodus 8:16, and Lipton's sculpture portrays a bust of a pious Jewish male wearing a prayer shawl.[38] By the mid-forties Lipton was welding biomorphic, Surrealist-inspired forms. *Exodus No. 1* (1947), a horizontal, abstract construction made of lead and comprised of pointed, geometric elements, references the Bible and also implies a mass departure, perhaps the Jews' exodus from Eastern Europe.[39] Lipton described the series: "The *Exodus* pieces were part of a tragic mood of history and reality that has always concerned me. The underlying mood is tragedy . . . a kind of wailing wall monument to human suffering."[40]

That same year Jennings Tofel addressed the Holocaust with his Exodus-influenced canvas *Moses and the Burning Bush*.[41] As Jeffrey Hayes noted in one of the few scholarly discussions of Tofel's work, "the figure of Moses personifies leadership and deliverance from tyranny."[42] An oversized Moses consumes the canvas with his bodily presence, as disproportionately smaller, anguished figures flee the burning bush. Comments in Tofel's unpublished diary (1933-43) indicate the artist's attachment to his heritage, and hence its subsequent influence on his art: "I imbibed from earliest youth some of that vast mass of Jewish religious, moral and cultural teachings with its many laws."[43]

The above-mentioned artists came of age directly following the years of the "new immigration," 1880 to 1920, which was also known as the third wave of immigration. During this time, twenty-three million immigrants entered the United States, of which two million were Jews and of that almost one and one half million were Eastern European Jews. Aronson, Ben-Zion, Tofel, Soyer, and Meyerowitz fall into this category, hailing from Lithuania, Ukraine, Poland, and Russia, respectively, while Rattner, Rivers, Segal, and Lipton, were children of immigrants as was Levine. The immigrant artists arrived from Europe at a young age, and distinct memories of their native land were likely

scarce, thus they experienced acculturation in a similar way as American-born children raised in immigrant households. All of the artists described lived in homes with practices that differed from the mainstream, and separating from religious parents often caused familial conflict and confusion about alliances to one's ancestral heritage or one's country, as described in the instances of Levine and Aronson.

Enjoying freedom outside of enclosed walls, many Jews forged relationships with non-Jews for the first time. Different cultures and ideas pervaded the once-constrained Jewish sensibility. The American Diasporic experience was unlike any other Jews had confronted in their peripatetic existence, and the desire to secularize became overwhelming in a democratic culture that promised prosperity and equality. After the challenging task of learning a new language, manners, and customs, a large number of Jews continued the assimilation process by relaxing their religious practices.

The less restrictive environment of the American Diaspora appears to have promoted a psychological need to consciously create a relationship with one's Jewish heritage; the secularization that allowed a Jew to pursue a career in art also instigated the need for a link to a Jewishness that was beginning to disappear. In other words, assimilation diluted the Jews' connection to that which they knew best—traditional Jewish practice—and some sort of signifier could mitigate feelings of loss in reference to the more Jewishly connected life once lived. The sociologist of religion, Will Herberg, observed that immigrants,

> had their societies, where one met people from the 'old country' and talked about things still vivid in memory; they had their newspapers, which made one feel close to the new and the old; they had their churches, and even plays and amusements in the familiar accents of the mother tongue. Aside from the church, they had not known any of these things 'back home,' but here these innovations seemed to give them something of the old life, something that gave an appearance of continuity and security to their existence.[44]

The coping mechanism described by Herberg was tenable for the Jew who had distinct memories of a native land, but the American-born generation and the young immigrant had nothing to hold onto. For these younger American Jews their native land, their homeland, was the Bible. Their sense of locale was not the towns around them but biblical geography, the only Jewish soil they knew. The environment provided by the Book in the form of language, laws, and common perceptions, was the psychologically contiguous territory of these Jewish American artists. The stories in the Bible were the American Jews' bond to Jewish life.

Obviously, generalizing the experience of ten artists can be problematic as can the presentation of a somewhat wide historical range of artists. It seems to me, however, that such an approach is necessary, for I offer this broad picture with the aim of initiating a dialogue on the prevalence of biblical imagery by twentieth-century Jewish American artists.[45] That a large group of Jewish artists at a specific time and place embraced an outmoded genre is notable, and to comprehend better why this is so, some initial understandings need to be generated. The artists discussed in this article, and also many more who worked on biblical subjects in the twentieth century, have had an important aspect of their work neglected. While the minority motivations of African American artists, women, and homosexuals working as Abstract Expressionists have been addressed within the discourse of American art, Jews working on a topic as unfashionable as the Bible, also sometimes in the context of abstract art, have been ignored.[46] Even to this day, Aronson and Levine remain biblical artists and representational painters throughout the years of non-objective art and now post-modern developments in a country that never really embraced biblical painting. In 1956 Levine remarked: "I'm a Jew of the American seaboard, looking east. . . . That has affected the subject matter as well as the style of my painting."[47] No doubt, as Jews in twentieth-century America, Levine and his peers were affected by the Diasporic experience, with biblical art being one visual manifestation that assimilation and secular life prompted in the oeuvres of this group of fascinating and sometimes critically ignored artists.

Notes:

[1] David L. Shirey, "Vatican to Buy 600 Works By Modern Artists in U.S.," *New York Times* (June 11, 1973): 47. These artists were Leonard Baskin, Philip Evergood, Jack Levine, Abraham Rattner, Ben Shahn, and Max Weber.

[2] Edward Lind Morse, ed., *Samuel F. B. Morse: His Letters and Journals*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 159.

[3] For some literature on American religious art see Sally Promey's article "The 'Return' of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 3 (September 2003): 581-603. Sally Promey and David Morgan have demonstrated that religion often appears in American visual culture. For example: Sally M. Promey, *Spiritual Spectacles: Vision and Image in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Shakerism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), which interprets the gift drawings of the Shakers; David Morgan's *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), an analysis of mass-produced Christian religious iconography; the exhibition catalog *Exhibiting the Visual Culture of American Religions* (Valparaiso: Brauer Museum of Art, 2000), which has excellent introductory essays by Morgan and Promey; and the larger edited volume by Morgan and Promey, *The Visual Culture of American Religions* (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 2001). Religion in its more spiritual dimensions has been discussed by scholars such as Joshua C. Taylor's "The Religious Impulse in American Art," ed. John C. Milley, *Papers in American Art* (Mapleshade: Edinburgh Press, 1976), 113-32. My essay argues that religious art in a traditional and conventional sense, appearing in the fine arts and picturing the biblical text, is relatively rare in America compared to European artistic production, and that Jews creating images inspired by the Bible in the secularized twentieth-century are worthy of note.

[4] Jack Levine, *Planning Solomon's Temple*, oil on masonite, 1940, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

[5] Jack Levine, conversation with author, New York City , January 14, 2005.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Jack Levine quoted in ed. Stephen Robert Frankel, *Jack Levine* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 37-38. Frankel compiled Levine's verbal commentaries in this volume from a variety of sources, but mostly from a series of interviews between himself and Levine from fall 1988 and winter 1989.

[8] Jack Levine, conversation with author.

[9] Levine quoted in Frankel, *Jack Levine*, 37.

[10] For more on Midrash see ed. Michael Fishbane, *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). The most observant Jews would assert that commentators do not create new meaning, but rather simply discover what the divinity already conceived.

[11] American Jewish scholars partake in similar strategies. For example see Tresa Grauer, "One and the Same Openness: Narrative and Tradition in Contemporary Jewish American Literature" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1995).

[12] Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4, 5.

[13] Levine, conversation with author.

[14] For more on Levine and *Planning Solomon's Temple* see Samantha Baskind, "Midrash and the Jewish American Experience in Jack Levine's *Planning Solomon's Temple*," *Ars Judaica* 3 (2007): 73-90.

[15] David Aronson, "Real and Unreal: The Double Nature of Art," in Asher D. Biemann, *David Aronson: Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture* (Boston: Pucker Art Publications, 2004), 144.

[16] David Aronson, *Young Christ with Phylacteries*, oil on canvas, 1949, private collection.

[17] David Aronson quoted in Emery Grossman, *Art and Tradition* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1967), 23.

[18] David Aronson quoted in Carol Kur, "David Aronson's Art," *Moment* 4, no. 1 (November 1978): 26.

[19] Larry Rivers, *History of Matzah (The Story of the Jews)*, acrylic on canvas, 1982-84, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

[20] Rembrandt, *Moses with the Tablets of the Law*, oil on canvas, 1659, Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen, Berlin; Leonardo de Vinci, *The Last Supper*, oil and tempera on plaster, c. 1495-98, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan; Michelangelo's *David*, marble, 1501-4, Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

[21] Susannah Heschel, "Jewish Studies as Counterhistory," in *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, eds. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 110. This argument is repeated in Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 19.

[22] Beginning in nineteenth-century Germany, Jewish thinkers of the Wissenschaft des Judentums (Science of Judaism) attempted to confront a Christian centered civilization, creating a Jewish discourse that did not simply add to the dominant paradigm, but attempted to instead revise, "resist and even overthrow the standard portrayal of Western history." Heschel, "Jewish Studies as Counterhistory," 102.

[23] George Segal, *In Memory of May 4, 1970: Kent State - Abraham & Isaac*, bronze, 1978, Princeton University, New Jersey.

[24] Ben-Zion, *The Prophet in the Desert*, oil on canvas, 1935, collection unknown; Ben-Zion, *Joseph's Dreams*, oil on canvas, ca. 1939, Sosland family collection; Ben-Zion, *Moses and the Tablets of the Law*, oil on canvas, 1952, Jewish Museum, New York.

[25] Ben-Zion quoted in Stephen S. Kayser, *Ben Zion: 1933-1959* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1959), 11-12. Matthew Baigell also notes the Jewish link of the past with the present when describing Jewish responses to the Holocaust in *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 109–11.

[26] Raphael Soyer, *Amos on Racial Equality*, drawing, 1960s, private collection, Oakland, California.

[27] Abraham Rattner Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., roll 5258, frame 170. Original clipping, James Berstein, "Abraham Rattner, Artist, at 82," *Newsday* (15 February, 1978).

[28] Lloyd Goodrich and John I. H. Baur, *Four American Expressionists: Doris Caesar, Chaim Gross, Karl Knaths, Abraham Rattner* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1959), 39.

[29] Abraham Rattner, *Job No. 2*, oil on canvas, 1948, Leepa-Rattner Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida.

[30] Abraham Rattner, *Descent from the Cross*, oil on canvas, 1942, Art Institute of Chicago.

[31] Ziva Amishai-Maisels convincingly argues that the crucifixion was employed by Marc Chagall, and many other Jewish artists before and after him, during periods of intense anti-Semitism as a symbol of Jewish martyrdom. See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "The Jewish Jesus," *Journal of Jewish Art* 9 (1982): 84-104.

[32] Piri Halasz, "Abraham Rattner: Rebel With a Cause," *Archives of American Art Journal* 32, no. 3 (1992), 26.

[33] Samuel M. Kootz, *New Frontiers in American Painting* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1943), 36. Abraham Rattner, *Darkness Fell over the Land*, oil on canvas, 1942, collection unknown.

[34] Abraham Rattner, oral history interview with Colette Roberts, May 20, 1968 and June 21, 1968. Transcript in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 13.

[35] In *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years*, Baigell addresses some New

York-based Jewish artists' responses to the Holocaust, focusing especially on Abstract Expressionists and not limited to American artists (e.g., Marc Chagall, Mané-Katz) or biblical subject matter.

[36] William Meyerowitz, *Exodus*, etching, 1930s, private collection, Sugar Land, Texas.

[37] Theresa Bernstein Meyerowitz, *The Journal* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1991), 63.

[38] Seymour Lipton, *Let My People Go*, wood, 1942, collection unknown.

[39] Seymour Lipton, *Exodus No. 1*, lead, 1947, private collection.

[40] Albert Elsen, *Seymour Lipton* (New York: Henry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1970), 27. On Holocaust imagery across national boundaries, sometimes using biblical subjects, see Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1993).

[41] Jennings Tofel, *Moses and the Burning Bush*, oil on canvas, 1947, Harry N. Abrams family collection, New York.

[42] Jeffrey R. Hayes, *Jennings Tofel* (Mahwah, NJ: Ramapo College Art Gallery, 1983), 21.

[43] Jennings Tofel Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., roll N68-36, frame 13.

[44] Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955), 28.

[45] Although Jewish American biblical art has not been addressed as a larger phenomenon, modern Jewish American art is the subject of recent scholarship. The seminal work in this area is the Jewish Museum exhibition catalog and accompanying essays found in eds. Norman L. Kleeblatt and Susan Chevlowe, *Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York 1900-1945* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1991). Jewish American artists also feature in Matthew Baigell's scholarship, including *American Artists, Jewish Images* (Syracuse University Press, 2006). For a book-length consideration of one artist in relation to his Jewish American identity see Samantha Baskind, *Raphael Soyer and the Search for Modern Jewish Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). See also Samantha Baskind, *Encyclopedia of Jewish American Artists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), which profiles eighty-five artists.

[46] See Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

[47] Jack Levine, conversation with Seldon Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), 202.

Aesthetic of Reception? A Jaussian Reading of *The Family of Man*

Monica Bravo

The traditional model of reception is represented by Hermes transporting messages in an undisturbed flow from the gods on Mount Olympus to their mortal recipients below. So prevalent was this conception that the messenger's name has been preserved in the appellation bestowed on the art and science of text interpretation. Yet hermeneutics in the twentieth century has tended to bolster the position of the recipient, whereby the mortal shares in the gods' role as maker of meaning. Few theories have gone as far as the Konstanz School of literary studies in restituting to the reader this control. The School's methodology of *Rezeptionästhetik* is nowhere elucidated more clearly than in Hans Robert Jauss's "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory."[1] Although an essentially literary methodology, Jauss's seven theses towards an aesthetic of reception are here applied to an exhibition curated by Edward Steichen at The Museum of Modern Art in 1955. In the evaluation of Steichen's influence on the reception of this exhibition, the adaptability of Jauss's framework to the art historical field will simultaneously be considered. Invocation of *The Family of Man* undoubtedly elicits in the reader's mind a host of associations, a horizon of expectations that this paper intends to transform.

While Jauss's scholarly contributions have focused mostly on the realm of literary studies, the extension of his approach to other areas of humanistic studies was initiated by Jauss himself with "History of Art and Pragmatic History."[2] The fields of art history and literary history are similarly burdened by questions of canonization, and sustained by a quest for meaningful criticism. The author of a literary work is comparable to the artist or creator of an art object. The recipient or audience of the work is called a reader or viewer / spectator / observer respectively. These last three designations are problematic in their own right, beset by connotations of passivity incompatible with the necessarily active audience Jauss argues for. Nevertheless, these appellations are so embedded in the language of art history that they will be employed as necessary.

Beyond these points of communion (and others not here made explicit), however, the parallel tracks diverge - especially in terms of loci of

consumption. While some might argue, cynically no doubt, that a gallery is precisely like a bookstore in contemporary society, the divergence is more pronounced at the institutional level. Obvious lack of a communal atmosphere aside, a library is precisely not a museum. The former—especially of the public variety—tends towards totality and attempts objectivity, modeling itself conceptually on the encyclopedia as a compendium of information and practically on the Library of Congress as a living archive. While the library grows, unlike the museum it does not actively pursue an agenda. The museum dares not even strive for totality; it can never acquire all works of art of a given artist, let alone a given period.[3] Regarding objectivity the issue is more contentious; nevertheless the museum visitor is or should be aware that his or her experience of the art, even in the permanent collection, has been mediated by the institution and the curator in particular.

The curator occupies a privileged place indeed in the museum visitor's interpretation of works of art. Beyond (variable) responsibility for museum acquisitions, the curator determines what, when, where, why, and how an artwork will be shown. What would it mean to have a book exhibition in the manner of an art exhibition? Books mounted on walls or arranged on shelves are reduced to ornament unless the exhibition's audience has a familiarity with most, if not all, the publications so arranged. It would be almost as meaningful to simply receive a list of texts to read, and think about what relationship they might have to each other, given that our culture has so strongly divorced the act of reading from our encounter with the conditions of that act, be they environmental or temporal. That is, an original work of art has really only been seen or experienced if it has shared in our self-presence; not so if only a slide or a digital file of it has been viewed. A book, however, is generally perceived to have been read whether it has been perused on a subway car or read off a handheld device.

The exhibition catalogue, it follows, lies somewhere between a book (independent publication) and documentation of an event. Although it may be many audience members' sole point of entry to the exhibition, it is not the same as the art exhibition. Note, however, that an exhibition catalogue represents an opportunity for the curator or institution to re-present an exhibition in a new and orderly fashion, and in some cases may even come to be regarded as the definitive, permanent iteration of an essentially ephemeral installation. Of particular interest here is the book version of *The Family of Man,* which reproduces all 503 images of the exhibition and has become the bestselling exhibition catalogue of all time with over four million copies sold.[4]

The curator enters the hermeneutical enterprise, the encounter with the "literary [here art historical] event," in a way not accounted for in Jauss's theory. Rather than an encounter between book and reader, the art encounter is one of artwork and viewer *via* curator. The curator therefore becomes an ex-

tremely powerful and immediate force in the viewer's horizon of expectations, the phrase derived from Husserlian phenomenology and adopted by Jauss to refer to a reader's set of both literary and life experiences that are neither conscious nor objectifiable.[5] Even, and perhaps especially, in an exhibition whose scope is as broad as *The Family of Man,* in which the selection process was made extremely transparent, the curator's vision is never invisible. And it is this exhibition, boasting an audience of nine million people in sixty-nine countries, which has not only been canonized in the museological tradition, but itself formed a mini-canon of photography as well as of human representations. A systematic interpretation of *The Family of Man* through Jauss's manifesto for an aesthetic of reception accomplishes two tasks: an illumination of Steichen's influence on the viewers of his grand opus, and a rigorous questioning of the validity of Jauss's methodology as a potential application to art exhibitions.

In calling for "the removal of the prejudices of historical objectivism" in thesis one, Jauss indicates that a literary work is like an orchestration or dialogue rather than a timeless essence.[6] By extension, *The Family of Man* was never a closed entity but a space in which viewers negotiated the collection of photographs not only in the context of each other, but also in relation to similar photographs, similar images, perhaps even to photographs in general, and certainly in relation to lived experience. Although as then Director of Photography at the MoMA (and a practicing photographer himself) it would not be expected that Steichen curate this exhibition in any other medium, it is significant that photographs are probably the most constitutive elements of our contemporary horizons of expectations and were by the mid-1950s as well. As E. H. Gombrich has succinctly stated, "whether or not we are used to taking snapshots ourselves, we have seen so many that we can classify them and understand them."[7] A constant flow of photographic images competes for attention in modern society, creating ever larger mental treasuries from which to draw comparisons when new photographs are presented.

Also significant was the prevalent mid-century belief in photography's objectivity, that photographs capture the "fact" of a past moment. So pervasive was this conviction that it has not entirely been discarded in the twenty-first century, despite the advent of manipulatable digital technology that would seem to reinforce the tenet that photography has *never* been a transparent representation of fact. It is this principle of objectivism that has further contributed to a similarly persistent non-distinction on the part of the general public between fine art and commercial, instrumental or documentary, etc., kinds of photographs. In curating this exhibition, Steichen simultaneously subverted and relied upon these beliefs. Unlike sculpture for example, which by nature is limited exclusively to the realm of fine arts, the visitors to his exhibition could draw on a larger pool of like-media referents. Although presented in the con-

text of a museum as "the art of photography," most of the images are representations of daily life, and some undoubtedly enjoyed earlier incarnations as newspaper pictures, anthropological studies, and family snapshots. The preponderance of images credited to *Life* magazine attest to these sources.

Finally on this point, the theme of this exhibition and its various categories—images of birth, love, work, play, children, death—is precisely the most evocative of generalizable personal lived experiences, exclusive of no one. Almost as each photograph is unconsciously weighed against other images already registered in the viewer's horizon of expectations, he or she simultaneously gains a new criterion for evaluating works in the future, according to Jauss. The continuous action of re-constituting the horizon of expectations achieves the coherence of history in a recipient-centric mode of scholarship, a point which will be revisited. It is notable at the moment, however, that a similar mechanism takes place in an individual's personal history (versus art or literary history) upon the reception of new works of art, especially given *The Family of Man*'s content coupled with its medium of representation. The criterion gained for evaluating works of art in the future is thus fluidly transmitted into the realm of daily life. After viewing a romantic photographic of young lovers, such as Ralph Morse's "London, Hyde Park" of1944,[8] the observer may think, "Yes, this is what love should look like." A similar force is at play when a natural phenomenon or young child is said to 'look like a picture,' a platitude nevertheless rooted in criterion developed by looking at photographs.

By confining textual, be it a work of literature or art, analysis to "the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises from each work in the historical moment of its appearance,"[9] Jauss proposes to eliminate psychology, sociology, and collective ideology from his methodology, as stated in thesis two. Rather, predisposition to a specific sort of reception is directed by the author's (and here the curator's) employment of mostly formal elements. While this is considered an empirical or objective means of determining influence, formal elements are by no means to be considered objective. Whereas a book may manipulate genre expectations or style to direct the reader's perception, the curator's most powerful tools are spatial: architecture of/in the gallery, size of the artworks, mode of hanging, sequencing, and, though not solely spatial, wall text. Each of these elements, as considered by Steichen and his team, would have played a significant role in triggering the audience's process of directed perception and are duly considered here.

The architecture of *The Family of Man* as inaugurated at The Museum of Modern Art in 1955 was and remains rather unique. Architect Paul Rudolph was responsible for the exhibition design that tended to eliminate walls, mounting the images on thick steel rods or hanging from the ceiling on

thin wires, and significantly precluding the use of frames. Consequent to the lack of borders, nothing prevents the eye from moving around and through the exhibition. The viewer may look at and past any given image, lending an element of depth to the viewer's reception and expanding possibilities for direct contextualization. The sizes of the photographs differ as well, some blown up to near life-size and others more familiarly small and intimate. They are arranged in a mode we might call "Salon-style Modern," installed at various heights and focal points, seemingly situated haphazardly. Curiously, a hierarchy of scale is preserved while situational privileging recedes in importance. Furthermore, while the visual display may seem random, related works were grouped together and sequenced in a manner that is decidedly not.

The narrative arc of the exhibition, maintained and somewhat more codified in the accompanying catalogue, nearly echoes the trajectory of human adult life beginning significantly with images of romantic love rather than birth. To begin at a point of relative maturity accomplishes the important task of establishing the viewer's identification with the photographs almost immediately, presupposing that the anticipated viewer demographic would be substantially composed of twenty to thirty year old adults. Thus, the exhibition opens with photographs of young couples before proceeding to documentation of marriage rituals, pregnancy, and childbirth. Fathers are introduced somewhat gingerly into the domestic scenes, sequentially following modern Madonnas. Fathers take a much more active role, however, in the section following images of child's play. Young sons mimic their father's actions in a paean to patriarchy, the traditional refrain 'father is the head of the household' reaffirmed in the next sequence's representations of extended families.

The following sections move from the intimate family unit to other, equally 'universal,' themes in the social realm: labor, production, leisure, education, interaction, death, mourning, suffering, religion, justice, portraits, the United Nations, and ending, of course, with hope –children. The message Steichen wishes to convey can only be made clearer by citing the curator's own words and some of the phrases included on large panels to caption the photographs, or perhaps to be illustrated by them in turn. Steichen, referring to "the art of photography" in the introduction to *The Family of Man* exhibition catalogue, states: "It was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everdayness of life – as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world."[10] *The Family of Man* perfectly mirrors Steichen's conception of photography; the exhibition and the belief reflecting back upon each other in an eternal feedback loop, capturing the viewer within that hall of mirrors rather than opening a window towards a meaning developed of his or her own accord.

For those without access to Steichen's introduction, however, a similar message is "reinforced by text editor Dorothy Norman's predilection for

pithy shards of timeless wisdom extracted from a wide range of sacred texts."[11] "Sacred" should be taken liberally, to encompass the litany of proverbs, quotes, passages, and statements that dotted the exhibition on hanging panels equal or larger in size than the photographs they accompanied. Native American sayings are disproportionately represented (*qua* photographs by and of Native Americans) along with the wisdom of other 'primitive' peoples, in an attempt to gild a tarnished past that nevertheless enhances its timeless impulse. Poetic texts are balanced by statements from the United States Atomic Energy Commission and many, many biblical passages. Anne Frank shares billing with Sophocles. Many of the exhibition's visitors, it will have been expected, would be familiar with some of the specific texts. Others, it may be supposed, remained only to be read, and would be grasped immediately for the inherent truth they reflected. The combination of text and image, indeed the total effect of the gallery installation, "resembled nothing so much as an oversized magazine layout, designed to reward rapid scanning rather than leisurely contemplation."[12] This, too, Steichen could use as a referent in the viewer's horizon of expectations.

In his third thesis, Jauss posits that the distance between the first audience's horizon of expectation and the work is an objective criterion for determining the artistic character of a work according to an aesthetic of reception. Steichen's range of referents evoked in *The Family of Man*, common to the contemporary horizon of expectations, has already been shown. It has yet to be determined to what extent Steichen challenged those expectations or simply fulfilled the status quo in the manner of kitsch. Jauss identifies "the audience's reactions and criticism's judgment" as indicators of this aesthetic distance.[13] Both parties' reception to *The Family of Man* is subsequently considered.

At this juncture it is important to note The Museum of Modern Art's support of Steichen's large-scale productions during his tenure as Director of Photography from 1947-1962. The dates are coincident with the institution's patriotic fervor in the immediate post-war period as well as with its tacit participation in the cultural Cold War. The curator's insinuation in the process of meaning was thus conjoined by institutional goals in a special way during this period.[14] The MoMA, since its inception in 1929, had been at the forefront of photography collection and display – cultivating in many ways the public's horizon of expectations with respect to the medium. Abandoning the model of first Lincoln Kirstein, and then Beaumont Newhall's stewardship, which aspired to gain for photography its role as a fine art, the MoMA and Steichen replaced values such as craftsmanship, 'preciousness,' originality, and authorship, with a new set of aspirations . . . at least for a time.[15]

Thus Ansel Adams, a major force during Newhall's tenure, bemoaned the lack of print quality in Steichen's exhibitions.[16] Photographs that had pre-

viously been exquisitely matted and framed were now blown up to resemble unframed glossy posters. Originality was subsumed in favor of illustrations for the curator's predetermined meaning. Most striking of all, however, was the forsaking of a previously carefully groomed canon of photographers in exchange for a democratic amalgam of artists *plus* one-shot ponies. *The Family of Man* featured photographs by Robert Capa, Robert Frank, Dorothea Lange, Irving Penn, and other artistic giants alongside those of relative unknowns, agencies, and even anonymous authors.

Public reception, nevertheless, blossomed under Steichen. Remarking on his 1942 exhibition *Road to Victory,* Steichen recalls: "Here were photographs that were not simply placed there for their aesthetic values. Here were photographs used as a force and people flocked to see it. People who ordinarily never visited the museum came to see this."[17] The public response to *The Family of Man* differed from its predecessor only by several orders of greater magnitude. Yet the enthusiasm of the audience's reception is no great indicator that the exhibition successfully inspired a broadening of the horizon of expectations—had not Greenberg already warned us that the public will always prefer the Repin?[18]

If nothing else, Steichen won for the department and for photography a mass audience. The critical response to *The Family of Man,* however, is exemplified by the MoMA's reformist replacement of Steichen with the art historian John Szarkowski as Director of Photography in 1962. Steichen's mode of curatorship would never again be adopted by the institution, replaced instead by a return to a more aesthetic approach. Critical detractors at the time of the exhibition's opening focused less on the exhibition's artistic merit than on its philosophical or political stance. Of course, critics since that original horizon of expectations have singled it out for vociferous anti-imperialist and anti-universal language critique (among a host of other motivations), Roland Barthes and Allan Sekula chief among them.[19] Using Jauss's criteria it is difficult to gauge the artistic merit of *The Family of Man* based on an aesthetic of reception alone. It is true that the exhibition's model, or at least the quality of its production, has been all but abandoned by major art institutions. Yet *The Family of Man* is still a landmark in the museological, art historical, and photographic traditions; however, this exhibition has been canonized not for the aesthetic quality of its contents, but for the colossal scope of the project.

Jauss' fourth thesis concerns "the reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past."[20] We have already unraveled the institutional context of *The Family of Man,* some of the sociopolitical elements that motivated its organization, the mode and kinds of photographic exhibitions that preceded and followed its curation, and its visitors' general attitude towards photography as an art. On a broader historical level, the year of its inauguration—1955—is firmly en-

trenched in the Cold War and intriguingly nearly equidistant from the end of World War II and Buckminster Fuller's popularization of the term "spaceship earth."[21] That is, its message of photography as a universal language and reflection of the oneness of mankind was born from the utter chaos of the world and its peoples at war, at a time when a tense rivalry between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics motivated all political activity (at least in the two main countries involved). In this context, *The Family of Man* can be seen as a sort of peace offering, pre-figuring the calls for worldwide cooperation that would become increasingly insistent in the mid-1960s. Steichen thus encountered an audience in New York still smarting from the losses and lessons of World War II, with individuals variably receptive to the virtues of universality and collaboration.

The exhibition's historical cultural context, and hence the reconstruction of its horizon of expectations, is nonetheless complicated by several factors. The initial 1954 press release for *The Family of Man* asserted that the exhibition "would open simultaneously in New York, Europe, Asia, and Latin America, thereafter to travel globally for two years."[22] Steichen's exhibition was never intended to be a single orchestration. Indeed, the museum's original expectations would fall short – it would be seen in eighty-five separate exhibitions over the course of nearly a decade. Allan Sekula has a rather sinister, if reductivist, interpretation of *The Family of Man*'s dissemination; it was a marketing and public relations tool, supported with funding from governmental organizations and corporations like Coca-Cola. Similarly to that other great American export, *The Family of Man* "tended to appear in political 'hot spots' throughout the Third World," and was packaged as a commodity designed to reinforce the country's cultural superiority. The traditional patriarchal values espoused by the exhibition thereby became a metaphor for American world order.[23]

While this reading adds an interesting perspective to the Cold War politics that motivated *The Family of Man*'s production and distribution, it also points to the malleability of the exhibition. Various permutations, not always under the supervision of the originating institution, make for more variables in the scope of its reception. Sekula points out "that the Japanese recipients of the exhibition insisted on the inclusion of a large photographic mural depicting the victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."[24] In this example, the exhibition becomes equal parts memorial and art exhibition. Given their demands, the Japanese recipients were instrumental in evoking a meaning distinct from that with which Steichen had endowed the exhibition, thereby sharing authorship with the original curator. Although it thus becomes impossible to generalize a single horizon of expectations for early receptions of the exhibition, the example of Japan indicates the extent to which some recipients made viewership an active process.

Indeed the active reception of the exhibition or any work is the only means by which a history can be generated according to Jauss's aesthetic of reception. Thesis five deals with the diachronic relationships viewers would draw to establish an individual work as an event in its "historical position and significance."[25] Steichen, although disavowing an aesthetic of reception, would agree that "each period in the arts is the result of its inheritance of a past subjected to the conditioning pressures of the present."[26] While *The Family of Man* can certainly be incorporated by the viewer into a timeline of previously-viewed exhibitions, related to other photographic exhibitions, or even anthropological expositions, in some ways many of the photographs in the show resist historicity.

For example, fashion is generally a reliable signifier of its era. In this exhibition, foreign (read: non-Western) cultures are depicted whenever possible as nude or in traditional dress. The trappings of modern Western civilization—i.e., automobiles, television, and skyscrapers—are infrequently represented in favor of a more nostalgic, idealized past. Man in *The Family of Man* is frequently shown interacting with the natural environment and working the earth, in contrast to the Western reality of decreased agrarianism and increased industrialization. Similarly, the time period represented by exhibition is nowhere demarcated. This omission is curious, as great pains were taken to make other aspects of the selection process transparent:

> For almost three years we have been searching for these images. Over two million photographs from every corner of the earth have come to us – from individuals, collections and files. We screened them until we had ten thousand. Then came the almost unbearable task of reducing these to 503 photographs from 68 countries. The photographers who took them – 273 mean and women – are amateurs and professionals, famed and unknown.[27]

It therefore must be concluded that the exhibition is bound only by the possibility of the medium, from 1839 to the 1955 present. Only one photograph is dated in the exhibition catalogue, a circa 1862 portrait by Lewis Carroll of his muse, Alice.[28] Elsewhere, the photographs are only identified by country, photographer, and agency or publication where relevant. Although indicators of modernity are not entirely absent by any means, an effect of timelessness is achieved through Steichen's discriminating eye.

To the diachronic perspective sketched out in thesis five, Jauss's model marries a synchronic cross-sectional model in thesis six. Jauss wishes to overcome the primacy of the diachronic perspective in literary history, which presupposes a uniform flow of time with homogeneous impact on the arts, while simultaneously retaining its sequential element for the creation of a history. Rather, the relationships between works of a given historical moment should

be discovered, later to be reintegrated into a diachronic model with consecutive synchronic cross-sections. Therefore, for Jauss, "the historicity of literature comes to light at the intersections of diachrony and synchrony."[29]

Furthermore, it is not clear what counts for a contemporaneous work to be a photographic exhibition. Eva Cockcroft has revealed "MoMA's extensive wartime program," such that Steichen's actions in the Department of Photography were paralleled by those of his colleagues within the institution.[30] However, the MoMA's status at the forefront of photography made it in a sense one without peers. Even Stieglitz's 291 Gallery had disappeared as a forum for fine art photography by 1955. Also, it is impossible to determine whether the mass audience of *The Family of Man* overlapped with that of the esoteric *Goya Drawings and Prints* for example, which travelled to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the National Gallery in 1955.[31] This would seem unlikely, given Steichen's boast that his exhibitions attracted "people who ordinarily never came to the museum." While the retrospective historian's glance might categorize these two exhibitions as works of the same historical moment, it cannot be determined if the respective audiences similarly regarded them as works addressing the same horizon of expectations.

In terms of art historical innovations of the 1950s, *The Family of Man* sits uneasily at the extreme polarity of Abstract Expressionism. Populist and more akin to the contemporary movement Pop Art, American photography as a whole (in distinction to the modernist photography of the European avant-garde including Lazlo Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray), and Steichen still less, had not embraced the rhetoric of modernity. This situation is not without irony, as photography was one of several factors that ushered in modernism in art, freeing painters to abstraction rather than burdening them with representation after 1840. Steichen, in particular,

> grasped intuitively the heart of classical photographic practice. He did not focus on artists or schools of art . . . but on a certain subject matter (the "people") seen in a certain way. From the perspective of the classical aesthetic, which focuses on the subject, this makes good sense, but it is almost impossible to imagine it within the modernist idea of art, except as a joke or interesting anomaly.[32]

Sekula, by contrast, argues that Steichen had so strongly wrested authorship of the photographs from the artists that at least one tenet was upheld: "the modernist category of the solitary author was preserved, but at the level of editorship."[33]

Having considered *The Family of Man*'s synchronic and diachronic perspective, only Jauss's last thesis remains to be considered. It concerns the relationship of literary (or art historical) development to the general process of history; the work should not be a simple reflection of reality, but must be so-

cially formative of reality as well. That is, "the social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis."[34] For Jauss, it follows that art's achievement is not to be found in representational arts. Although he falls short of condemning photography outright, it may be inferred from his anti-illusionistic stance that Jauss would disallow the medium's potential claim to a social function.

Steichen's 'mirror' of mankind would seem to concur with this view, yet there is friction between this perspective and the exhibition's actual transcendence into the horizon of expectations of 'lived praxis.' It is almost impossible to quantify *The Family of Man*'s calculable impact, beyond a recital of its vital statistics (number of works, countries on view and / or represented, number of viewers, books sold, etc.). Did visitors to the exhibition come away with a renewed sense of the universality of their lived experiences, with a benign attitude towards other nations and other peoples? Certainlya new understanding was gained, whether for many or few, and this despite the photographs' mere 'representation' of the family of man. Meaning was given and / or produced, and these visitors could go forth with an enhanced ethical view of their own social function in society. The horizon of expectations of these select visitors was evoked, transformed, and in turn colored future art viewing situations, and even in rare cases, 'reality.' Jauss' view of representational art is too narrow to allow for this kind of gradual social activity and chance.

The Family of Man's final resting place is a permanent reinstallation at Château de Clervaux, Luxembourg, Steichen's country of birth. It is somehow fitting that the curator's sweeping global family album should find a home in one of the smallest (and richest) countries on earth. Although paltry in comparison to the mega-exhibitions of today, it can still be seen as an important and direct ancestor: "Perhaps this is the ultimate museological destiny of *The Family of Man:* to become the immobilized relic of a global road show that provided the model for the traveling museum blockbusters of today."[35] Having been a vociferous critic of Steichen and *The Family of Man,* Sekula must allow, nearly fifty years after its inauguration, that the exhibition has become timely again, given the "context of the contemporary discourse of 'globalization'."[36]

Perhaps Steichen gave or continues to give a face to that concept. A contemporary viewer's horizon of expectations and current cultural context may provoke such a reading, and Jauss's framework can aid in this analysis. But the exhibition's more concrete outcome was to have paved the way for exhibitions of the future – a result that does not require an aesthetic of reception to be validated. Jauss's methodology is thus an apt mode for studying some aspects of art history, yet the recipient-centric model fails to account for all the ways that social functionality and historical coherency can be achieved.

Nor does it fully account for the 'author's' power over the reception of an aesthetic.

Steichen wrote that "the invention of photography gave visual communication its most simple, direct, universal language."[37] Without engaging the host of problems this statement might induce, we can at least categorically refute that the *exhibition of* photography is the most simple, direct, or universal mode of visual communication. *The Family of Man* was created with a predetermined message in mind, to appeal to a presupposed horizon of expectations; it was, and is still, only through the force of active and critical viewership that other meanings can be brought forth. But if the curator stands for Hermes in this hermeneutical enterprise, what would it mean to shoot the messenger?

Notes:

1 Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* trans. Timothy Bahti, intro. Paul de Man (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982), 3-45. The German text of this essay first appeared in 1970. A different English translation of certain sections appeared in *New Literary History I,* ed. Ralph Cohen (1969).

2 Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* 46-75. The English translation first appeared in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism,* eds. Richard Amacher and Victor Lange (Princeton University Press, 1979).

3 Bill Gates' Corbis agency, founded in 1989, lies somewhere between a digital archive and online museum, with the goal of collecting all of the images in the world: www.corbis.com. See discussion in Allan Sekula, "Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)," *October* 102 (Autumn 2002): 11, http://www.jstor.org/stable/779129.

4 Information from my edition: *The Family of Man,* 30th anniv. ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1986).

5 Paul de Man, introduction to *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* by Hans Robert Jauss, trans. Timothy Bahti, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982), xii.

6 Jauss, "Literary History," 20-21.

7 E. H. Gombrich, "Standards of Truth: The Arrested Image and the Moving Eye," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1980): 270.

8 Ralph Morse, *London. Hyde Park* (1944. Silver gelatin print, 15" x 17.8", Time – Life, Inc).

9 Jauss, "Literary History," 22.

10 Edward Steichen, introduction to *The Family of Man,* 30th anniv. ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1986), 3.

11 Sekula, "Between the Net," 25.

12 Christopher Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," *October* 22 (Autumn 1982): 49, http://www.jstor. org/stable/778362.

13 Jauss, "Literary History," 25.

14 For an extensive look at the MoMA Department of Photography's influence, see Phillips, "Judgment Seat."

[15] Ibid., 28-39.

[16] Ansel Adams, correspondence with Christopher Phillips, January 30, 1980, in Phillips, "Judgment Seat," 48.

[17] Edward Steichen, "Photography and the Art Museum," in *Museum Service* (Bulletin of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences), June 1948, 69, quoted in Phillips, "Judgment Seat," 43.

[18] I trust that this reference is sufficiently familiar that no deeper discussion of Clement Greenberg's "The Avant-Garde and Kitsch" is necessary.

[19] Philosophical criticism exemplified by Jacques Barzun, *The House of Intellect* (New York: Harper, 1959), 28, quoted in Roger Seamon, "From the World is Beautiful to the Family of Man: The Plight of Photography as a Modern Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 3 (Summer, 1997), 248. See also: Hilton Kramer, "Exhibiting the Family of Man," *Commentary* xx, no. 5 (October, 1955). Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man," in *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: 1972), 100-02. All in Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* 41, no. 1, Photography and the Scholar / Critic (Spring, 1981), 15-25. http://www.jstor. org/stable/776511.

[20] Jauss, "Literary History," 28.

[21] Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1963).

[22] "Museum of Modern Art Plans International Photography Exhibition," MoMA press release, January 31, 1954, The Edward Steichen Archive, MoMA, quoted in Phillips, "Judgment Seat," 46-48.

[23] Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," 19.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Jauss, "Literary History," 32.

[26] Edward Steichen, "On Photography," *Daedalus* 89, no. 1, The Visual Arts Today (Winter, 1960): 136.

[27] Steichen, introduction to *The Family of Man.*

[28] This was Lewis Carroll's *Alice Liddell as 'The Queen of May'*, (1860. Albumen print of collodion negative).

[29] Jauss, "Literary History," 36-39.

[30] Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapons of the Cold War," *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (June 1974), 39-41, quoted in Chris Phillips, "Judgment Seat," 45.

[31] See *Goya Drawings and Prints*, in "Past Exhibitions," on the National Gallery of Art website, accessed online at http://www.nga.gov/past/data/exh150.shtm.

[32] Seamon, "From the World," 249.

[33] Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," 20.

[34] Jauss, "Literary History," 39.
[35] Sekula, "Between the Net," 27.
[36] Ibid., 21.
[37] Steichen, "On Photography," 136.

Paths to Dissolution: Water and Abstract Art

David Clarke

Although there were many routes towards abstraction in twentieth-century painting, it is worthy to note that in the case of several of the most significant artists an involvement with water as a subject proved of importance at a crucial moment in their pathway to abstraction.[1] Although abstract art, by definition, lacks any subject matter in the everyday sense of the term, at the threshold of abstraction where remnants of recognizable imagery were still present, watery themes proved particularly helpful in aiding painting beyond a concern with bounded form and reference to the world of everyday material objects. This was the case because of the nature of water itself, a substance without fixed form that was particularly appropriate as a subject for an art that was seeking dissolution. As will be argued at some length in the following pages, this role of water as a crucial subject for painting on its path towards abstraction can be documented in the case of two of the pioneers of the language of abstract art, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky. Although there are important differences which need to be acknowledged, a similar attraction to watery themes can be found in the second great wave of abstraction in twentieth-century art, namely that seen in the United States following the end of the Second World War. Artists such as Jackson Pollock or Mark Rothko took very different routes towards the abstract than Kandinsky or Mondrian, but they too shared to some degree a concern for water as a subject. Several American artists of that era will be discussed, albeit in rather less detail than the two European pioneers, and the continuing interest in water as a subject amongst painters producing work of an abstract or near-abstract nature in our own era will be explored towards the end of the essay through a consideration of the work of Pat Steir.

A second dimension of the interest in water displayed by abstract-leaning artists relates to that substance's value as a possible medium for painting. This double identity of water as both a subject for painting, and as a physical material that can enable the act of painting itself, places it apart from almost all other subjects that art can address. Just as water's visible properties aided the dissolution or erosion of recognizable form in twentieth-century art, so too did its actual physical qualities when it was employed as an element of technique.

In the era of Romanticism, where many of the roots of later European modernism are to be found, water on occasion also played a significant role. Preeminent of these examples is that of Joseph Mallord WilliamTurner, an artist who both created many images of water as a subject in which an unprecedented degree of dissolution of form is found, and who also explored the use of watercolor as an expressive medium like never before in its history. A deep engagement with water as a motif (also leading to a dissolution of form) can also be found in the post-Romantic art of Claude Monet, although in his case it was by means of his abiding interest in the theme of fragmented reflections on water surfaces. Such precedents helped pave the way for the achievements of twentieth century Western artists, and although many of them can be shown to have had engagements with the subject of water in their work (including artists as varied as Henri Matisse and David Hockney), the particular role of water in enabling painterly abstraction is a story worth telling in its own right. In order to help clarify the extent to which various abstract artists adopted parallel paths to abstraction despite different artistic starting points, different cultural contexts, and different historical moments, the following discussion will consider each artist separately.

Piet Mondrian

As a Dutch artist Mondrian grew up in a country where water was a constant consideration. In the great Dutch art of the seventeenth century there are already many instances where the very obvious presence of rivers and canals in the commerce and everyday life of the country are documented, as well as a great number of seascapes that reflect the importance of trade and maritime strength to the nation. In Rembrandt's time water was already a part of the central cityscape of Dutch cities like Amsterdam, Utrecht or Delft in the same way that it is more famously in Venice. Even so, the Holland of Mondrian's time was even more a land won from water, and in many senses the Dutch landscape that we can see today is very much a creation of the modern world. For instance, the North Sea Canal, which allowed seafaring vessels to reach the port of Amsterdam, had been constructed between 1865 and 1876. The Zuiderzee Works[2] was undertaken from 1916 onwards, with a thirty-two kilometer dyke protecting against the North Sea completed in 1932, and the first polder completed in 1929. This massive project was finally agreed to by the Dutch parliament in 1918 following a disastrous flood in January 1916 (the latest of many) after having been mooted as early as the seventeenth century, but serious and technically-feasible plans were only able to emerge and become a part of Dutch public consciousness in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Dutch government actually started working on official plans for the enclosure after 1913, when engineer and project advocate Cornelis Lely

became Minister of Transport and Public Works. His plan of 1891 provided the basic template employed in the project. At this same time, albeit on a smaller scale, this shifting of balance between land and water was also occurring in urban environments as well, including the city of Amsterdam. When Mondrian lived there as a student in the 1890s Amsterdam canals were being filled in to create sites for new housing and to permit the construction of access roads.[3]

Our understanding that the transformation of the Dutch landscape through the control of water was an occurrence of the modern era in which Mondrian was living can be deepened by noting that, unlike many other locations where land has been reclaimed, the habitability and cultivability of Holland's low-lying man-made polder landscape needs to be continually maintained by its distinctive system of canals, dykes, drainage ditches and pumps (the power for such pumping having traditionally been provided by the windmills for which the country is so well known). Even today the creation of the polder landscape is not simply a matter of engineering history, a cultural act of landscape making which can be misrecognized through the passing of time as merely natural, but is a continuing and visible responsibility of maintenance for a people aware of living below sea level.

Both the presence of water in the Dutch landscape and the mechanisms by which it was controlled—canals, ditches, windmills—are frequently depicted in Mondrian's early work. Examples of works depicting irrigation ditches include *Irrigation Ditch, Bridge and Goat* (watercolor, c. 1894-5, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague), *Farm Building Near Irrigation Ditch With Farmer at Work* (oil, c. 1895-6), *Irrigation Ditch With Young Pollarded Willow, Oil Sketch II* (oil, 1900, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague), *Fragment of an Irrigation Ditch* (oil, c. 1901-2), and *Curved Irrigation Ditch Bordering Farmyard with Flowering Trees* (oil, c. 1902).[4] River and canal scenes include *Waals-Eilandgracht with Bridge and Moored Tjalk Barges* (oil, c. 1895-6), *Farmstead along a Canal* (oil, c. 1897-8), *Lange Bleekerssloot with Barge* (oil, c. 1898), *House on the Gein* (watercolor and gouache, 1900, private collection), *Geinrust Farm in Watery Landscape* (watercolor, c. 1905-6, Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem), and *Farm at Duivendrecht* (oil, 1905, private collection). Amongst many works in which water-pumping windmills ("poldermolens") appear are *Stammer Mill with Summer House, Oil Sketch* (oil, 1905, Ethnike Pinakoteke kai Mouseion Alexandrou Soulzou, Athens) and *Oostzijde Mill with Extended Blue, Yellow and Purple Sky* (oil, c. 1907-8, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague). In addition, during his Amsterdam phase, Mondrian made three paintings and one charcoal drawing of one of the two dredges the city owned at the time (e.g. *Dredge III*, oil, 1907, The James and Lillian Clark Foundation, Dallas) thus alluding to one of the processes by which water and land are kept in a balanced relationship in the Dutch land-

scape.[5] A thematic allusion to the interaction of water and land is also to be found in three images of a dry dock that Mondrian also produced in Amsterdam (e.g. *Drydock at Durgerdam*, watercolor, c. 1898-9, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis). In addition, the aforementioned process of filling in Amsterdam's canals, while not itself depicted, may have occasioned the images Mondrian made of Lange Bleekerssloot, which had begun to be filled in during 1892, and had disappeared entirely by the end of that decade not long after he painted it.

At one level the prevalence of an imagery of water and water-containment in Mondrian's early paintings is unsurprising. Given the pervasiveness of water-containment works in the Dutch landscape their presence in his art could easily be explained as inadvertent, but I believe such reasoning fails to take account of the conscious and selective nature of artistic representation. Not all Dutch landscape artists of that era made water and the mechanisms of its control such a significant part of their work, and in doing so Mondrian demonstrated his selectivity concerning the influences he accepted. He may in fact have been following a specific lead from his uncle, Frits Mondriaan (1853-1932), who he acknowledged as his first painting teacher. Frits Mondriaan himself chose to emphasize water as one of the main themes of his art, writing in the third person in a biographical note that he was an artist who "chiefly paints woodland scenes and water views."[6]

Although Frits Mondriaan produced many finished Salon-style works that appear to have been less influential on his nephew, Piet did seem to respond to the fresher style of his uncle's outdoor landscape sketches (although lack of precise dates for many of the older artist's works and the absence of other contextual information means that this ultimately remains something of a conjecture). Since Mondrian went along with his uncle on outdoor sketching trips, this may have been a matter of learning a particular approach to the process of image making rather than simply imitating that process's results. The watery motifs of the younger artist's paintings may have been chosen in accordance with habits of vision and working that had been established at an earlier age from observation of his uncle's practice. *Irrigation Ditch, Bridge and Goat* is one example of a work by Mondrian that can be closely compared in terms of subject matter to a painting of his uncle's, *Waterway with Bridge* (watercolor and pencil, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague). Although Mondrian's image belongs to his Amsterdam phase and represents a different locale than that shown in his uncle's work, both artists chose to depict a modest corner of nature and the motif of a small single-span bridge over a water channel. There are similarities of style and mood between the two images, which both show a natural world transformed by human activity instead of the purer vision of nature favored by the Romantics. At the same time they introduce a note of contemplative stillness, evacuating human presence itself from

the stage set of the work. The main motif of both works—the bridging of water—is in the foreground of the painting, which occupies most of our attention. The bridge in each image serves to block visual access to depth, although unlike Piet, Frits does establish some visual interest in the depth of his image to counterbalance the foreground emphasis of the work. In both cases the bridge is set back a little into the foreground, with water and the land on either side of it taking up the immediate foreground without offering anything to detain our eye there. Both works are executed in the medium of watercolor, although the younger artist's image (more than twice the size of his uncle's work) is a little more adventurous in its use of this medium, a little more willing to adopt a watery feel in his treatment of this watery subject.

Although in most respects Mondrian's later work differs markedly from that which he produced under his uncle's influence, and their art diverged rapidly as Piet's experimental or modernist attitude manifested itself, Piet's interest in a grid-like structure of horizontals and verticals characteristic of his mature signature canvases can be traced back to Frits Mondriaan. This mature language of horizontals and verticals was displayed in earlier imagistic works with watery subjects such as *Row of Eight Young Willows Reflected in Water* (oil, c. 1905, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague); *Row of Young Willows Reflected in Water* (oil, c. 1905, Sidney Janis Family Collection, New York); and *Five Tree Silhouettes along the Gein with Moon* (oil, 1907-8, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague). In these works, the predominant verticals are provided through the forms of trees, and the predominant horizontals are provided by a body of water taking up the immediate foreground (and the lowest segment of the painting surface) and depicted frontally from a viewpoint on the opposite bank.[7] This exact format can be found already in Frits Mondrian's oil *Cows at a Stream* where, as with Mondrian's *Row of Young Willows Reflected in Water*, the reflective surface of water allows the vertical accents of the tree trunks to carry downwards to the bottom of the image.

Already in works such as *Five Tree Silhouettes Along the Gein With Moon* a symbolic opposition between vertical and horizontal (rather than one which could be explained as of merely formal, compositional purpose) seems to have existed in Mondrian's work, with water playing a key part in defining the latter, and thus having a more than merely literal significance in his art. A sketchbook note from circa 1914 makes explicit the association of water with horizontality (and with the feminine principle) as part of a symbolic duality with verticality, but even before the date of that note a further development of the association of water with horizontality can be found in Mondrian's work itself.[8] This is seen in the images he produced between 1909 and 1911 when he was spending time at the coastal bathing resort of Domburg in the Dutch province of Zeeland. Here horizontality is even further stressed in many works to a point where it tends to dominate, as found in *Sea Towards Sunset* or *Sea-*

scape (both oil, 1909, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague). Although the Dutch landscape is characterized by its flatness, it is only here on the coast and with the new motif of the sea, that such unfettered horizontality can be found and a greater sense of unbounded spatiality explored. A new expressivity of tone is now present in Mondrian's painting, evidenced by the heightened, non-naturalistic color and visibly broken touch, which recalls his compatriot Van Gogh as well as later Fauvist tendencies. These are the canvases in which he comes closest to engaging with the heritage of Romantic landscape painting for which the sea played a key role in its aesthetic of the sublime, figuring nature in its more cosmic sense. Clearly it is not to Turner and his restless and stormy seas and shipwrecks that parallels can be drawn, but rather to the more contemplative seascapes of Caspar David Friedrich. Like that artist's works, Mondrian's Domburg paintings often show a shoreline in the foreground, rather than placing the viewer themselves at sea. Of course a more specific point of comparison is offered by Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (oil, 1809, Nationalgalerie, Berlin) which itself, like Mondrian, deals with the particular subject of a seascape fronted by dunes. Where Friedrich offers the figure of a monk (or, in other works, a variety of figures which substitute for or echo the spectator's gaze within the world of the painting) Mondrian allows us to confront the oceanic vastness directly, without mediation.

Even in the Domburg seascapes there is a desire to find a balance for the watery horizontality and unboundedness to some extent, to discover some countervailing visual element. In the breakwaters that check the sea's erosive force along the water's edge Mondrian finds a maritime counterpart to the ditches and canals that, as shown in his early work, serve to contain the power of water in the Dutch inland landscape. Mondrian shows these breakwaters in several of his sea images such as *Beach with Five Piers at Domburg* (oil, 1909, Sidney Janis Family Collection, New York). Such elements of sea defense (which are actually an integral part of reclamation and water control projects like the Zuiderzee Works that have transformed the country's interior) are evidence of a sensibility that is ultimately quite different from the Romantic one with its wholehearted embrace of unboundedness and its celebration of man's smallness in the face of nature. This sensibility seeks instead a place for the man-made and the rational within the broader scheme of things, and is supportive of human efforts to temper or balance nature's raw power, while at the same time celebrating nature in its expansive or cosmic aspects. As the Joosten and Welsh catalog raisonné of Mondrian's work notes (and as Mondrian himself would have been well aware), the Zeeland coastline he was depicting was one where "protection from erosion and floods of . . . hard-won farmlands, which began towards the ninth century, was an ongoing process not infrequently interrupted by brief or long-term invasions of the sea." Domburg and each of the other villages in Zeeland that Mondrian chose subjects from

"had fought a centuries-long battle to keep the dunes which protected it from the sea from moving inland."[9]

Despite his interest in the motif of breakwaters, for the most part Mondrian's investigation of man-made structures in Domburg was instead relegated to other, non-oceanic motifs, namely churches and windmills. In these images the sea is absent, and verticality dominates instead of horizontality. One other vertical man-made structure does also figure in several of his works of this period; the lighthouse at Westkapelle (for instance, *Lighthouse at Westkapelle in Orange, Pink, Purple and Blue*, oil, c. 1910, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague), and this time of course the sea, although not visible, is evoked indirectly. As a structure concerned with defending mankind against the sea by preventing shipwrecks (and a modern one too in that its oil lamps had been replaced by electric ones in 1907), this work also shows how Mondrian's sensibility differs from that of Romantic painting.[10] It is no surprise that traces of that aesthetic are no longer visible in the work he produced after his time at Domburg came to an end.

Early in 1912 Mondrian moved to Paris, and in the work that he created during that phase he showed a deep engagement with the lessons of Cubism, which he had already encountered and begun to respond to before his arrival. The heightened color of his Domburg paintings disappears as he approximates the near monochrome of Picasso and Braque's Cubism, and although neither landscape nor even seascape disappears entirely from his production during this period his previously intense dialogue with the particular qualities of the Dutch topography is largely interrupted while in this urbanized overseas location.[11] While based in Paris he did however make occasional return trips to his native Holland, spending time in Domburg and continuing to explore the challenges and possibilities presented by the motif of the sea in drawings and sketches, if not in finished paintings. This is evident in such sketchbook images as *Piers and Sea* (pencil, summer 1912, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague). In *Still Life with Gingerpot II* (oil, 1912, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), one of the most ambitious of the works completed during this Cubist-influenced phase, his previously noted interest in constructing a composition from the interaction of horizontals and verticals is again present. In this work however, the delimited and shallow space of a still-life that had been advantageous for Picasso and Braque in enabling the evolution of their Cubist language, required in Mondrian's case a sacrifice of the more expansive quality found in his Domburg seascapes and enabled by their watery subject. Lacking the fragmentation of form found in Picasso and Braque's Analytical Cubist works and their exploration of shifting viewpoints, Mondrian's work is gridlocked, and compositionally inert or static.

Only in the sequence of images of trees which he produces during this period does Mondrian's new Cubist-inspired vocabulary of forms get tested

against a natural subject of the kind that had inspired his best work up to that point. Like his compatriot Van Gogh, Mondrian often chose fruit trees as his subject. The Joostein/Welsh catalog raisonné of his work identifies several of the single trees represented as apple, as in *Apple Tree in Blue: Tempera* (tempera, 1908-9, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague) and *Apple Tree, Pointillist Version* (oil, 1908-9, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas). This is also true of the more Cubist works, such as *Flowering Appletree* (oil, 1912, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague). However, more important than any allusion to the artistic precedent of Van Gogh, is the fact that unlike other species grown for timber, fruit trees tend to have their branches carefully trained and pruned by man (the espalier being a particularly extreme form of such deformation). Thus, like the Dutch landscape as a whole with its man-made qualities and careful channeling of water, they offer a motif that represents the balancing of the natural with the rational or human. Looked at in this way, the stylizations and distortions that Mondrian imposes on his painted trees (such as *The Grey Tree*, oil, 1911, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague) can be taken as just one further step in a process of organizing nature already present in this aspect of the real world itself. Indeed, looking back at Mondrian's earlier works one is struck by how often the trees in his paintings and drawings are ones which man has intervened with or "composed" in some way. For instance, instead of self-seeding first growth forests, we see trees carefully planted at regular pre-determined intervals alongside a water channel as in *Five Tree Silhouettes Along the Gein with Moon*, and branches re-growing on pollarded willows as in the following: *Irrigation Ditch with Young Pollarded Willow, Oil Sketch II*; *Irrigation Ditch with Mature Willow* (oil, c. 1900); *Willow Grove, Trunks Leaning Left I* (oil, c. 1902-3, Centraal Museum, Utrecht), and *Willow Groves, Near the Water, Prominent Tree at Right* (oil, 1905-6, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague).

Although to some extent the tree as subject did help Mondrian get beyond the static gridlocked compositions of his Cubist-influenced work (perhaps through its organic nature which offered a counterpoint to the more geometricizing vocabulary of Cubism), it ultimately proved too contained a form. Since he was dealing with trees that had been trained as they grew he was able to find horizontal accents as well as vertical ones (e.g. *Tree: Study for the Gray Tree*, black crayon, 1912, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague), but by their nature trees are hierarchical rather than open structures, and even though he tried to counteract this property by emphasizing the negative spaces between the branches (as in *The Grey Tree*), this remained a limitation. To enable further progress in the evolution of his style and the emergence of an idiom that was truly his own Mondrian needed to leave behind not just the tree as subject but also still life and the human figure (both genres which had helped him in his early encounter with Cubism since they were central to the Cubist

project of Picasso and Braque). In his next phase, which can be marked by his return to Dutch residency in 1914 (having being prevented from returning to Paris after a trip to his homeland by the outbreak of the First World War) the two main subjects of his art were again the ones that had preoccupied him at Domburg, the façades of buildings and, more crucially I would argue for his art, the sea. Facades were now treated in close up, and horizontal accents were found in structures where previously only verticality had seemed worthy of emphasis (for example, *Church Façade 1: Church at Domburg*, pencil, charcoal and ink, 1914, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague). Nevertheless Mondrian's images of facades produced at this time retained the relatively static grid-like quality of earlier works such as *Still Life with Gingerpot II*, (perhaps necessarily so because of the nature of architectural structures) and it is only in his works that treat the subject of the sea, such as *Pier and Ocean 4* (charcoal, 1914, Haags Gemeentemuseum, the Hague) and *Composition 10 in Black and White* (oil, 1915, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo) that the crucial breakthrough to a more open sense of space is found.

Whereas Mondrian's earlier attempts at representing the sea had resulted in works where horizontality dominated, now in a work such as the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller's *Composition10 in Black and White* there was a balance between vertical and horizontal accents, which have themselves become more overt due to the increasing abstraction of the style, and the increasing emphasis on the now simplified graphic language of lines which make up the work at a formal level. This new balance between the horizontal and the vertical was achieved by introducing the motif of a pier or breakwater to provide vertical accents within the work, and to thematically counterbalance the natural motif of the sea with something man-made. This new motif is a more developed counterpart to the Domburg breakwaters visible in his earlier works such as *Beach with Five Piers at Domburg*, where these man-made elements had been used visually to reinforce the horizontality given to the image by the sea, rather than to provide an opposite to it, and it is entirely consonant with the tendency that has been observed from his early works onwards of representing the Dutch landscape as constituted from both natural elements (of which water was an integral part) and human interventions (primarily concerned with the mastery of that water). The diagonal lines found in the more naturalistic sketchbook study of a Domburg breakwater which lies behind the pier and ocean works and their idea of orienting the structure vertically (and which are created by the form of the breakwater's paired rows of wooden piles as they recedes in perspective) are not repeated in *Composition10 in Black and White* (1915) or the other pier and ocean images.[12] Although the sketch is made from an elevated viewpoint, these more abstract and finished works can be read (because of that absence of diagonals) as having an even more elevated birds-eye view, looking down on the water surface from above. Such a

viewpoint detached from possible earthbound vantage points helps introduce a more cosmic dimension to the image, and of course, the unbounded subject of the sea further enhances this.

Not as delimited as an architectural façade, the sea as a subject enables a new and very un-Cubist openness of space to come into Mondrian's art. The boundaries of the image therefore come to seem merely provisional, with a suggestion of expanse beyond the framing oval edge. At the same time the grid-like arrangement of verticals and horizontals within the image are less locked together than in earlier Cubist-inspired works such as *Still Life with Gingerpot II* or even contemporaneous works of an equivalent degree of abstraction that are derived from architectural facades, although with time even these architectural works (such as *Composition*, oil, 1916, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) begin to be somewhat infected by the new openness of structure found in the engagement with the sea motif.[13] With empty space now more visible between the vertical and horizontal lines the composition has more room to breathe, and since horizontal and vertical lines do not always now meet, it starts to read as a more significant pictorial incident when they do. Partly because of this and also because the varying length of the lines introduces a shifting and ambiguous optical illusion of depth (since we tend to read shorter lines as if further away in space) the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller's *Composition10 in Black and White* has a rippling, visually active feel not present in the same way in the architectural façade images, and which can be taken as referring to the motion of the waves; evoking nature as in process (but not offering a representation of an actual water surface as found in Monet's painting for example). Solving the problems that had been with his art from the time of its engagement with Cubism, Mondrian is simultaneously now able to return with success to the issues left unsettled in his earlier Domburg works. Vertical and horizontal are now allowed into the same image whereas they were previously largely relegated to different images, and the unboundedness of nature (in the form of the sea) is allowed into the work without surrendering to a Romantic aesthetic of the sublime.

In the years immediately following the production of his abstracted sea images Mondrian's signature idiom began to emerge, with its language of black horizontal and vertical lines, and rectangles in the three primary colors against a white field. Although starting points in nature were no longer needed in that phase of his art he could not have arrived at that purer abstraction without his engagement with natural motifs (in particular the sea) that took place in the threshold period of near-abstraction which preceded it. At first sight his works of the early 1920s onwards may seem to have little resemblance to the pier and ocean images that preceded them, since the overlapping vertical and horizontal lines seem to reintroduce a grid-like structure. However, these mature canvases have a sense of unbounded space gained from the

sea images, indicated by the way the lines and rectangles invite being read as continuing beyond the painting's edge, and derived from the dominance that empty white is allowed to have. They also frequently have the rhythmic or optically mobile sense of the pier and ocean works, particularly in the 1930s when lines come to dominate the images more at the expense of the colored rectangles, and where one even encounters effects of optical flickering which prefigure the work of Bridget Riley and others.

Rather than the vertical and horizontal lines of the later work serving to create a static interlocking grid such as was present in his earlier Cubist-influenced images (and the works created after his return to Holland that were based on building facades) they now provide a balancing counterpart to the sense of spatial openness and movement derived from the pier and ocean works. The visual elements within the mature works no longer read merely as a series of linked forms as in *Still Life with Gingerpot II* (partly because, as in the pier and ocean works, the lines are no longer the outlines of closed shapes, instead retaining their autonomy), but as forces in a kind of yin/yang-like dynamic tension—as it were, like verbs rather than nouns. Instead of likening Mondrian's mature works in a superficial way to the appearance of the Dutch landscape, as has often been done, I instead see him responding to the particular qualities of that country's terrain (which his earlier paintings and drawings had shown his profound interest in) in a deeper way. Since visual likeness was no longer sought in that later phase and natural starting points were no longer employed, it only introduces misleading associations into the reading of his works to see the straight black lines as if they were like canals and irrigation ditches, or the colored rectangles like bulb-fields in bloom, etc. Rather, the balance of contrasting visual forces in these works can be likened to the Dutch landscape viewed as a habitat sustained through a subtle dynamic balance, never resolved into static equilibrium, between the power of water and mankind's efforts to control and channel that power for its own purposes. In this way of thinking Mondrian's later work can still be seen as embodying the image of the Dutch landscape that he had directly represented in his earlier naturalistic work, one which saw rational human intervention not as a later addition or overlay to nature in the landscape, but as integral to it, enabling this distinctive landscape to come into existence in the first place.

In arguing for a consonance between Mondrian's mature abstract paintings and the Dutch landscape I am clearly not attempting to claim that his style was in any sense determined by the physical facts of the landscape in which he was born and brought up, any more than I am arguing that his earlier naturalistic depictions can be explained only by reference to the realities of the landscape they represent. In both cases this would ignore the uniqueness of his solutions amongst Dutch artists, and the extent to which his art must be based on either a conscious or unexpressed conception of the landscape, and

must embody an interpretation of it. The idea that a reading of the Dutch landscape's unique watery properties could provide inspiration in a less-than-likely arena, even providing a metaphor for thinking about reality in some larger sense (as perhaps can be said to be the case with Mondrian), can be consolidated by reference to the case of Sigmund Freud. Freud had visited Holland and it is not inconceivable that first-hand observation of the widespread Dutch process of recovering dry land from water through rational human effort helped him think through certain key notions of his psychoanalytic theory. In any case, in a 1932 lecture on psychoanalysis Freud famously used Dutch land reclamation as an analogy in the explanation of his theory. Summarizing the process of analysis at the end of his lecture as "where the id was, the ego shall be," he describes this task as "a work of culture – not unlike the draining of the Zuider Zee."[14]

Wassily Kandinsky

The route to abstraction taken by Kandinsky, that other great pioneer of abstract painting, differed markedly from the one adopted by Mondrian. Unlike the Dutch artist, Kandinsky did not travel towards abstraction via an encounter with Cubism, which played no part in his artistic development. Furthermore, color had a more central role in his more emotively expressive images than it did in the mature signature work of Mondrian. However, similarities can still be found in their work, both at the trivial level (Kandinsky also painted the Dutch coastal landscape at one point) and at the more profound and intangible level of aesthetic orientation (for instance both artists took inspiration from the ideas of Rudolph Steiner and were motivated by an essentially spiritual or mystical outlook in moving their art beyond recognizable imagery). With respect to the theme of this present study it is also of interest to note that, like Mondrian, Kandinsky was drawn to engage with watery themes during the period when he began to develop his abstract idiom. Even more than is the case with Mondrian, it is necessary to clarify that Kandinsky's movement towards abstraction was motivated by complex factors, and while not attempting to see water as somehow "responsible for" his abstract manner I do want to argue here that his choice of watery subjects prior to the emergence of his more fully abstract works did help the evolution of that work significantly.

Although watery subjects were present in Kandinsky's early naturalistic phase (e.g. *Kochel -Waterfall II*, oil, 1902, Städtische Galerie, Munich), they did not have any marked quantitative prominence in his oeuvre, and one cannot say that it is in relation to depictions of water that the artist's stylistic developments of that time occurred. When watery imagery began to take a greater prominence in his work in the early half of the 1910s, the crucial period during which the artist's abstract idiom is forged, it is of a different, less

empirically observed kind. Rather than imaging water as it is found in the natural world, at that time Kandinsky engaged with the symbolic associations that water had accrued in the Judeo-Christian tradition through its role in the key biblical story of the flood of Genesis. Although other Christian themes (such as St. George and the Dragon) are also found in his work of this period, which can be seen as echoing or reworking imagery that is found in the distinctive pre-modern art of Russian Orthodox Christianity, the theme of the Deluge proves crucial for Kandinsky in enabling him to embody certain key spiritual beliefs in his art. Influenced by various modern mystical thinkers, and most particularly perhaps by Rudolph Steiner, Kandinsky seemed to believe that the world was about to experience an apocalyptic moment of spiritual cleansing in which a prevailing era of materialism would come to an end and be replaced by a new more spiritually-evolved one. Although the biblical story of the Deluge refers to an event that was supposed to have occurred in the past, Kandinsky's work references a catastrophic watery transformation that appears to be prophetic and thus future-orientated in nature. A conflation of references to the biblical flood and to the apocalypse foretold in the book of Revelations may be taking place, and this is possible since Kandinsky does not offer the kind of literal illustration of the words of Genesis found in other artists' paintings, and because the later New Testament passage is not presented in quite the same descriptive language as the Old Testament one.

Crucial amongst Kandinsky's paintings treating the theme of the Deluge is *Composition VI* (oil, 1913, Hermitage, Saint Petersburg), a work that took eighteen months to bring to a successful completion (as he himself tells us in a detailed account produced in May 1913). This alone indicates the important role that it played in enabling his artistic development.[15] Already a relatively high degree of abstraction had been achieved with this canvas, and it would thus not be easy to know the theme's inspiration if Kandinsky had not explicitly stated, "my starting point was the Deluge." Kandinsky had produced a glass painting on this theme previously, and the completion of that work, which he described as having been made primarily for his personal satisfaction, gave rise to the desire to produce a "Composition" (the most considered type of painting he was executing at this time) on the same theme. This glass painting is now lost, and we can only attempt to imagine its appearance with the help of other glass paintings the artist produced around this time, working in an idiom influenced by Bavarian folk crafts to which he had been exposed during his time in the Munich area. Kandinsky did mention that the lost painting contained such motifs as the ark, lightning and rain. While the latter two motifs would probably have required a degree of stylization, a concern with specific recognizable things (presumably related to the given iconography of the Deluge theme) seems to have predominated, and Kandinsky notes that when he began work on the *Composition* he was to take a similar approach.

However, this proved to be a dead end, and he wrote, "I lost myself amidst corporeal forms, which I had painted merely in order to heighten and clarify my image of the picture."

Progress with the work came only in a roundabout way, after Kandinsky had produced a related series of painted studies on the Deluge theme. Although he found these also incomplete in their expression, when looked at together he felt they "contained much that was correct." The breakthrough came with the understanding that he needed to move beyond attempts to interpret the theme externally (even abstract attempts): "I was still obedient to the expression of the Deluge, instead of heeding the expression of the word 'Deluge.'" The crucial step towards this more direct approach came via a move beyond separate bounded material forms into a more spatially ambiguous, fluid and holistic all-over composition. The "corporeal forms" were now "dissolved" (Kandinsky's terms); in other words, a wateriness was allowed to be present at the very level of forms themselves, existing as their governing metaphor as it were, eroding solidity and separation. One can say that this new formal fluidity is appropriate to the theme, that it perhaps helps evoke an impression of turbulent waves in the lower section of *Composition VI*, or even that it suits the theme of inundation and drowning in the painting as a whole. However, at a more important level it is not only a matter of specific or general thematic references, but in fact the whole visual language of the work has become a fluid one. Ultimately it would not prove possible to illustrate the theme of the Deluge successfully, even in an abstract way; instead (as Kandinsky wrote of the completed painting), the original motif of the Deluge itself had to be "dissolved and transformed into an internal, purely pictorial, independent, and objective existence".

In addition to the previously-mentioned references to dissolution in Kandinsky's account of the difficult birth of the landmark painting *Composition VI*, which occur when he is discussing the dissolving of solid or "corporeal" form (on the one hand) and the dissolving of the theme or of the illustrative approach in general (on the other hand), a watery metaphor also appears when he is talking about the treatment of space in the work. Just as form dissolves, so spatial order is similarly undermined in a way that becomes of major importance for the paintings that follow. Kandinsky draws our attention particularly to the area towards the left of the painting's mid-point, which for him is the principal focal center of the picture (though not immediately recognizable as such), pointing out that "here the pink and white seethe in such a way that they seem to lie neither upon the surface of the canvas nor upon any ideal surface" (by which I take him as meaning any fictional represented surface within an illusory space). In attempting to specify positively the ambiguous spatial position of these colors, Kandinsky writes that "they appear as if hovering in air, as if surrounded by steam." This reference to water in its gas-

eous form is further specified in the remarks that directly follow: "This apparent absence of surface, the same uncertainty as to distance, can, e.g., be observed in Russian steam baths. A man standing in the steam is neither close to nor far away; he is just somewhere."

Many artists who have depicted the theme of the Deluge in art, from Nicolas Poussin to Francis Danby, emphasize the negative aspects of the event for humankind, introducing into their works images of terrified and struggling human figures, even if (for artists of the Romantic era and their successors) the larger goal might be to evoke a sensation of the sublime, and thus to offer a religious sense of man's smallness in the face of nature's (and by implication God's) power. In Kandinsky's case, however, there is no intention to evoke a sense of the sublime (despite the ambiguity he introduces, both formally and spatially), and he seems more conscious than other modern artists of the positive and purifying connotation of the story of the flood. His ability to take the side of water more than them perhaps allowed this breakthrough of dissolution in his art. The catastrophe he was depicting represented for him a welcome and perhaps even imminent spiritual cleansing, and thus there was no need in his art, as there was in Mondrian's, to counterbalance water with some controlling or limiting force. While the Dutch artist shared quite a lot of the mystical worldview of Kandinsky, an apocalyptic breakthrough to a new spiritual era was not a part of his thinking in the way it was for the Russian.

Another work by Kandinsky from this period showing progress towards a definitive abstract idiom, and of which we have a detailed account given by the artist, is *Painting with a White Border (Moscow)* (oil, 1913, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York). Here again Kandinsky's description invokes watery terminology in describing the characteristics of a work whose completion was not a straightforward affair. Once more he describes "dissolving" forms and colors that had been too "concise and restricted" in his first design, and this metaphor of solid becoming liquid is paralleled by one of liquid becoming gas in two references to "inner boiling."[16] The picture as a whole is characterized as "stormy," and at two points in his formal description of it Kandinsky references waves. At one point he states that if one follows the edges of one particular ambiguously defined form with one's eye, "one experiences an inner sensation like a succession of waves." The metaphor of a wave also returns in his discussion of the painting's most conspicuous feature, which Kandinsky describes as providing "the solution to the picture," namely the white edging so visible to the bottom and right of the image (after which he named the painting). He describes this formal feature as a "white wave" rising from a chasm at the image's lower left, but suddenly subsiding, "only to flow around the right-hand side of the picture in lazy coils, forming in the upper right a lake (where the black bubbling comes about), disappearing towards the upper left-hand corner." Unlike *Composition VI*, the iconography of the Del-

uge is not the initial stimulus for this work. Although any wateriness here is thus firmly divorced from descriptive intent, a similar logic is at work, with a watery formal language emerging that helps erode boundaries between forms and unite the work. The prominent white form, with its wave-like appearance and apparent ability to overwhelm and link other smaller and more separate shapes, acts somewhat like a purifying "Deluge" within the cosmos of the painting.

Although *Composition VI* and *Painting with a White Border (Moscow)* were crucial works in the gestation of Kandinsky's abstract idiom and demonstrate the extent to which a "dissolving" of solid form and a fluid or watery conception of painting were essential to achieving it, they are not the first works in which a watery quality can be found. Earlier works show this tendency, although in a more partial way: water has yet to provide the governing metaphor of the whole pictorial conception, something which perhaps could not happen without the inspiration provided by such a definitively wet subject as the Deluge. Such a localized quality of fluidity or wateriness can be perceived in works such as *Composition IV* (oil, 1911, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf), in the way the artist allows a "running-over of color" (his terminology), and through the introduction of blurring effects.[17] In this work linear boundaries are still much more insistent than in either *Composition VI* and *Painting with a White Border (Moscow)*—"corporeal forms" can be distinguished and one can even make out a horizon—but effects of fluidity help to qualify or erode the distinctions that line has made.

The effect of fluidity that enters Kandinsky's work during this transitional phase is not merely at the level of subject matter and form. That formal sense of fluidity is often created with the aid of an actual degree of fluidity at the level of technique. For example, in *Deluge I* (oil, 1912, Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld) the paint is less thick in several places than in many other works by Kandinsky up to this time, and more diluted in application. *Deluge I* is one of the aforementioned painted studies that Kandinsky made for *Composition VI*, and thus the fluidity of technique fits well with its watery subject. While the medium here is oil paint, and therefore the perceived fluidity of paint doesn't involve actual "wateriness," it is possible that such effects in oil are influenced by Kandinsky's experience with the possibilities of watercolor technique. Certainly watercolor does play an important part in the artist's total output, he produced over 1300 works in this medium and used it throughout his artistic career. There would have been plenty of occasions on which he could have contemplated the medium's potential lessons for use in oil, especially in cases when he made a watercolor study in preparation for a subsequent oil painting. Nevertheless, it is a little difficult to prove any clear-cut influence because, as Frank Whitford notes, Kandinsky seems to have dealt with pictorial problems more or less concurrently in all the media he was us-

ing.[18] Furthermore, it should be noted that Kandinsky's earlier watercolors do not particularly foreground their "wateriness". A medium does not dictate a style even if it can be implicated in one. It is however interesting to note that the more imaginative of Kandinsky's earlier works had often involved watercolor, whereas his landscapes were more likely to be in oil.[19]

The watery metaphor that seemed to productively underlie the formal language of Kandinsky's works as he made his transition to abstraction is not sustained throughout his later work. During his time in Russia, in part as a response to the language of abstraction prevalent there, his paintings start to employ a geometric vocabulary not found in his work before this time. However, effects of fluidity don't disappear entirely from his later work, since the dominance of the geometric shapes is often tested or subverted by more fluid, wash-like and amorphous forms. This can be seen in *Untitled* (gouache and colored inks, 1930, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven), where color visually "bleeds" beyond the lines that seem intended to enclose them as it did across the non-geometric lines of earlier works such as *Composition IV*. An analogous method for creating a counterbalancing effect of amorphous fluidity employed by Kandinsky, and which is particular to his later work, is the use of an atomizer to spray dilute watercolor paint over stencils of (largely) geometric shape. This style of work is found in *Into the Dark* (watercolor, 1928, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York) and *Weighing* (watercolor and gouache, 1928, Long Beach Museum of Art, California).

In works produced during Kandinsky's late Paris phase the geometric language which had begun to appear during his Russian years, and which had dominated in his German years, begins to give way to one which features a variety of biomorphic forms. These often have the look of simple microscopic organisms or of marine invertebrates, and they are often shown against open fields that read by association as watery in nature (for example *Untitled*, gouache, 1941, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York).[20] Forms are not dissolved as they are in earlier works such as *Composition VI*, but water has again acquired significance at the level of subject matter. Whereas Malevich, that other great Russian abstract painter, placed forms in his images as if within an aerial environment, Kandinsky in this phase often seems to prefer to situate his forms in an underwater world. Clearly influenced by his own investigation of natural history (for example, a diagram of "plants swimming by means of their 'tails'" was included in his treatise *Point and Line to Plane*, and visual sources for the watery organic imagery of his Paris works have already been suggested), this preference for an underwater environment may also have been partially inspired by the art of his friend Paul Klee.[21] Klee, perhaps more than any other twentieth-century artist had created images of the underwater world, an environment conspicuously unexposed to representation in Western painting until the late nineteenth century.

Post-Second World War American Abstraction

Despite the general absence of continuity between the first generation of European abstract painting and its counterpart in the United States following the Second World War (which often looked to non-abstract sources such as Picasso and Surrealism for elements of its visual language, and which in the case of its leading practitioners often had an especially marked antipathy to geometric abstraction in particular) there are similarities when it comes to the role of water in the passage to abstraction. In the case of the Abstract Expressionist painter Arshile Gorky, we can even talk of the possibility of his being influenced by Kandinsky's practice, since the example of that artist was evidently important at a certain phase of his development. A conjuncture of painterly fluidity, dissolution of form, and abstracted water-themed subject matter such as we have documented in the case of Kandinsky can also be observed in Gorky's *Waterfall* (oil, 1943, Tate, London). This work's fluid quality (a general property of Gorky's mature work rather than merely a specific quality of this particular canvas, as *Water of the Flowery Mill*, oil, 1944, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, demonstrates in its passages of dilute watercolor-like wash and use of dripped paint effects) also has an additional source of inspiration in the painting of Roberto Matta. The Chilean artist Matta had relocated to New York from Europe by the end of the 1930s, and the paintings he produced following his arrival, such as *Water* (1939, private collection, New York), and *Rain* (1940-41, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown) were important to Gorky because of the way they combined Surrealist concerns with the unconscious— imaged in Matta's works as a kind of interior landscape in constant flux— with a more painterly and abstracted style. Making use of the effects enabled by highly diluted paint, Matta often presented an image of a world in which solid form faces dissolution, thus taking further the theme of melting presented in a more neutrally illusionistic way by fellow Surrealist Salvador Dali in his paintings like *The Persistence of Memory* (oil, 1931, Museum of Modern Art, New York) and *Birth of Liquid Desires* (oil, 1931-2, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice). The sense of wetness that is present at the level of both form and content is most evident in *Water*, a painting with an explicitly aquatic theme. Such a double wateriness can also be seen in Gorky's *Waterfall*: the dripping of the diluted paint in places produces an equivalency to the falling water of the waterfall, and I believe this parallel, or interference between form and content, is something Gorky intends us to notice.

Although the influence of Surrealism must be fully acknowledged as with Gorky, it can also be argued that Kandinsky could have been an inspiration to the near-abstract paintings of William Baziotes. In his case, the parallel is not with the works Kandinsky produced immediately prior to his first step

into abstraction but instead with the underwater-themed output of his later Paris period, since like Kandinsky, Baziotes produced many works where biomorphic forms float in a submarine environment. Examples include *The Pond* (oil, 1955, Detroit Institute of Arts), *Moby Dick* (oil, 1955, private collection) and *Aquatic* (oil, 1961, Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection, New York). An interest in watery subjects can already be seen in the previous decade with *Water Form* (oil, 1947, Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio), one of the earliest works by the artist to display a fluidity of application, and hence one can also conjecture a role for water in aiding the formation of his personal style. Interestingly, Baziotes's widow Ethel recalled that one of his favorite sayings applied a watery or oceanic metaphor to his art as a whole: "My work is like the Caribbean Sea – beautiful, serene and exotic on the surface. And all the time below are the sharks."[22]This hint of menace is a major factor distinguishing Baziotes from Kandinsky, and linking him to the Surrealist legacy.

A case which cannot be directly linked back to earlier abstraction, but in which the treatment of a watery theme seems perhaps more crucial than the examples given so far in enabling a transition to abstraction, is that of Mark Tobey. *Modal Tide* (oil, 1940, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle) is a key work in Tobey's move towards a more fluid all-over stylistic vocabulary, beyond the solid form so often emphasized in his earlier works like *The Middle West* (oil, 1929, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle). As was the case with Mondrian, Cubism had proved a difficult influence for Tobey to absorb, and the boundless, mobile subject of the sea aided his stylistic evolution significantly, even if other influences, such as the fluid and dynamic linearity of Chinese brushwork, were also to play a crucial role in this transformation. The importance of the solution found in *Modal Tide* can be attested to by the fact that it was to exert an influence on other artists of the Pacific Northwest. Morris Graves, who like Tobey often favored water-based media over oil, seems to directly respond to the older artist's work in his own *Black Waves* (mixed media, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo), which was painted only a few years later in 1944.

A similar attraction to watery imagery on the threshold of moving towards abstraction can be found in the case of Mark Rothko. Although telluric imagery was often present in early paintings like *Subway Scene* (oil, 1938, collection Kate Rothko Prizel), *Underground Fantasy* (oil, c. 1940, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.),and *Entombment I* (gouache, 1946, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), watery imagery becomes more prominent in the period when his work began to change in style (e.g. *Aquatic Drama*,oil, 1946, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C), many paintings giving the sense of an underwater environment. As with Kandinsky there was a crucial engagement with water-based mediums during this transitional phase, and in addition to the fluidity that watercolor, gouache and tempera allowed

Rothko, one can also see the watercolor-like use of oil at this time. In the transitional multiform painting *No. 9, 1948* (oil and mixed media, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C) the vertical indigo form in the centre has blurred edges, which appear like the bleeding effects one might encounter in a watercolor, while the pale horizontal mauve form at the lower left centre has a kind of "washed out" feel.

The movement towards abstraction in Rothko is in one sense a kind of watery dissolution of solid form, and one can say something similar with respect to Jackson Pollock. In one significant early pre-abstract work, *The Flame* (oil, c. 1934-38, Museum of Modern Art, New York), it is fire's mobility of form rather than water's that was taken as Pollock's subject, and his engagement with it can be seen as aiding him in the dissolution of solid, bounded structures. The process of formal dissolution taking place at a stylistic level in *The Flame* is also explicitly referenced in the work's subject matter through the motif of a human limb being consumed by fire, as if perhaps on a funeral pyre. Despite this particular interest in fire, however, Pollock primarily turned to the subject of water when he needed to address issues of dissolution and flux in his painting. An engagement with water was ultimately to be a great deal more productive for Pollock during the development of his abstract manner than an engagement with fire because water had relevance not just at the levels of subject matter and style (as fire did in *The Flame*) but also at the level of materials and technique. Because of its liquid nature, water could prove inspiring in a more direct way with respect to the painter's actual art-making materials themselves and the choices he needed to make about how they should be handled – the very level at which Pollock's breakthrough to his mature abstract idiom was made. Pollock's distinctive method of pouring and flicking paint onto his canvases (with the aid of sticks, basting syringes and other resources) was a more direct engagement with paint's intrinsic fluidity that most earlier artists had ventured, and led to a marked departure from his earlier style.[23] While *The Flame* remains a representation of fire in the same way that Leonardo's drawings (such as *Studies in Hydrodynamic Turbulence*, pen and ink, c. 1508-9, Royal Library, Windsor) are representations of water in turbulent motion, in a Pollock painting such as *One: Number 31, 1950* (oil and enamel, 1950, Museum of Modern Art, New York) we are able to see the direct indexical traces left by actual fluids in motion.

Although I am arguing that at the level of materials and technique the fluidity of water offered Pollock a model to aspire to, his signature works were not themselves actually made with water-based paints. Instead he was to turn mostly to synthetic enamel paint (manufactured originally for commercial purposes rather than artistic), which he often thinned before use to create an even more appropriate degree of viscosity than would be offered by oil paint. "Most of the paint I use is a liquid, flowing kind of paint," Pollock clarified in 1950.[24]

While we (and perhaps Pollock himself) might think of the diluted enamel paint used in his works as having a more "watery" appearance than oil paint, in fact the even lower viscosity of water itself would have made it unsuitable for producing the particular look of fluidity he was seeking. The "drizzling" effects he achieved with dilute enamel paint would have been hard to match with water, which is more likely to splash on impact.

Many of Pollock's titles, particularly during the phase when his signature style emerges, introduce watery associations and offer further evidence that water had come to function as something of a governing metaphor for the artist. Amongst the most obvious examples are *Water Figure* (oil, 1945, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C), *The Water Bull* (oil, c. 1946, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), and *Watery Paths* (oil, 1947, National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome). *Full Fathom Five* (oil and enamel, 1947, Museum of Modern Art, New York) and *Sea Change* (oil, 1947, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle), two works with underwater associations, also belong to that important period of transition that dates significantly to the period after his November 1945 move from New York City to the more rural setting of East Hampton on Long Island, where his backyard afforded a view of Accabonac Creek.

Although it dates from rather late in his short career, *Ocean Greyness* (oil, 1953, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York) reminds us through its title that Pollock made use of an oceanic metaphor in one of his most important statements about his art: "my concern is with the rhythms of nature, the way the ocean moves."[25] One might argue in the light of a statement such as this, that water is not simply providing Pollock with inspiration for a purely technical or stylistic breakthrough, but also relates to his work at the level of meaning (albeit that such meaning – particularly since the images are abstract – is embedded in or carried at the levels of technique and style themselves). Water offered Pollock a governing cosmological metaphor for understanding the universe in terms of flux and interconnectedness, placing him more in the camp of the ancient Greek philosophers Heraclitus and Thales (who saw water as the underlying substance of the universe) than that of the more influential Democritus and Lucretius (who laid the foundations for the modern atomic theory of matter).

Although Willem de Kooning's *Excavation* of 1950 (oil, Art Institute, Chicago) shows him still to be in post-Cubist territory, and relying on Analytical Cubism's fragmentation of form as the major resource moving his art to the brink of abstraction, at a later stage he too allows watery influences into his work. This is most obviously the case with ... *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* (oil, 1975, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), which was painted after De Kooning had relocated to East Hampton (like Pollock before him), and at a time when he was frequently spending a part of his day by the

ocean at Louse Point.[26]

Maria Prather sees ... *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* as a painting "that signals the artist's search for means to convey the very substance of water."[27] She argues that De Kooning "invented a distinctive handwriting to describe watery reflections, and his fluid medium resembles an oil emulsion floating on the water" in that work. This reading rests in part on the artist's own account of his meditative trips to the ocean, a regular part of his life after his move to East Hampton:

> I reflected upon the reflections on the water, like the fishermen do. They stand there fishing. They seldom catch any fish, but they like to be by themselves for an hour. And I do that almost every day. . . . There is something about being in touch with the sea that makes me feel good. That's where most of my paintings come from, even when I made them in New York.[28]

Like Pollock, De Kooning seems to have responded to his move from New York to the more watery environment around East Hampton with a change in style, but in his case water-filled landscapes would also have been a part of his childhood experience since he grew up in Holland like Mondrian before him. Not all associations to water were positive ones for De Kooning, however, and Judith L. Wolfe has noted a couple of traumatic incidents involving water in De Kooning's earlier life. As a child he was once pushed into a sewer by another boy, and in an early 1930s trip to Miami a painful encounter with a jellyfish tentacle made him wary of entering water from then onwards, perhaps providing the explanation of why he never learnt to swim.[29] Although they are by nature hard to evaluate, one should therefore bear in mind the possibility of psychological factors contributing to De Kooning's engagement with water as a subject in his later art.

Although De Kooning made oil his favored painting medium, the look of fluidity his brushwork often gives us (especially after his move to East Hampton) is in one sense indebted to the actual physical properties of water as an artistic medium. In order to permit reworking of painted surfaces—of fundamental importance to his painting practice—De Kooning made use of a very particular painting medium that would allow him to extend drying time, and one which made use of water as a significant element. He mixed his pigments (as Richard Shiff points out) into "a temporary emulsion of safflower oil, water and one or more solvents." Over time the water would of course evaporate, "leaving traces of bubbles in the paint surface or a pattern of wrinkles, a kind of shrinkage."[30]

The productiveness of a watery or fluid approach to painting that is seen in abstract artists such as Gorky, Tobey, Rothko, Pollock and De Kooning, who all came to maturity in the 1940s, is also found in later American abstract

painting produced within the same aesthetic vein, particularly that of Helen Frankenthaler. Frankenthaler's *Mountains and Sea* (oil, 1952, collection of the artist) is the first painting that artist produced in which an interest in fluid wash or stain effects are to be found. Her technique was influenced by a body of work Pollock produced in 1951 that used black enamel paint stained directly into canvas (rather than simply resting on top of it). *Mountains and Sea* also took inspiration at the level of subject matter (as its title indicates) from the maritime scenery of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, which the artist had just returned from viewing. The watercolor feel of the work may even be related to Frankenthaler's use of that medium during her trip, and in any case this canvas belongs to the long narrative of watercolor's influence on oil in which Turner played an important early role.[31] Frankenthaler noted of her work of this time, "My paint was becoming thinner and more fluid and cried out to be soaked, not resting."[32] Even Pollock's 1951 works that had been so inspirational for Frankenthaler belong to the story of the influence of water-based painting mediums on their non-water-based counterparts (although enamel rather than oil in his case), because those stained works were directly preceded by, and surely crucially influenced by, a series of works in ink or ink and watercolor on Japanese paper that sometimes involved the staining and blotting effects often characteristic of that medium.[33]

Frankenthaler achieved her watercolor-like effects of wash and staining in *Mountains and Sea* with oil paint, but her later paintings further developed the idiom of that breakthrough work with the then newly available medium of acrylic emulsion. Frankenthaler was one of the earliest significant artists to experiment with this water-based medium (introduced under the brand name Liquitex) and returned to it again in the early 1960s after which it became her medium of choice. Although the makers of acrylic emulsion paint were interested in competing with oil paints in the marketplace, and introduced a new formulation in 1963 with a thicker consistency more like oil paint, the water-based nature of the new acrylic paints did open up new possibilities for dialogue with watercolor, especially when used diluted further with water. Watercolor effects that had previously only been familiar from more intimately scaled works on paper were now possible in large paintings on canvas, works that could now compete in visual presence with anything produced using the more established medium of oil. Because it is not possible to dissolve acrylic paints in water once they have dried on a surface, certain watercolor effects such as the lifting off of paint by a re-wetting of the surface cannot be replicated with acrylic, but acrylics did encourage the kind of watercolor-like soaking and staining effects Frankenthaler sought since, unlike oil, there was no technical necessity to size the canvas before application to ensure its preservation. Furthermore, there was also no risk of halo-like effects caused by the bleeding of the carrier medium after application to the surface, which could

occur with oil paint. Although with acrylic emulsion artists were making use of a medium which was water-based, the production of watery effects in the medium cannot always simply be attributed to the literal presence of water itself. David Hockney, for instance, notes that watery staining effects obtained with acrylic paint on unprimed canvas can be achieved more effectively by adding a small amount of detergent to the paint, thus breaking up the oil in the cotton and making it more absorbent.[34]

One of the earliest works in which Frankenthaler's use of acrylic emulsion paint can be seen is *The Bay* (1963, Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan), which is dominated by a large amorphous stain of blue paint. A sense of wetness is further enhanced by the effects of feathering that have occurred in those places where the blue paint has interacted with the adjacent light green pigment before it has dried. Although *The Bay* is an abstract work, and not intended to directly represent any particular body of water, it is relevant to note that like Pollock and De Kooning before her, Frankenthaler had taken a studio in a setting near water (overlooking Provincetown Bay in her case) and that watery environment does seem to have had an influence on the feel of her work.

Amongst other works by Frankenthaler which have a reference to water in their title is *Flood* (acrylic emulsion, 1967, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York).[35] Here the watery reference seems to point more to the process of the work's making, since Frankenthaler remembers that when it was being painted "there was a lot of liquid paint on the floor. The studio [which had a floor area not much bigger than the canvas itself] was flooded with color."[36] An equally watery birth occurred with *Sacrifice Decision* (acrylic emulsion, 1981, private collection) according to the artist's account. The canvas was first placed flat on the floor, and "the entire fabric wet with water." Then a long horizontal mark was made by throwing paint from a bucket: "I took a heavy pail of gray paint and tossed all of the paint on a selected area of the canvas." However, the resultant mark proved too visually insistent, so Frankenthaler "flooded it with water, brushed over it, leaving its shape, with veils of tint created by it."[37]

Pat Steir

Whereas most of the artists discussed so far in this essay, such as Mondrian, Kandinsky, Rothko and Pollock, are painters who achieved an abstract idiom at some point in their artistic evolution from a stylistic beginning of a more figurative nature, in the case of Pat Steir (b. 1940), as with other artists of her generation, there was no sense that abstraction had to be worked towards in the form of a personal struggle. It was already fully available as a possible idiom within which to work by the time she was developing her artis-

tic identity. For artists of Steir's post-modern generation the problem was not the availability of abstraction as a mode but rather the anxiety or self-consciousness of choice between styles or idioms, a sense of there being no given relation to the art that had been made up to that moment. This sense of belatedness as both difficulty and possibility is expressed by Steir in her *The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style)* (Oil on canvas, 64 panels, each 26.5" by 21", 1982-84, Kunstmuseum, Bern). In this work, each section of an eight by eight-gridded image of a Brueghel flower still life is interpreted by reference to the style of a different artist, including several that work abstractly.

Not needing to find a way to abstraction like Kandinsky or Rothko, there was no need for Steir to turn to water either as a subject or an art-making material for help with a breakthrough; nothing needed to be "dissolved" before abstraction could be arrived at. Nevertheless, when her art became abstract or near abstract (we are still perhaps in that border zone where "pure" abstraction is not yet present, only now any notion of "purity" seems outdated as a goal so this zone is no longer one of transition but a viable destination point in its own right), water becomes a major theme of her work. As befits an artist of her conceptual and post-modern era, her art is self-conscious about its subject matter and its relation to the art that precedes it. While not following directly in the footsteps of Pollock, her work does nevertheless form a deliberate connection to his practice and his concern for a "watery" or fluid way of applying paint, and offers a possible way forward, although not one which could be construed as a next step forward in some larger narrative of artistic progress (as Greenbergian formalism might suggest). Because of the self-consciousness of Steir's interest in water and the inter-textual and historically aware way in which water related motifs are employed in her abstract images, her body of work has certain parallels to the project of this essay itself.

Steir has approached water via two major themes. Beginning in 1985 she produced a number of paintings dealing with the wave as a subject, before turning to the theme of the waterfall, which proved even more productive for her art and inspired a great many canvases. In both cases the adoption of a watery theme had important implications for her style, occasioning a self-conscious investigation of the way other artists had treated that theme, and leading to inter-textual references to their solutions in her own work. Rather than simply being influenced by earlier artists, Steir self-consciously refers to them as part of a knowing dialogue with world art history.

The inter-textuality that was already present in *The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style)* in a less focused way (in that the choice of artists referenced in that work seems unrelated to the theme itself), becomes more complicated in the series of wave paintings beginning with *Autumn: The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by Turner with the Chinese in Mind* (oil, 1985, collection Eric Franck). Here, as the title already tells us, there are several

layers of stylistic allusion, stacked one on top of the other (there is no equivalent to the side by side juxtaposition of different solutions in the sixty-four sections of the earlier Brueghel work). Imagining a Turner who had Chinese solutions to the task of painting waves in mind while he worked is an added complication we weren't faced with when attempting to separate out the respective contributions of Brueghel, the other artist whose style was being borrowed, and Steir herself (after all, the painter of all of the sixty-four sections) in *The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style)*. This oblique reference to Chinese art in the painting's title should remind us not to treat the task of viewing the work as a dry intellectual exercise in art historical attribution (which would ultimately fail to tease out clearly the separate constituent elements), or to imagine that the artist thought in that detached manner herself while making the work. While such disinterested intellectual pleasures might predominate in works such as the ones Roy Lichtenstein made in 1969 on the subject of Rouen Cathedral (where we have paintings that reference printed images which in turn refer to Monet paintings), for Steir the process of putting different references in conjunction seems to be engaged in more with a mind to the painterly end results that can be obtained, receiving retrospective validation only if it succeeds visually by providing a way towards something new that is valid in its own terms.

While the motif of a breaking wave, by its thematization of the dissolution of form, gives a near-abstract feel to Autumn: *The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by Turner with the Chinese in Mind*, the initial starting point for the image is a representational work, and indeed one which is distinctly realistic in style, namely Courbet's wave painting (of which in fact there are several). Courbet's waves also provide the starting point for the other wave images by Steir in the same series (*Winter: The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by an Italian Baroque Artist*, oil, 1985, collection John Pappajohn, Des Moines; *Summer: The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by Monet*, oil, 1986, Jacksonville Art Museum, Florida; and *Spring: The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by Ensor*, oil, 1986, collection Paula and Richard Cohen, Boston), providing the only constant element in the shifting combinations of artists she references, in much the same way that Brueghel underlies all sixty-four sections of the earlier work. The very realism of Courbet's wave images, the tactile or sculptural visual language he employs in them which seems so ill suited to the fluidity and evanescence of his chosen subject, makes them ripe for new artistic engagement. This matter-orientated artist, with a manner more appropriate to the description of static and solid forms, needs some "remedial work" done to him so that he can accept a more process-orientated world view such as a Chinese artist might be expected to possess, and also have a style capable of evoking it. In the case of *Spring: The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by Ensor* and *Summer: The Wave*

After Courbet as Though Painted by Monet the remedy or antidote is provided by the work of a later artist. Although in *The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style)* there is no such careful matching of the chosen interpretive style with the particular needs or deficiencies of Brueghel's own, there is also the same sense that it is through the lens of later, and primarily modernist, artists that his work is being viewed. While this might lead to a sense of artistic progress in either case, as if modern art is better than that which it replaces, the same is not true in the case of *Autumn: The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by Turner with the Chinese in Mind* and *Winter: The Wave After Courbet as Though Painted by an Italian Baroque Artist*, both of which overlay Courbet with the work of an artist from an earlier era, disrupting the temporal sequence of a linear art history and introducing a kind of anachronism.

The second of Steir's watery themes, the waterfall, begins to appear in 1987, and there is a work of 1987-8 in which the transition from one theme to the other is "documented": *Last Wave Painting (Wave Becoming a Waterfall)* (oil, collection the artist). Unlike the wave paintings, with the waterfall images there is a clear paralleling between subject matter and the literal fact of how the image was made. As was true to a lesser extent with Gorky's *Waterfall*, Steir's images on this theme of water falling vertically are made by allowing dilute paint to run down a vertical surface (e.g. *Monk Toyu Meditating Waterfall*, oil, 1991, private collection; *Yellow and Blue One-Stroke Waterfall*, oil, 1992, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York).[38] Literal and depicted wetness coexist or even interfere with each other in our viewing of the paintings, something Steir had already allowed to occur as localized incident in certain much earlier works such as *Looking for the Mountain* (oil, crayon, pencil and ink, 1971, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C), *Cellar Door* (oil, crayon, pencil and ink, 1972, Collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kaye, New York), and *Circadia* (oil, crayon and pencil, 1973, Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland).

The waterfall images seem a little less self-consciously art historical than their wave predecessors; one's first visual associations are to nature rather than art, and titles tend not to cite other artists by name. Nevertheless, even if he is never openly named, there is still a single artist whose work lies behind all these images in the same way that Courbet lay behind all four of the season-titled series of wave images, and Brueghel lay behind *The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Style)*. As previously intimated, this artist is Pollock, and one can read Steir as attempting to provide remedial attention to Pollock's problem—his famous creative impasse in the last years of his life—in the same way as she did for Courbet. Belatedly offering a way beyond Pollock's dead end by reprising his poured and splashed gestures in a new fashion, she shows us how to engage with an artist whose direct stylistic influence was remarkably small when compared to his reputation.

In both the case of Courbet and of Pollock, the solution offered involves a turning towards the lessons of Asian art and metaphysical thought. Steir is clearly inspired by the many paintings of waterfalls found in Chinese art, and one of the earliest of her images in this sequence of works is titled *Waterfall Painted with the Chinese in Mind* (oil, 1987-8, collection Alvin Olin, New Rochelle, New York). This Asian source is not named so directly in other works, but Steir has made no secret of her admiration for Chinese and Japanese art and thought, and a fascination with those moments when European modernism had drawn sustenance from Asia seems already present in an earlier phase of her work.[39] A canvas such as *The Tree* (oil, 1982, collection Jean-Paul Jungo, Morges, Switzerland), for instance, appears to be as much about Van Gogh's painted appropriations of Japanese prints as it is about Japanese art in itself. Although abstraction as a mode may be alien to East Asian painting, for Steir the openness towards fluidity of the water-based ink painting traditions of China and Japan made them a vital source through which Western abstraction could be given new life.

It has been argued here that from its very beginnings abstraction as a mode needed to turn towards watery subjects in order to come into existence. Although abstraction was already an available option in 1940s America, the most interesting abstract artists to emerge there were ones who found their own new path towards abstraction from sources that were not themselves abstract instead of beginning from variants of existing European styles. In that situation watery themes again played a role, enabling abstraction's renewal on a new continent. As the case of Pat Steir has shown, even in our own time an attempt to extend abstraction's possibilities can find itself taking vital inspiration from water.

Thanks:

Preparation of this essay was aided by a research grant awarded by the Committee for Research and Conference Grants, The University of Hong Kong. This crucial help is gratefully acknowledged.

Notes:

[1] For an insightful general study of the rise of abstract art see John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[2] The Zuiderzee Works is an enormous system of dams, water drainage and land reclamation activities that enclosed the Zuider Zee, an inlet of the North Sea of approximately five thousand square kilometers in surface area, which extended about one hundred kilometers inland.

[3] For examples of the filling in of canals in Amsterdam between 1891 and 1896 see Eds. Robert Welsh, Boudewijn Bakker and Marty Bax, *1892/1912: Piet*

Mondrian, the Amsterdam Years, (Bussum: Thoth Publishers, 1994), 13.

[4] The versions of Mondrian's titles used here follow the versions found in Joop M. Joosten and Robert P. Welsh, *Piet Mondrian: Catalogue Raisonné*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

[5] See Welsh, Bakker and Bax, 99, and Joosten and Welsh, Vol. I, 364-5. In a 1913-14 sketchbook Mondrian wrote a note mentioning "modern machines (dredging mills, etc.)," thus likening such dredges to windmills. As Welsh points out (364) "the use of the term 'mill' with modern dredging machines pointed to the analogy between the series of scoops which lifted up the silt of a river or harbor bed to a conveyer belt that carried the muddy substance to some form of transport vehicle and the paddle wheel of the windmills used to lift polder waters to the levels of the encircling canals."

[6] Frits Mondriaan's biographical note appears in Lurasco, *Onze Moderne Meesters* (Amsterdam, 1907), quoted in translation in Herbert Henkels, "Mondrian in Winterswijk," in *Mondrian: From Figuration to Abstraction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 152.

[7] Without making a comprehensive analysis of the placement of colors in Mondrian's mature or signature works, it is perhaps intriguing to note that quite a few of them have blue at the bottom of the image, sometimes in a horizontal strip that might be taken as a distant echo of the tendency to place water at the bottom of the image in his early works. Examples include *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (oil, 1927), *Composition with Double Line and Yellow and Blue* (oil, 1933), and *Composition with Red and Blue* (oil, 1933). More than a few of Mondrian's earlier imagistic works, even when the grid-like pattern of horizontals and verticals is not present, have a concern with reflections of forms in water at the bottom of the image, such as *House on the Gein* (1900). Interestingly, a suggestion has been made that even in one of Mondrian's proto-abstract building façade images (*Composition No. II*, oil, 1913) there may a reference to such a reflection (see Joosten and Welsh, 227).

[8] "Since the male principle is the vertical line, a man shall recognize this element in the ascending trees of a forest; he sees his complement in the horizontal line of the sea. The woman, with the horizontal line as characteristic element, recognizes herself in the recumbent lines of the sea and sees herself complemented in the vertical lines of the forest", eds. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, *The New Art – The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 18. The sketchbook in which this note is found contains some of the early sketches that lead to Mondrian's "pier and ocean" works.

[9] See Joosten and Welsh, Vol. I, 440.

[10] On the Westkapelle lighthouse and its modernization, see Joosten and Welsh, Vol. I, 449-450.

[11] Examples of landscapes and seascapes from this period include such works as *Landscape with Trees* (oil, 1912, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague), and *The Sea*, (oil, 1912, private collection).

[12] I follow Joosten and Welsh (Vol. II, 245) in taking the "pier" motif to be based on the Domburg breakwaters that had already featured in Mondrian's earlier work, but in *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (New York: Abrams, 1995), 85-87,

Carel Blotkamp argues that the pier at Scheveningen lies behind this motif. This is apparently based on a conversation that Moholy-Nagy had with the artist himself.

[13]Mondrian, writing to Van Doesburg on 20 November 1915, expressed dissatisfaction with the way his vertical and horizontal lines were losing their independence and becoming secondary to the closed rectangular forms they delimited. He was apparently referring to the semi-abstract works of 1914 based on building facades that featured more closed forms and less expansive space than in his sea works. See Joosten and Welsh, Vol. II, 230.

[14] Sigmund Freud (1933), *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Lecture XXXI: "The Dissection of the psychical personality"), in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXII (1932-1936)*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 80. On conceptions of the Dutch landscape see Hub Zwart, "Aquaphobia, Tulipmania, Biophilia: A Moral Geography of the Dutch Landscape", *Environmental Values*, 12/1 (Feb. 2003): 107-128.

[15] Wassily Kandinsky, "Composition 6" (1913), in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art. Volume One (1901-1921)*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 385-388. Quotations in the text are from this translation.

[16] Wassily Kandinsky, "Picture with the White Edge" (1913), in Lindsay and Vergo, Volume One, 389-391.

[17] Wassily Kandinsky, "Composition 4" (1911), in Lindsay and Vergo, Volume One, 383-384.

[18] Frank Whitford, *Kandinsky: Watercolors and other Works on Paper*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 13.

[19] This point is made by Frank Whitford. See Whitford, 13.

[20] On the sources for Kandinsky's biomorphic imagery see Vivian Endicott Barnett, "Kandinsky and Science: The Introduction of Biological Images in the Paris Period", in *Kandinsky in Paris, 1934-1944*, (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1985), 61-87.

[21] On Klee's underwater imagery see for example Richard Verdi, *Klee and Nature*, (London: A. Zwemmer, 1984), especially his discussion of Klee's fish imagery in chapter five.

[22] See Michael Preble, *William Baziotes: Paintings and Drawings, 1934-1962*, (Venice: Peggy Guggenheim Collection, 2004), 27.

[23] In addition to being deeply affected by his technique of pouring liquid paint, the fluid look of Pollock's images is also influenced by his willingness to encourage and accept effects resulting from the bleeding and (sometimes, as with *Yellow Islands*, oil, 1952, Tate) dripping of wet paint after it has arrived on the support - although the latter effect can undermine (or at least offer a counterpoint to) the sense of gravity-free dynamism that his pouring technique gives his canvases. For a recent analysis of Pollock's pouring technique which makes use of scientific understanding concerning the properties of fluids in motion, see Claude Cernuschi and Andrzej Herczynski, "The Subversion of Gravity in Jackson Pollock's Abstractions", Art Bulletin, 90/4 (December 2008): 616-639.

[24] Pollock, in a recording for a never-broadcast radio interview with William Wright, taped 1950, in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 585. Pollock's use of diluted enamel paint is discussed by his widow Lee Krasner in a 1980 interview with Barbara Rose. See Pepe Karmel, ed., *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 43. Exactly how Pollock diluted his enamel paints is not clear but Krasner says he sought advice from the paint company itself over this issue.

[25] Pollock, quoted in B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972), 228.

[26] ... *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* takes its title from Keats's epitaph, seen by De Kooning on his 1960 visit to the poet's tomb in Rome. De Kooning moved to East Hampton in 1964 after work on a new studio there was completed.

[27] Maria Prather, in David Sylvester, Richard Shiff and Maria Prather, *Willem De Kooning: Paintings*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 197. On De Kooning and water see also David Anfam, "'What's water but the generated soul?'", in *Garden in Delft: Willem de Kooning Landscapes, 1928-88*, (New York: Mitchell-Innes and Nash, 2004), unpaginated.

[28] Harold Rosenberg, "Interview with Willem De Kooning", *Artnews* (September 1972), reprinted in David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, eds., *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 241-253 – the quote is from 251-252. De Kooning also states (250) "I was always very much interested in water", going on to link his interest in water back to his early Dutch experience, and to point out that water was a factor for his figure paintings and not just his landscapes: "*Woman I* ... reminded me very much of my childhood, being in Holland near all that water."

[29] See Judith L. Wolfe, *The Young Willem De Kooning: Early Life, Training and Work, 1904-1926*, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996), 48-49.

[30] Richard Shiff, "Water and Lipstick: De Kooning in Transition", in Sylvester, Shiff and Prather, 35.

[31] This suggestion was made by E.A. Carmean in *Helen Frankenthaler: A Paintings Retrospective*, (New York: Abrams, 1989), 14. Amongst American watercolorists John Marin seems closest in feel to the aesthetic of *Mountains and Sea* and his work may have been an influence on it.

[32] Helen Frankenthaler, quoted in John Elderfield, *Frankenthaler*, (New York: Abrams, 1989), 66.

[33] See Kirk Varnedoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work", in Kirk Varnedoe (with Pepe Karmel), *Jackson Pollock*, (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999), 63; and plates 195-98 and 201-205 in the same book (all these works date from 1951 and are untitled).

[34] See Jo Crook and Tom Learner, *The Impact of Modern Paints*, (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000), 93.

[35] Amongst a number of other images by Frankenthaler with watery titles is *Sea Change* (acrylic emulsion, 1982, The Dayton Art Institute, Ohio), which shares its Shakespearean name with one of Pollock's images.

[36] Frankenthaler, quoted in Carmean, 50.

[37] Frankenthaler, quoted in Carmean, 82.

[38] In the earlier waterfall images Steir tended to create the marks by pressing a loaded brush onto the canvas, while in later works a splashing or pouring action was more often involved. On this transformation see John Yau, *Dazzling Water, Dazzling Light*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 62 and Thomas McEvilley, *Pat Steir*, (New York: Abrams, 1995), 67.

[39] On Steir's waterfall images and a connection to Chinese art and Daoist thought see G. Roger Denson, "Watercourse Way", *Art in America*, 87/11 (November 1999): 114-121. Asian influences on Steir are also considered in John Stomberg, *Looking East: Brice Marden, Michael Mazur, Pat Steir*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

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Birth of Liquid Desires, oil,1931-2, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

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The Bay, acrylic emulsion, 1963, Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan.
Flood, acrylic emulsion, 1967, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
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Arshile Gorky
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Morris Graves, *Black Waves*, mixed media, 1944, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.

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Curved Irrigation Ditch Bordering Farmyard with Flowering Trees, oil, 1902.
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The Grey Tree, oil, 1911, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.
Irrigation Ditch with Mature Willow, oil, c. 1900.
Willow Grove, Trunks Leaning Left I, oil, c. 1902-3, Centraal Museum, Utrecht.
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Pat Steir

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Autumn: The Wave after Courbet as though Painted by Turner with the Chinese in Mind, oil, 1985, collection Eric Franck.

Winter: The Wave after Courbet as though painted by an Italian Baroque Artist, oil, 1985, collection John Pappajohn, Des Moines.

Summer: The Wave after Courbet as though Painted by Monet, oil, 1986, Jacksonville Art Museum, Florida.

Spring: The Wave after Courbet as though Painted by Ensor, oil, 1986, collection Paula and Richard Cohen, Boston.

Last Wave Painting (Wave Becoming a Waterfall), oil, 1987-8, collection the artist.

Monk Toyu Meditating Waterfall, oil, 1991, private collection.

Yellow and Blue One-Stroke Waterfall, oil, 1992, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Looking for the Mountain, oil, crayon, pencil and ink, 1971, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Cellar Door, oil, crayon, pencil and ink, 1972, collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kaye, New York.

Circadia, oil, crayon and pencil, 1973, Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland.

Waterfall Painted with the Chinese in Mind, oil, 1987-8, collection Alvin Olin, New Rochelle, New York.

The Tree, oil, 1982, collection Jean-Paul Jungo, Morges, Switzerland.

Mark Tobey

Modal Tide, oil, 1940, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.

The Middle West, oil, 1929, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.

Leonardo da Vinci, *Studies in Hydrodynamic Turbulence*, pen and ink, c. 1508-9, Royal Library, Windsor.

Towards Illustration Theory: Harold Rosenberg, Robert Weaver, and the "Action Illustrator"?

Jaleen Grove

It is quite contrived to match Harold Rosenberg's art criticism with the work of illustrator Robert Weaver, whom Rosenberg never mentioned and perhaps never even knew of. Yet doing so affords two opportunities: to critique Rosenberg's art criticism, and to bring illustration scholarship into the arena of art criticism on its own terms, rather than allowing it to exist merely as a punching bag for fine art's vanity. The forced companionship may well turn out to be a failure, but in failing, at least the question of whether the criticism of a major theorist of the "high" arts can or ought to be useful in understanding the "low" will be partly answered. Perhaps this attempt may find meaningful insights and new strategies for interpreting the creative practices of both critics and illustrators. Revisiting and appropriating the thought of critics such as Rosenberg is an attempt to redress a critical neglect of illustrationin the past. It also tests the current belief that the split between high and low art has collapsed – a conclusion that has been perhaps prematurely reached, since despite Robert Weaver's work being hailed in the 1950's as the synthesis of fine art and illustration,[1] illustrators are still credited differently in publications[2] and excluded from exhibitions, and they continue to express concern over their artistic status.[3] If such a dialectic presupposes that some basic premises are held in common, then there ought to be an affinity hidden within the writings of the old adamantly "elitist" critics that can be brought to bear usefully on commercial art practices; one that can be exhumed through a critical reappraisal of their thought from an illustrator's perspective. This paper returns to the year of 1959 to posthumously initiate a scholarly debate on whether illustration could be "legitimate" art; a debate that at that time had excluded illustrators' viewpoints.

Rosenberg and Weaver were not such strange bedfellows as the foregoing implies. Harold Rosenberg popularized the term "action painting," and furthered the careers of Abstract Expressionists, and Robert Weaver was credited with using Abstract Expressionism to revitalize the illustration industry, moving illustration from academicism to conceptualism.[4] Both men were determined to be misfits (and were)within their respective fields, yet they held some beliefs in common: "genuine" art was a special entity, creativity should

be individualistic, the creator ought to be of his times, and artists had a moral duty to challenge the status quo.[5] They both deplored what Weaver referred to as "artistic Stalinism:"[6] institutional determinism largely associated with the formalist doctrines promoted by Rosenberg's nemesis Clement Greenberg. Their primary difference is that Weaver stated, "I see no reason why an illustrator should not think of himself as a serious contemporary painter,"[7] while Rosenberg asserted, "That genuine art can be created to order in *modern times* has never been demonstrated."[8] Robert Weaver's illustrations for *Sports Illustrated, Life, Fortune*, and other mass publications challenge the belief that creativity in mass culture could not be considered art according to Rosenberg's own parameters in the 1950's. This paper uses Weaver's series of illustrations for an 1959 *Esquire* article on John F. Kennedy as a case study to examine whether such work can be considered art.[9]

Weaver is remembered as "the godfather of the new illustration" because of his avant garde innovations.[10] According to Rosenberg, "an indispensible ingredient" of the avant garde "is social dissent. . . . The aim of vanguard art is to build a new kind of life in an epoch in which forms have collapsed or turned into purposeless restrictions."[11] The form that illustration was seen to have exhausted, and that Weaver challenged, was the academic realism associated with Westport illustrators in the vein of Norman Rockwell and Al Parker. As for social dissent, in 1965 he said he "would like to bring the artist's eye to bear upon more dangerous and volatile aspects of our time."[12] He sarcastically observed in 1959, "A true *avant-garde* might today proclaim the return of *subject matter*!"[13]

Regarding the question of subject matter, Rosenberg's definition of an action painter seemed diametrically opposed to Weaver's definition of an illustrator. While Weaver said, "The illustrator may use the ideas of the contemporary painter; but it is communication that is his ultimate goal,"[14] Rosenberg denied action painters any goals whatsoever:

> At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act – rather than a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.[15]

This method consisted of the artist engaging with the canvas with no subject in mind, each new mark based on inspiration derived from the last, thereby provoking self-knowledge in the artist (or writer-critic); a process that was for Rosenberg a superior state:

> The materials I use – words, paint, gesture – become the means for . . . unveiling the unexpected. It is for this reason that a work of art

> that carries out an idea conceived by someone else – as in commercial art, or art made under the intellectual prodding of dealers, critics, or cultural managers – is bound to be inferior to art brought into being through a continuous passage between the mind and the hand of a free individual.[16]

Rosenberg's reasoning assumed that illustrators always know what they are doing ahead of execution, that conditions for surprises do not exist in their methods, that they are always art directed, that direction, goals, and desiderata *necessarily* hamper freedom, and that self-knowledge cannot be achieved in commercial work. Robert Weaver, on the other hand, was skeptical of action painting, caustically remarking in 1959:

> Today's artist finds himself unattached to society. There is no mutual responsibility. He is 'free'. He likes it that way. Is it not this very freedom that has vitiated and robbed art of its *raison d'etre*? I have noticed that abstract expressionism carried to the most reckless extremes no longer has the power to shock and disturb even the most conservative of audiences. Ennui sets in. . . .'Self expression' is not a purpose, it is an inevitable by-product of [an extrinsic] purpose. It is at this point that the illustrator-painter should realize his opportunities.[17]

Weaver had reason to question assumptions like Rosenberg's because Weaver's assignments from publishers were very loosely defined. Weaver was dispatched to cover a topic—delinquent youth, baseball players, industrial labour, Kennedy's presidential campaign—in any way he chose, as a journalist was. He recalled, "I was known for the kind of work I did. I rarely had to defend it or argue for it. They came to me, and they knew what they were going to get."[18] Visiting actual sites, speaking to real people, sketching on the spot, he developed visual essays *as* he discovered the subject, not beforehand. Recalling his first cover job for *Fortune* magazine, he said,

> [Art director Leo] Lionni trusted the artist, and once he picked the right practitioner, he let him alone. . . . What I did [for the cover] was go to the library and look up all the preceding *Fortune* covers under his direction. I made up my mind there was a certain kind of cover that he wanted, which I then proceeded to copy. . . . which he quickly rejected, saying, "No, no, no, no, do it your way." He looked at my sketchbook and picked out a most unexpected drawing for a cover. I told him it didn't look like a *Fortune* cover, and he said, "I don't want it to look like a *Fortune* cover."[19]

The way magazines hoped to benefit from letting artists go wild is conveyed in

an advertisement *Esquire* ran in 1956. Some of Weaver's work was reproduced with copy that read,

> Between art and illustration lies the very fine line Robert Weaver captures on canvas today. His work is a startling translation of the literal. . . . It's a first and an imaginative one – and that's why you're bound to find it first in *Esquire*. For *Esquire* is good country for explorers like you...You were the first to step out in the "chukka" boot . . . first with a portable TV. . . And you'll always find firsts like these in *Esquire* . . . Because *Esquire* is a showcase for tomorrow's mood.[20]

It is gag-inducing copy like this that set Rosenberg's teeth on edge. But commercial appropriation of "translation" and "imagination" does not negate the fact that those very qualities could have genuinely existed for the illustrator as he made the work, and that they can be reinstated simply by removing the images from the text with a pair of scissors, mental or real.

The crux of Rosenberg's and Weaver's conflict was whether creativity could thrive best within or outside of mainstream culture. Although in 1948 he protested against the idea of the romantically "alienated" artist, Rosenberg still felt the artist was some distance away from the everyday by virtue of his not being a reified worker.[21] His poor opinion of popular art was strongly manifested in his 1957 essay "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism."[22] Here, he wanted to suppress all critical scholarship on "kitsch" (which included illustration), except that which denounced it as propaganda in order to "change the landscape."[23] He worried that studying it ennobled it above its station, imbued it with meaningfulness that he felt was not genuine, and worst of all, that it took precious intellectual attention away from "real" art. There was, however, the annoying fact that fine art and mass art often borrowed from each other. Rosenberg complained that "kitsch" obligated art to retreat to ever more rarified pastures, for if "kitsch" came to resemble art (as Weaver was promoting), then art would become just "a commodity among commodities, kitsch."[24] Accusing mass art of "looting" fine art, he jealously defended his pet artists' (Willem De Kooning and Stuart Davis) use of "billboard type and lips that sell rouge" as "a vaccine," to critically point out how "life and kitsch have become inseparable."[25] But this chicken-and-egg debate of who-dunnit-first only showed how dividing culture into high and low was ultimately futile. Faced with this obvious conclusion but determined to keep art and mass culture apart nonetheless, Rosenberg then awkwardly denied that art was the "counterconcept" of popular culture:

> But if it [art] sharply distinguishes itself . . . it becomes a disturbance, a risk...Dissociated from the experience of millions...the

> best art of our times restricts its appeal to other artists . . . there is no audience for contemporary art and no luxury for artists. Both attention and cash go to kitsch. . . . [26]

By distancing itself, art was supposed to maintain a non-commercial purity and to avoid collapse with "kitsch," but in practice this theory was an utter failure. Distance reinscribed the dialectic rather than transcending it, which ironically led to its collapse again; the more rarified it became, the more cash value such art was awarded. By 1969 Rosenberg would be forced to acknowledge that, "Action painting does not escape the law of the fetishism of commodities. . . . as in all art there is inherently in Action painting a temptation to chicanery . . . once Action painting had left the seclusion of the studio the old art game was going on as usual."[27] Worse, he wanted "genuine" art to have some political resonance (rather than an overt stance) but, as he later admitted, dissociated art risked being inscrutable and therefore ineffectual for political radicalism,[28] In fact, art reduced to an artistic statement of "no comment" could have any agenda imposed upon it. This was the fate of "depoliticized" abstract expressionist works, which as Frances Stonor Saunders shows, were embraced by the CIA-friendly Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum of American Art and paraded internationally from 1946 through the 1950's, promoting American cultural and economic hegemony abroad.[29] Nevertheless, Rosenberg clung to the ideal of dissociation throughout his career, eventually claiming the artist should be distanced as "a primitive, a naïf", so his art could "set in motion previously uncontrolled, or even undiscovered, powers of the mind."[30]

Finding the socially disconnected artist and art to be inappropriate vehicles for meaningful engagement with life, Weaver proposed he "would like to show how 'art' and illustration could serve each other." He continued,

> How can there be vitality without meaning? A much more intellectually challenging field of painting is that which includes illustration but *is not limitedby it*. Illustration is essential to great painting. Abstraction cannot be equated with it; it is merely the grammar [originalemphasis].[31]

Weaver was entirely in agreement with Rosenberg that the artist should never be a mere "reflector." Instead, "in an atomic era he should be a reactor." And just as Rosenberg proposed the artist should dissociate, so too did Weaver demand the illustrator "be outside momentary surface illusions, observing."[32] Yet how could the aloof observer artist also be a nuclear reactor? Weaver advocated that the observer be completely immersed in the assignment, and like Rosenberg, he advocated that the artist define his creativity—his artistness—on his own terms:[33]

> Since I am an amateur illustrator as well as a professional one, I commissioned myself to cover 'Our Town' [a theatre production]. . . . One of the first problems in this kind of assignment is to become an accepted, unobtrusive presence. I had to be close to what was going on but not a distraction for the cast. I was able to accomplish this by showing up regularly at rehearsals and sitting around for long hours. The illustrator, too, needs this familiarization. Thus, in a relaxed way, he can draw exactly what he wants to draw.[34]

"Familiarization," not withdrawal, was the way to artistic empowerment. He continued to emphasize drawing from life as research, making his students at the School of Visual Arts draw in public while saying, "Once the initial shock of *life* wears off the student can begin to discover the magnitude of the world."[35] The illustrator was a participant observer, and Weaver called his sketchbook pages "informational notes," not art.[36] Rosenberg wrote, "The mass-culture maker, who takes his experience of others, is essentially a reflector of myths, and lacks concrete experiences to communicate."[37] Challenging this totalizing proclamation, Weaver said of his journalistic approach,

> It was not the kind of mythologizing illustration that you saw in *Cosmopolitan*. Theirs was not attached to the real world, and that's why I liked the journalistic side of it. . . . I did do some *Cosmopolitan* work, a lot of detective stories, which I enjoy doing, but even that kind of fictional illustration grew out of the real. I used *real*data. . . . I based my *Cosmo* work on a lot of sketches of real situations. . . . in the interest of credibility.[38]

In observing real situations, Weaver synthesized a distinction Rosenberg made between "formulated *common experiences* which are the substance of mass culture and the *common situations* in which human beings find themselves," the latter of which was "the genuine work of art" [originalemphasis].[39] Rosenberg protested against the concept of the artist becoming the "medium of a common experience," and instead claimed, "For individual experience it is necessary to begin with the individual." In agreement with him in principle, but differing on the score of medium, Weaver stated, "I don't like symbolism. It's very hard to feel emotional about a symbol [in posters]. . . . I'm using real and appropriate symbols. The poster I worked from is *my* poster. That's *my* umbrella. The symbols are appropriate because they effectively represent *my* life."[40] However, both men's claims were contradicted somewhat by the fact that Weaver loved flags, even if he appreciated their symbolism ironically: in a self-portrait his eccentric jacket is made of the American stars and stripes.[41] In fact, common symbols do not close meaning. Rather, they are points of familiarity people customize and use in defining their identities as simulta-

neously similar and different. The more mass identity is imposed, the more it invites subversion.

Rosenberg's condemnation of kitsch revolved around its supposed adherence to rules:

> Mass art is the product of creative talent put into the service of
> a) art that has established rules
> b) art that has a predictable audience, predictable efforts, predictable rewards
> Kitsch is art that follows established rules. . . . Kitsch is thus art produced in obedience to the basic assumptions of the Art of the Ages: the assumption that traditional forms can be put to new uses through technical means; the assumption that these forms retain an intrinsic power to move people. Both these assumptions are correct.[42]

It is essentially true that avant garde illustration did use new technical means to reiterate traditional forms in order to profit from their ensuing novelty, the very tactic that Rosenberg feared could become propaganda. Weaver did not deny that this possibility existed. He accused illustrators of being unthinking:

> That [the illustrator] has not realized [his artistic opportunities] is borne out by the low opinion in which the illustrator is held in the general art world. Many illustrators of today are too little concerned with the actualities of their time. Too often they merely aid and abet the pre-sold illusion of the age. The illustrator who should be outside momentary surface illusions observing, is himself observed as part of the phenomenon by more serious students of the time.[43]

Weaver's belief that most illustration contributed to "illusion" agreed with Rosenberg's opinion, but Weaver differed from Rosenberg in that he felt the problem could be addressed in commissioned work. Although Rosenberg eventually saw that abstract expressionism found its logical outcome in ennui,[44] the idea that artists should be "responsible" frightened him. "I should only like to make sure nobody is bullied by the abstract concept of social responsibility into becoming useless to himself and to his fellow men, or even becoming a menace," he said, referring to the producers of mass culture who while attempting to work for the greater good may become totalitarian instead.[45] Illustration, however, with its "power to move people" and to "be put to new uses through technical means," deserves credit that it might also be used to *positively* change the landscape, both in its own right and as the cattle-driver of fine art;[46] it is not a foregone conclusion that totalitarianism results from design for mass culture. Weaver, like Rosenberg, pointed out that a "cigarette ad

[or] Soviet social realism . . . don't *really* communicate."[47] Unlike Rosenberg, he felt illustration did not necessarily equate to propaganda.

Rosenberg would have called Weaver an "Orgman," one who buys into the system he works for.[48] In contrast to the Orgman, the intellectual, like the artist, "defines himself as an intellectual . . . *by the sole fact of his inner dissociation* from the organizational universe" [original emphasis].[49] True intellectuals were never contained by their job descriptions, were characterized by philosophical lone wolfism, and could be found in any walk of life,[50] except apparently as "mass culture makers," whom Rosenberg characterized as a faceless, monolithic lot. In this, he was being hypocritical, since he himself was paradoxically implicated as an Orgman and mass culture producer by his thirty-year career as a radio script-writer and poster campaign planner, then Project Consultant, on the Advertising Council since at least 1945 until 1971.[51] Although the Ad Council promoted itself as a benign entity performing public service duties like the Smoky The Bear campaign, its close financial ties to the CIA in the 1950's and central role in disseminating Cold War propaganda, has been documented by many.[52] Rosenberg's theory of the intellectual bureaucrat who dissociates is likely derived from his Ad Council day-job, but that he never directly acknowledged his daily toil and paycheck in his critical essays shows a serious gap between his theory and practice. While Rosenberg probably did not know about the CIA involvement at the time,[53] there is no way he could not have known about "The People's Capitalism," a piece of propaganda originating with his boss Theodor Repplier that was the template for international visual displays and pamphleteering at home and abroad in South America, Europe, and Asia, starting in 1957.[54] It promoted the notion that capitalism was directed by workers, who participated by purchasing stocks and insurance plans. It is hard to think of anything further from Rosenberg's personal political beliefs. He was probably as openly critical of this enterprise as he was of another one on the subject of mental health,[55] given that he derided the kind of centralized global control that The People's Capitalism initiative was representative of. It is not that he relaxed his standards; it is likely he was hired to be as critical as possible. Rather, it suggests that compromise has its positive aspects; he may have believed in other, more positive work the Council was doing, or that he could be a voice of reason within the system. It is unfortunate that he was unable to cut the same slack for other mass culture producers in art that he gave himself in policy-making. The self-directed intellectual who psychologically washes his hands of his day job while remaining materially tied to it participates in furthering hegemony – *but* – this illustrates that there may be no choice *except* to work for freedom within a structure of hegemony. There is no politically effective position that remains entirely outside of popular culture. One must work *consciously* from within, as Weaver asked illustrators to do.

Robert Weaver also fit the description of an intellectual within an organization, in that he taught at the School of Visual Arts but quit every year.[56] He also hated the Society of Illustrators, and suggested in his acceptance speech for their Lifetime Achievement Award that they were only giving it to him because they "preferred to have him in the tent pissing out rather than outside pissing in."[57] Weaver said that in the 1950's he felt illustration was the best way to express himself, and that he could always "find within a manuscript some way of putting myself into the illustration,"[58] an uncanny echo of Rosenberg's assurance that the intellectual always finds "cracks" in which "to crawl around the obstacles."[59] Indeed, in that illustration is handmade, it can never be considered in a Marxist paradigm to be *totally* reified labour. Weaver wanted his illustrations to stand alone as art apart from the texts they accompanied.[60] As such, they undercut the text, allowing the reader to interpret them against the script if desired.

Fighting for the autonomy of the illustrator suggests fine art values drove Weaver's program, and indeed, Weaver had never planned to become an illustrator. In 1953 he got his first contract accidentally when he applied for a designer-consultant position at *Town and Country* magazine, where the art director decided his sketches would look well as illustrations. Said Weaver, "[Illustration] had not appealed to me because of the prevalence of the boy/girl pretty stuff in magazines. No serious artist would ever consider doing illustration!"[61] In light of Weaver's paranoia of being a "mere" illustrator, in order to claim artistic integrity, he had to do more than just copy the brushwork of abstract expressionism. Weaver's innovation was, according to Steven Heller, "to push illustration beyond the single image to the essay form or to a dynamic realm that more closely resembled film than magazine art . . . he rejected literalism and emphasized pure form cut with irony."[62] It is in his development of *ambiguity* in illustration that Weaver is to be thought of as an innovator. Illustration traditionally clarifies. Weaver spoke strongly of clarity, but insisted in a typically cunning way, "It is possible to be ambiguous *clearly* [like Magritte]."[63]

Rosenberg always laid responsibility solely on the *artist* to avoid, by artistic spontaneity, "the kind of mental forcing out of which can come only lifeless illustrations of ready-made ideas."[64] He overlooked that the audience is also responsible for determining the message, and it is in the *viewer's* spontaneity that we can find room for political agency in commercial art. In order for it to be said to have occurred, communication must be *shared*. As a visual communicator, Weaver considered the reader's experience as well as his own. The "action illustrator" is then one who, as a nuclear reactor, provokes the "action" in the reader-viewer. Weaver avoided totalitarian depictions through ambiguous dialectic juxtapositions that cracked open the illusionistic front of illustration and allowed the viewer to engage in free semiosis, what Rosenberg

called "set[ting] in motion previously uncontrolled, or even undiscovered, powers of the mind."[65] Discussing his 1959 *Esquire* spread on then-Senator John F. Kennedy, Weaver said,

> it can be seen that my pictures sometimes might be said to operate on two or more levels of meaning. What is visible to the naked eye in real life does not always tell the 'truth;' so it is sometimes necessary to recompose life or juxtapose two widely separated elements in order to make visible and readable a true but *in*visible meaning or relationship.[66]

Weaver never disclosed what this invisible meaning might be. He had set out to "demonstrate that politics is just as visual and colorful as, say, show business . . . I was especially interested in the people who surround Kennedy. My observations have an even sharper edge among the paintings which were not used in the article." But he didn't approve of preaching morality directly. "As to Kennedy himself, I discovered I could come to no conclusion about the man and so chose not to do so in the paintings. Let the experts conclude; my job was to produce pictures."[67]

It would be fascinating to know whether the "sharper" images had been eliminated by *Esquire* or by Weaver. Marshall Arisman, a longtime friend of Weaver, says Weaver was left of centre, but apolitical.[68] This perhaps informs the polyvalent readings possible in the Kennedy series, the ambiguity that allows readers to interpret freely. In the title page image, a swarm of candidates holding placards that together portray the White House, can be read as either democracy working collectively for the whole, or as individuals breaking up the whole into pieces.

In the second image, according to the caption, Kennedy is "poised symbolically on the threshold" of the Capitol's Statuary Hall, "with campaign posters representing the rough-and-tumble way into the serenity of accomplishment." The posters outside the door behind Kennedy, framing him, can also stand for profane commercial art versus the sanctified fine art inside this temple, or the inevitable codependence of the two. Kennedy is dwarfed by the Corinthian columns of the hall, and by founding father figures that include the seated socialist-leaning Senator Robert LaFollette. LaFollette, despite popularity and effectiveness, never made it to the top, so he may be read as a benchmark for Kennedy or a warning. Weaver includes on the far left signage announcing SHELTER AREA THIS WAY with an arrow, which may be read two ways. If the arrow is seen to be pointing out of the room and off the page, it is implying that even if Kennedy makes it into the Hall as a celebrated figure, he will find no shelter there. If the arrow is read as an invitation to come further into the room, it implies the opposite.

The Statuary Hall picture is matched with a small image on the facing

page of Kennedy and his rival Nixon eyeing one another in a hallway that stretches beyond them into infinity; they had rather awkwardly been assigned offices across from one another. Isolating them together in this barren setting, Weaver makes them both rivals and brethren. Turning to the next spread, a large image of supporters watching from the steps of the Capitol building is paired with a smaller picture of Kennedy that is positioned on the page so that it appears as if the supporters are looking at him. The latter shows posters on poles depicting his face in sections, that together build a solemn portrait of him, yet they appear to fracture his identity as well. The caption refers to him as "the complex young man who holds [supporters'] hopes" while the pull-quote on the preceding page asks, "Can he get the nomination? Will he be elected? What kind of President would he make?" The shattered portrait can then be read as questioning whether Kennedy's mental complexity is a risk, or else suggesting that his complexity is responsive to the different constituents who presumably hold the poles aloft.

Compared to the caricaturish handling of the figures of people close to Kennedy whom Weaver depicts on the following page, the supporters looking from the steps towards the portrait are imbued with dignity, drawn in naturalistic poses and body proportions, with individuated faces that for the most part avoid exaggeration. In his painting of the people surrounding Kennedy, Weaver has laid identical "toothpaste" grins onto several men, including Kennedy, in bright white paint. Their legs are short and rigid, not convincing, while the floor falls out from under them in forced perspective. It is in this piece that we best see Weaver's negative opinion of the show business of politics, in contrast to his sensitive treatment of the hoi polloi on the steps.

Throughout the series, Weaver draws attention to the role of posters, TV, film, and banners in the campaign, a prescient move given that Kennedy's success was later attributed by many to his deft exploitation of broadcast media. In a small spot-illustration paired with the caricature of his team, Kennedy is shown inside a car, with a wall of posters outside the window. He is holding a newspaper and it appears he is being escorted by police out of the confines of the posters, one of which prominently spells CIRCU-, possibly circus, lending credence to the idea that Weaver was comparing campaigning to show business.

On the last page, Weaver showed Kennedy on a movie set, with a false window behind him and studio paraphernalia in the foreground, exposing the fakery of it all. This small spot was paired with a half-page bleed of a theatre screening a film on Kennedy's life. The film still shows men in suits, the second one bearing a passing resemblance to Hitler, with the words THE END ominously dominating. This also acted as a reference to the series itself, since it was the last illustration in the sequence. Overall, the loose handling of the brush in sketches where the perspective stayed relatively classical implied

that what he captured was objective, while the more contrived compositions with flattened space and more awkward figures inserted a feeling of self-conscious subjectivity. The interplay of objectivity and subjectivity created something approximating Rosenberg's "unique psychic tension" that he held out for genuine, critical art,[69] a tension that could allow the reader to question both the "truth" and "interpretation" proposed by the illustrations.

Weaver sounded certain that illustration could be artin 1959, but was no longer sure by 1965: "It is quite possible that illustration and art might one day merge, at some vanishing point in history, but for the moment their aims and purposes are quite different," he claimed.[70] In 1986, Weaver explained, "I don't feel [that illustration can be art] now, but in the early days, yes, I felt that everything I needed to say could be said in illustrations. . . . Now illustration has become very constricting."[71] The constrictions were both in the industry and within himself. He remarked:

> Illustration is a younger man's art form. I think one eventually gets tired of that kind of illustration where you have to make up solutions to stories that essentially are simplistic. If you really have an interest in art or ideas, you need some way of letting that come out, and you can't do it in illustration alone, unless you're given a lot of paper and a lot of time and freedom.[72]

The Kennedy assignment was hardly simplistic, but such jobs are not everyday work. After he had mostly stopped taking contracts, in 1979 he argued that illustration was not yet art because illustrators had not retained control as art directors and designers: "For a work to be judged as art there must be an artist in full command of the medium. Only when he has pushed it as far as it can go can he be tested fairly by the same critical standards applied to other artists."[73] He defined the medium as "ink, mechanically printed on both sides of the bound pages of a magazine," and said, "I think it is possible to extend the definition of the medium to include an appreciation of the possibilities for narrative that reside uniquely in the structure of the book."[74] He devoted his last decades to these "two-story" or "split-level" books, in which the pages were divided with different narratives (one could say like text and subtext) carrying on independently in each section. They invited the reader to synthesize a third meaning, a clear progression from the ambiguity of his earlier work in magazines. Famously, fulfilling Rosenberg's ideal, he refused to exhibit or sell them at all, and he gave away extremely few. Yet he still did not consider himself an artist, because he did not feel he had of anything of importance to say.[75]

While Weaver's art for magazines may be seen as satisfying even Harold Rosenberg's criteria for art, Weaver's abandonment of it for non-commercial studio practice suggests Rosenberg's position holds weight. Indeed,

the Illustrators Partnership of America and other industry representatives are still fighting for illustrators to be recognized as equal to the creative demands of the early design stages of the projects they are called upon to illustrate.[76] We must conclude then, that Rosenberg's insistence that the mass production of culture conflicts with individual creative input is correct. However, it does not follow that individual artistic expression is not to be found in illustration. Art cannot be limited by medium, method, or even message. The question is not whether "painting" or "illustration" is valid, but whether the practitioner is achieving what is important to him or her, be it self-realization or social participation. Weaver himself, even when he denied most illustration was art, still allowed that "the best practitioners may one day be remembered as artists."[77]

Despite—or because of—ruffling feathers, Weaver is considered among illustrators one of the most important of the twentieth century.[78] The landscape Weaver contributed to changing was that of how illustrators think of their working relationships. As illustrator Leif Peng put it, "I suspect that what Robert Weaver did by leaping into mid-air was show others that it could and should be done. Someone must take the daring plunge – and survive – to give others the courage to follow."[79] Weaver showed that base and superstructure are not in a deterministic relationship so much as a dialectic one, and that the commercial artist is uniquely positioned to play both sides.

Notes:

[1] Sterling McIhlany, "The Realism of Robert Weaver," *American Artist*, (Sept. 1959): 65.

[2] Debate has occurred in the *New York Times Magazine* offices over whether gallery artists ought to be credited as "Artwork by . . . " or "Illustration by . . . " (conversation between *Times* art directors and attendees of ICON5, The Illustration Conference, July, 2008).

[3] For example, a cover of *Varoom* magazine (July 2008) by Brad Holland, is filled with handwriting complaining that "Actors are artists, musicians are artists . . . it seems the only people who are not artists are illustrators."

[4] Steven Heller, "The End of Illustration?," *Illustrators' Partnership*, 2003, http://www.illustratorspartnership.org/01_topics/article.php?searchterm=00073 (accessed Nov. 23, 2008).

[5] I shall retain the use of "he" throughout my discussion of Rosenberg and Weaver's art and writing, since I am primarily discussing a period when women were invisible in art. This is not to reinscribe their marginalization but to expose it.

[6] Weaver in McIhlany, 66.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Harold Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," *Discovering the Present* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), 26. Rosenberg's italics were due to his allowing that high art was made to order in antiquity.

[9] In Richard H. Rovere, "Kennedy's Last Chance to be President," *Esquire Maga-*

zine (April, 1959): 63-70. According to Doug B. Dowd, the location of the original art for these reproductions is unknown.

[10] Steven Heller, "The Godfather," *Seeing is Not Believing* (Norman Rockwell Museum, 1997), unpaginated.

[11] Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," 223, 227.

[12] Weaver in Walt Reed, *The Illustrator in America, 1900-1960's* (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1967): 268.

[13] Weaver in McIhlany, 67. Original italics.

[14] Weaver in Reed, 267.

[15] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," [1953] in *Tradition of the New* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965): 25.

[16] Harold Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," in *Artworks and Packages* (New York: Horizon Press, 1969): 222.

[17] Weaver in McIhlany, 66.

[18] Weaver in Steven Heller, *Innovators of American Illustration* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1986) 16.

[19] Ibid.

[20] *Esquire Magazine*, "You saw it First in *Esquire*," Display ad 217, *New York Times* (Nov. 14, 1956): 49.

[21] Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 16.

[22] Rosenberg, "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism," in *Tradition of the New*, 259.

[23] Ibid., 265.

[24] Ibid., 267.

[25] Ibid., 264, 265.

[26] Ibid., 267.

[27] Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," in *Artworks and Packages*, 224.

[28] Rosenberg, "Art of Bad Conscience", in *Artworks and Packages*, 159.

[29] Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999), 257-278.

[30] Rosenberg, "Art and Its Double," in *Artworks and Packages*, 20-23.

[31] Weaver in, McIhlany, 66.

[32] Ibid.

[33] "An artist is a person who has invented an artist. . . . Artists are people who tamper with what makes them artists." Rosenberg, "Themes," in *Discovering the Present*, 214.

[34] Weaver in McIhlany, 34.

[35] Ibid., 67.

[36] Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 18.

[37] Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 28.

[38] Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 16.

[39] Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 18.

[40] Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 18.

[41] *Self-portrait*, circa 1960, reproduced in *Seeing is Not Believing: The Art of Robert Weaver*, [exhibition catalogue for The Norman Rockewell Museum and the School of Visual Arts] (New York and Stockbridge: Visual Arts Press 1997): unpaginated. The Location of the original art is unknown.

[42] Rosenberg, "Pop Culture: Kitsch Criticism," in *Tradition of the New*, 266.

[43] Weaver in McIhlany, 66.
[44] Rosenberg, "Virtuosos of Boredom," in *Discovering the Present*, 120-121.
[45] Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds," in *Discovering the Present*, 28.
[46] A reference to Rosenberg's assertion that mass culture forces fine art to constantly retreat to more rarified realms, cited above.
[47] Weaver in Reed, 267.
[48] Rosenberg, "The Orgamerican Phantasy," in *Tradition of the New*, 271.
[49] Rosenberg, "Twilight of the Intellectuals," (1958) in *Defining the Present*, 173.
[50] Rosenberg , "The Intellectual and His Future," [1965] in *Defining the Present*, 194.
[51] Eve Mangurten [for the Advertising Council], to Grove by email on Oct. 30, 2008.
[52] E.g., Robert Haddow, "Material Culture and the Cold War: International Trade Fairs and the American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair" (Ph.D diss., University of Minnesota, 1994); Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade Against the Soviet Union* (New York: NYU Press, 1999); Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999).
[53] Rosenberg, "Stopping Communism," in *Defining the Present*, 310. In this essay he lambasts the dishonesty of the CIA in their dealings with intellectuals.
[54] Haddow, 1994, 44, 52, 54-56, 61, 317.
[55] Archivist's note, Harold Rosenberg Finding Aid, Getty Institute, Los Angeles.
[56] Marshall Arisman, interview with Grove on October 27, 2008.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 16.
[59] Rosenberg, "The Intellectual and His Future," in *Defining the Present*, 194.
[60] Weaver in Heller, *Innovators*, 17.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Steven Heller, "Robert Weaver 1924-1994," *Print* 48.5 (1994): 130.
[63] Robert Weaver, "Robert Weaver's Illustration Issue," *Print* (Nov-Dec 1979); reprinted as "Introspectives," in *Print* 48.5 (1994): 116.
[64] Rosenberg, "Art of Bad Conscience," in *Artworks and Packages*, 167-168.
[65] Rosenberg, "Art and Its Double," in *Artworks and Packages*, 20-23.
[66] Weaver in McIhlany, 35.
[67] Ibid., 35, 65.
[68] Arisman in interview with Grove.
[69] Rosenberg, "Pop culture: Kitsch Criticism," in *Tradition of the New*, 267.
[70] Weaver in Reed, 267.
[71] Weaver in Heller, 16.
[72] Ibid., 19.
[73] Weaver, *Print* (1994): 116.
[74] Ibid., 117.
[75] Arisman in interview with Grove.
[76] For essays on "the art of illustration," see the Illustrators Partnership of America, http://www.illustratorspartnership.org/01_topics/topics.php?searchtype=topicCategory&searchterm=artofillustration&topicType=category&topicTerm=01.
[77] Weaver, *Print* (1994): 116.
[78] Conversations with Milton Glaser, Marshall Arisman, Steven Heller, and Walt

Reed confirm this, as well as blog testimonials from Doug B. Dowd and Leif Peng. David Apatoff takes a more cautious approach, noting that because Weaver did not always encourage illustration students or honor his peers, his *personal* influence might be exaggerated.

[79] Leif Peng, "The Incursion of the Avant Garde: Robert Weaver," *Today's Inspiration*, Feb. 26, 2008, http://todaysinspiration.blogspot.com/2008/02/incursion-of-avant-garde-robert-weaver.html (accessed Nov. 23, 2008).

From Destructive Infant to Restorative Mother: Tracing the Vulnerable Body in the Work of Louise Bourgeois

Whitney Howell

I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now.

Molloy in *Molloy*, Samuel Beckett.

She objects to the business. . . . She knows the profits of it, but she don't appreciate the art of it, and she objects to it. "I do not wish," she writes in her own handwriting, "to regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that bony light."

Mr. Venus, "Preserver of Animals and Birds and Articulator of human bones," on his rejected marriage proposal in *Our Mutual Friend*, Charles Dickens.

I

Mr. Venus utters his lament amid the many curiosities of his shop, and the reader, along with Silas Wegg, who is being addressed here, is fain to make out which among these curiosities are human, animal or more foreign parts. One can imagine Louise Bourgeois's studio to be a similarly uncanny environment, full of accumulated objects with previous lives and histories, as well as raw materials waiting for her hands to give them form. Bourgeois's artistic career spans over half a century and encompasses a variety of media; and yet, as many critics have noted,[1] the diverse body of her work is united by its relentless ability to tap the unconscious, to express and evoke the emotional conflicts which characterize childhood and continually inform adult life. Indeed, Bourgeois herself has cited specific events in her childhood as the source of much of her work, and describes her creative process, her sculpture in particular, as an opportunity "to re-experience the fear, to give it a physicality so I am able to hack away at it. Fear becomes a manageable reality. Sculpture allows me to re-experience the past, to see the past in its objective, realistic

proportion."[2] While the shapes and proportions—the means—of manageability have changed, and are changing in Bourgeois's work, her attempt to realize the pain of her past, to put it in bodily relation with herself, succeeds in its striking relevance to the viewer, who finds herself in touch with the textured emotion of each piece.

Bourgeois's own relationship to her work and the relationship she makes possible between her work and an audience describe an inhabited—but no less inhabitable—world. In *Dream, Phantasy and Art,* psychoanalyst Hanna Segal supplies an account of how the world of a work of art speaks meaningfully for the artist and to her audience. Drawing on Melanie Klein's writings on symbol-formation,[3] Segal develops the thesis that the work of art represents a work of mourning for a lost object, and thus recalls the loss of the primary object, the mother, that every infant undergoes in the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position.[4] The difficulty of this transition is that it requires the infant to acknowledge ambivalence: both the mother's ambivalence as a whole object that contains good and bad parts, and his own ambivalence towards the mother, which includes aggressive, destructive urges that, while aimed at the bad part-objects, damage the whole.[5] According to Segal, the work of art reenacts the successful mourning of a lost object in its re-creation of a world in which the object can live, and which includes elements of loss, aggression, and the desire for reparation that are all familiar to infantile unconscious experience.

It should be emphasized here that the loss of the mother is not only psychic, but bodily as well, and thus has a bodily significance for the infant. It is this aspect of Segal's theory that lends special insight into Bourgeois's work, and that aptly accounts for the kind of world she makes available to her audience. A recurrent image in Bourgeois's oeuvre is the vulnerable human body, vulnerable because it is abstractly isolated, or dismembered, or stripped to reveal its innards. Indeed, Bourgeois continually casts the body in a "bony light," making apparent the essential weaknesses of its substantiality. In this way, her work examines the subject's changing bodily sense of self in the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position: the infant's realization of his separateness from his mother implies a recognition of bodily vulnerability. This essay considers the ways in which Bourgeois conceives of the mother's body as both a protection against and a reflection of the essential vulnerability of the infant in the depressive position. Drawing on the emotional material of her childhood—namely, her relationship with her ill mother and her attitude towards her demanding and philandering father—Bourgeois constructs a world that includes both the raw aggression of the paranoid-schizoid position and the reparative impulse of the depressive position. This world reveals that this aggression and reparation are sited in the infant's bodily relationship to his mother, and that an understanding of both impulses involves

continual acknowledgement of vulnerability. I will consider how Bourgeois's created world is essentially informed by the mother's body in the infant's initial attempts at symbol-formation. I will also examine the role of aggression in reality-testing as it is realized in Bourgeois's relationship to her sculptural materials. With Segal, I will argue that both symbol-formation and reality-testing are processes necessary to the infant's achievement of the depressive position in that they require him to come to terms with his growing sense of bodily vulnerability.

In the final section of the paper, I would like to propose a consideration of Bourgeois's later work—her *Cells*, in particular—that examines how this sense of bodily vulnerability informs one's relationship with the external world. Bourgeois contends that in her sculpture, "fear becomes a manageable reality," but it nevertheless remains a reality, one that requires managing. Undoubtedly, the fear that she claims motivates her work contributes to its often uncanny aspect, such as the dismembered body parts that recall Mr. Venus's shop. But in *Cells*, the uncanny aspect becomes an environment, although one to which the audience has restricted access. It is in this work that Bourgeois expresses both the infant's desire for ultimate protective intimacy in the mother's body, and the denial of this desire that renders the infant vulnerable to the unfamiliarity of the external world, but only as this unfamiliarity is informed by the mother's body: "I am in my mother's room," as an otherwise confused Molloy attests to at the beginning of Beckett's novel. The unfamiliarity, the uncanniness, then reflects the significance of bodily vulnerability as experienced in the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position.

II

In an interview with Christiane Meyer-Thoss, Bourgeois comments on the significance of her parents in her work: "They are monumental, solid, my frames of reference."[6] But she goes on to cite another frame of reference: "Geometry is a safe thing that can never go wrong, a guarantee. *It offers a reliable world, a reliable system, and an unchanging frame of reference that will not betray you.*"[7] These remarks establish a contrast that succinctly expresses some of the childhood anxieties that inform Bourgeois's work. Bourgeois was born in Paris on the 25th of December, 1911, to Louis and Joséphine Fauriaux Bourgeois. She spent her first six years in Choisy-le-Roi, outside of Paris, before moving with her family to Antony, near the Biévre River, where her parents operated a tapestry restoration business. At the age of 10 Bourgeois began aiding her parents in the restoration work.[8] According to Bourgeois, these early experiences contributed to her conception of art:

> The tapestries were always torn at the bottom. They were origi-

> nally used as moving walls. The rooms they were used in were not very clean, and the tapestries always got torn at the bottom. Their lower parts were actually lost; the feet on the figures were often missing. I drew one foot for my mother. I became an expert at drawing feet. I still do it; I still do lots of feet. I was very satisfied with them, very satisfied with the feet I drew for my mother. It was a great victory. And it also taught me that art is interesting, and that it can be useful, which is completely unknown today. It can restore.[9]

As suggested by her words here, Bourgeois's early work in restoration was in part inspired by her mother, whom Bourgeois has elsewhere more explicitly characterized as "a restorer, she repaired broken things."[10] But even as a "restorer" her mother was undermined by Bourgeois's overbearing and demanding father, whose frequent extramarital affairs and "aggrandizing" presence provoked the anger and aggression in the young Bourgeois that would later motivate *The Destruction of the Father*.[11] As "frames of reference" her parents were unreliable, two figures united by betrayal and its acceptance, both felt by the young Bourgeois.

Bourgeois thus sets her family life in contrast to her academic studies, as suggested by her comment above that "geometry is . . . an unchanging frame of reference that will not betray you." She studied geometry at the Sorbonne until she realized that it too was susceptible to unreliability: "The day I understood that there were other geometries besides Euclidean, I experienced a sharp disappointment. It was for me the death of a symbol. Mathematics was no longer a safe symbol. . . . So I was in search of a new symbol, a new equation. The new equation was art."[12] For Bourgeois, the appeal of mathematics was its seeming stability; it supplied her with a system of parts that could be manipulated. But even barring its formal contingencies, it could not answer the demands for safety and manageability that she explicitly claimed to be seeking in her studies.

Her turn to art as a new "equation" is, according to her, a move to work with living symbols that answer to the emotional demands of her world. Bourgeois's remark here is relevant to the psychoanalytic conception of how symbols function in that it refers to their creative and bodily roots, roots which are all but lost in established mathematical systems. From a Kleinian perspective, symbol-formation introduces us to the external world. It is the infant's response to the anxiety he feels following his early sadistic urges and phantasied attacks on the mother's body.[13] Because he has invested aggression in the hateful, introjected part-objects that stand for the objects themselves, he fears the latter, and turns to other things in his environment that can serve as less-threatening symbols with which he can relate.[14] While symbolization is thus

initially defensive, and preserves the infant's relationship with part-objects, it is nevertheless constructive as well, and motivates the subject's establishment of a meaningful relationship with the external world.[15]

Though symbols create a world of meaning apart from the mother's body, they are necessarily informed by her body. In her discussion of the Ravel opera in "Infantile anxiety-situations reflected in a work of art and in the creative impulse," Klein interprets the animated hostility of the young boy's environment as the retaliation of the mother's body in response to his sadistic attacks: "The world, transformed into the mother's body, is in hostile array against the child and persecutes him."[16] As Klein also notes in her analysis, the first meaningful world for the infant is the childhood home.[17] It is the home, then, that is the venue for our first symbol-formations and thus for our first communication with the external world; but this communication remains essentially tied to the mother's body and thus to the sadistic impulses and resulting anxiety of the infant.

III

Some of Bourgeois's earliest work takes up this theme of the relationship between home and the female body. The drawings she produced between 1946 and 1947, collectively known as the *Femmes Maisons*, depict women whose bodies have been partially replaced by houses. Many critics have noted the relevance of these drawings to Bourgeois's newly established domestic life in New York; by 1946 she was a stay-at-home mother of three, managing the often-conflicting roles of wife, mother and working artist. But as Bourgeois herself states, "I am really a woman child. . . . People see me as a mother. I'm not a mother. I'm a baby."[18] And indeed, the iconography of these pieces seems to speak to the anxiety that Klein claims motivates the infant to engage in symbol-formation, investing the external world with the significance of the mother's body.

What is initially striking about these early pieces, particularly in regard to Bourgeois's first creative experiences, is that they present images that are loosely the inverse of those in the tapestries she spent her early adolescence restoring; the legs and feet remain intact while the trunk of the body has undergone "restoration."[19] Legs attribute the *Femmes Maisons* mobility,[20] and are thus able to move out of sight, a major catalyst of the early infantile anxiety-situation.[21] The infant's sadistic desires to plunder the mother's body render the introjected part-object dangerous and threatening, and the absence of the real mother, the loving mother, magnifies this threat.[22]

Despite the presence of legs, however, it is clear that these women-houses are not plotting escape or revenge. One of them is in fact falling, her own body seemingly out of her control.[23] Commenting on these early draw-

ings, Bourgeois has said that, "This woman is obviously nice looking, but she does not realize the effect she has on us. She does not know that she is half naked, and she does not know that she is trying to hide. That is to say, she is totally self-defeating because she shows herself at the very moment that she thinks she's hiding."[24] Bourgeois refers to the sightlessness of the *Femmes Maisons*, evident in the empty-looking windows of the drawings, which emphasizes their essential vulnerability. They are "nice looking" in that they initially appear to afford a nurturing domestic environment, but on closer inspection, even though they are not on the move, their bodies are ill-equipped to withstand anxiety, particularly the anxiety of the viewer, which she, the *Femme Maison*, cannot see: "she does not realize the effect she has on us."[25]

In her comment Bourgeois also mentions an attempt to hide, which describes a certain kind of relationship the body can have with the home, a relationship Bourgeois often takes up in her later work, and which emphasizes the body's desire for shelter and protection.[26] However in these drawings, even though the bodies of the *Femmes Maisons* take on the added protective layer of the structure of a house, their nakedness and their apparent helplessness display a bodily vulnerability that in fact mirrors, rather than allays, the bodily vulnerability of the depressive infant as he is coming to recognize it.[27] Recall that it is in the depressive position that the infant forges a relationship with the external world through the process symbol-formation. But successful symbolization necessitates that he recognize his mother's body as separate from himself, and thus confront the possibility of both her and his reciprocal vulnerability in order to establish a meaningful relationship with the external world.

Before developing this point as it is presented in particular sculptures of Bourgeois's oeuvre, I would like to consider briefly her relationship to sculpture in general, and perhaps posit it as a means to explicate the way in which the infant negotiates his phantasies with his increasing exposure to the external world.

IV

Though Bourgeois's choice of material for her sculptures varies greatly from latex, rubber, and cloth, to the harder surfaces of wood and stone, her stated preference is for material that is resistant:

> You get different things from different materials. Eventually, after going through many changes of material, I will get the subject that interests me most, and the most resistant material. The fact of resistance is challenging, perhaps the most challenging fact about sculpture for me. It is overcoming resistance. . . . What the piece finally is depends of course on the material I work with, but I

usually work with hard material. I am attracted to it.[28]

Bourgeois's description stresses the physicality of a sculptor's relationship to her material, and while she prefers this relationship to be one of "resistance," it ultimately must give way to her aggressive impulses. Her statement thus expresses the infantile paranoid-schizoid phantasy of dominating and controlling the part-object. Indeed, it was recently remarked, "Bourgeois never wanders far from the paranoid-schizoid position, however often she enters the depressive position to make art."[29] That she does enter the depressive position to make art displays a successful negotiation of phantasy with reality, which involves an acknowledgment of the capacities of and limits to her medium, and also of the aggressive impulses that originally motivated the creation of the work.[30] Thus, it is only after a process in which the paranoid-schizoid sadistic impulses can have free reign that Bourgeois makes reparation: "You can hack away, which is aggressive, and then you polish what you have made, and you oil it and you take care of it, and then you keep it for thirty years."[31]

Bourgeois thus relates to her medium as the infant first relates to the external world, through a process of reality testing that involves both aggression and reparation. The original medium for the infant, and arguably for much of Bourgeois's work, is the mother's body. Though Bourgeois was making her first experiments in sculpture in the mid 1940s, when she painted the *Femmes Maisons*, she did not make her public debut as a sculptor until her solo show at the Peridot Gallery in 1949.[32] While these early sculptures reflect her developing interest in spatial configurations of human relationships,[33] and thus are certainly relevant to psychoanalytic issues of separation and anxiety, I would like to turn to a later work that bears an explicit connection to the early drawings, and also to the discussion of the mother's body as the first material for reality-testing.

The *Femme Maison* sculpture of 1983 is formally impressive; the aggression of its construction in marble and the figure (un)named in the title are hidden in the smooth, intricate folds of the drapery that serves as the base of the house.[34] In its austere beauty this *Femme Maison* explicitly evokes the sculpture of the high classical period of Ancient Greece, such as the beautiful richly draped figures that decorated the Parthenon.[35] However, this sculpture also more subtly evokes the *korai* of the Archaic period of Ancient Greece, pre-cursors to the naturalist human form and drapery of the classical period, [36] who in contrast to the *kouroi* (their nude male counterparts) were often depicted wearing a heavily-folded *peplos*.[37] The *kore* is an important figure in relation to the *Femme Maison* because it is believed that she served as a grave marker for a young, unmarried woman (*kore* means "maiden") who had lost the opportunity to bear children who would in turn bear her memory.[38] Thus, the *korai* exemplify Segal's concept of art as reparation, as they are concrete

objects of mourning whose makers were less concerned with the afterlife than with creating a living memory of the lost young woman. But the anonymity of this *Femme Maison* makes a subtle reference to the contingent identity of the *kore*; the absence of a household merits her memorial, just as the house itself defines, at least in title, the *Femme Maison*, even as her body reciprocally defines and supports the house.

The anonymity of the submerged but supportive body of the *Femme Maison* perhaps precedes mourning in its appeal to the viewer's epistemophilic tendencies, and thus in its provocation of aggression which renders the position of the house precarious above the vulnerable base. In contrast to the drawings, this *Femme Maison* is decidedly stationary, but the mysteriousness of its body is emphatic; it is buried, sightless and hidden from the sight of the viewer. But its foreboding air, its evocation of "fear and peril," is quietly insistent.[39] It is this aspect of the sculpture that unites the aggression implicit in its creation with the aggression of the paranoid-schizoid infant, who according to Klein attacks the mother to acquire the contents of her body.[40] He attacks the body for what he expects it to contain, but what he cannot actually see. Through reality testing, the infant checks the expectations of his sadistic phantasy against the material of the external world, the mother's body being the significant first material. The un-hidden body of the mother is thus vulnerable to the attacks of the infant, but, as I plan to show, in the reality testing that accompanies these attacks and affords the opportunity for reparation, the infant discovers his bodily vulnerability as well.

This notion of reality testing is thus critical in the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position, and in the infant's development of a sense of bodily vulnerability. In the paranoid schizoid position, the infant primarily relates to the world through his phantasy of "ideal and persecutory expectations,"[41] however as was discussed earlier, anxiety forces him to engage to some extent with the external world in symbol-formation. This engagement with the external reality leads the infant to encounter real objects, and to "test" these against the objects that populate his phantasy.[42] Segal is particularly interested in "reality testing," because she regards it as a necessary process in the shift from the paranoid-schizoid to the depressive position in its contribution to the creation of the whole object.[43] In reality testing, the infant learns to distinguish between phantasy and reality perceptions,[44] which aid him in the development of a greater awareness of his body and its relationship to the world. This process reveals a significant link between phantasy and the body, a link that is evident in an example Segal gives of a baby who refuses a persecuting breast. If the baby does not build a tolerance for ambivalence—that is, if he does not come to recognize the breast as capable of both nurture and persecution—then he may develop digestive problems in his interaction with the persecuting breast, thus the internal phantasy

has a psychosomatic effect.[45] Hence, reality-testing is a crucial means of bodily negotiation with, and integration in, the world.

V

While this discussion of the sculptural *Femme Maison* focused on its materiality in relation to the mother's body, much of Bourgeois's other works in sculpture, particularly the later *Cells*, employ "found objects;" materials that have had a previous life. The notion of a "found object" implies its preexistence to us. In finding it we reactivate it, and in doing so we engage in a conversation that preceded us, but that was all the time including, and even describing us. The found object's appeal to the unconscious was exploited in the work of the Surrealists, with whom Bourgeois is often associated, but against whom she explicitly contrasts her own work, particularly her work with found objects.[46] What notably distinguishes the Surrealist object from those of Bourgeois is that the former requires an *articulation* of the unconscious conversation it invokes, a "theoretical ballast" to explain its meaning.[47] In this sense, the object itself does not speak. In contrast, Bourgeois's use of the found object is very similar to her relationship with physically sculpted materials in its evocation of intimacy and aggression grounded in the infant's relationship to the mother's body. Bourgeois has said, "It was once important that the objects I used be found in the house."[48] While Bourgeois explicitly cites convenience and thrift as reasons for using objects of the home,[49] her work with found objects arguably derives its force from the significance of the home as the first world for the infant apart from the mother's body, a world informed by both aggressive and reparative impulses as made clear in our discussion of the paintings of *Femme Maison*. While the previous sections of this paper have focused almost exclusively on the aggression of the paranoid-schizoid infant in symbolization and reality testing, and the effect of this aggression on the mother's body, this final section will turn to the reparative impulse of the depressive position as it is displayed in some of Bourgeois's later works in sculpture that employ both found and crafted materials.

Perhaps the sculpture that makes the most explicit reference to the artist's own relationship to her mother's body, and also to impulses of both aggression and reparation, is the striking *Ventouse*.[50] In this sculpture two sizable blocks of black marble are stacked, with the base being slightly larger. The surface of the marble is rough and inconsistent, as if it had been hacked away at with hammers of different sizes. Screwed into the top of the upper block are glass cups, their appearance similar to light bulbs, and their shapes like small breasts. The title of the piece informs the viewer of the original function of the cups: "*ventouse*" is French for "cupping jar."[51] These cupping jars were often used as instruments to relieve pain, after the interior of the cup

has been lit and placed open face down on the body, the decrease in pressure within the cup eases pain.[52]

The *ventouse* has a special significance for Bourgeois because her mother was ill for much of Bourgeois's adolescence, and Bourgeois would use these cups in nursing her.[53] Bourgeois found these particular *ventouses* at a flea market in France in 1989, but as her use of them here implies, they strongly invoke the memory of her mother and the pain of her death.[54] Bourgeois's experience nursing her mother brought her into direct contact with the vulnerability of the human body, and more significantly of her mother's body.[55] What vulnerability in its farthest reaches discerns is the possibility and inevitability of death, and *Ventouse* conveys both the aggression of the paranoid-schizoid infant (in the hard "resistance" of the heavy marble), and the acceptance of loss and the desire for reparation (in the careful placement of the delicate glass cups). As Bourgeois herself notes, vulnerability is suggested in the contrast between these materials: "The eternal quality of stone and the fragility of glass are opposites. Opposites mean we try to achieve an equilibrium. Tension is when opposing impulses pulls us. Their proximity is a challenge to my self restraint."[56] Their proximity is a challenge to her self-described aggressive stance as a sculptor, the destructive aggression of the paranoid-schizoid infant. This gesture of self-restraint is that of the infant in the depressive position who wants to make reparation for the damage she has inflicted upon the object.

Ventouse is thus a piece that unites many of the concerns present in Bourgeois's earlier work in an articulate statement about the role of the mother's body in the infant's awareness of his own vulnerability. In its use of both found and constructed objects, it is a present and enduring gesture of reparation created out of the material of memory. This gesture illuminates how the mother's body aids in the transformation of the aggressive, epistemophilic urges of the paranoid-schizoid infant into his meaningful communication with the external world. The interior of the marble base is hollowed out and the clear glass cups reveal a lit interior. Bourgeois has said that, "Life is organized around what is hollow."[57] That the breast-like *ventouses* do not offer physical nourishment but rather light instead emphasizes the infant's—and the artist's—turn from the interior world of phantasy, which includes the interior of the mother's body, to the external world of reality, a turn necessary to reparation and creation.

It is all the more interesting, then, that the works that closely precede and follow *Ventouse* are Bourgeois's *Cells*, a series of created interior spaces that like *Ventouse* are composed of both sculpted and found objects, assembled together in a confined space. The *Cells* are a turn to interiors, but the interiors themselves are laden with the significance of the infant's first world, the home, which, as noted earlier, is always invested with meaning derived from the

mother's body. Indeed, the designation of these pieces as "cells" unites human body and physical place in one word. But unlike the previous pieces examined here, the *Cells* contain only subtle suggestions of the mother's body, rather than more explicitly literal or abstract representations of it. However, although the body of the mother is absent, it haunts the *Cells* and their viewers, who are denied access to most of these installation pieces. Haunting is the suggestion of presence in absence: here, an intimation but ultimate denial of protection. It is in these pieces, then, that Bourgeois makes an explicit connection between reparation and bodily vulnerability, a connection that appeals to the viewer and her own sense of bodily vulnerability in her stance before the piece. According to Segal, the work of art as reparation always includes the viewer, who identifies with the aggression implicit in its making, and also in the desire for the re-creation of a harmonious world.[58] Bourgeois's *Cells* present a ready-made world to the viewer, inviting her gaze but not her body, and in their collection of familiar and unfamiliar objects they invoke a strange sense of confusion and intrigue. I would like to briefly investigate the "uncanniness" (*Unheimlichkeit*) of this sense in the context of the *Cells* as it relates to the body of the viewer, who is the final piece in the reparative process of the work of art.

The first of Bourgeois's series of 29 *Cells* is *Articulated Lair*, an installation of folding steel doors that enclose a small circular space, which can be entered or exited through two openings.[59] Hanging from the doors are heavy looking, oblong rubber shapes. As Bourgeois herself notes, articulation refers to separability; pieces may be added or subtracted.[60] Arguably, the "articulation" here can refer to possibilities of both space and body; the hanging rubber shapes are suggestive of animal parts or unidentifiable organs, prizes of the mistress of this domain that perhaps warn the intruder of her imminent return.[61] Freud claims that dismembered limbs evoke a sense of the uncanny in their allusion to the threat of castration.[62] However, in considering *Articulated Lair* in light of Bourgeois's thematic preoccupation with the mother-infant relationship, the fear of castration could perhaps be reconfigured according to Kleinian terms; the depressive infant's acknowledgment of the father signals the beginning of his bodily vulnerability in his introduction to the reality of the external world.[63]

Another "uncanny" aspect of *Articulated Lair* and of many of the other *Cells* that suggests a sense of vulnerability is the enforced ambiguity of the viewer's perspective; there is no central point of focus, no definite entrance or exit to the confined space. Many of the later *Cells*, such as *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*,[64] are completely enclosed, and it is only by walking around them, looking in at different angles, that one may have a fuller view of their interiors. As one critic has aptly noted: "The uncanny is called up in these works because they always keep us outside their realm. The magic of the work

resides in its ability to keep us to keep us out while drawing us in."[65] This structural feature of the *Cells* speaks to a critical etymological insight that Freud makes in his study of the "uncanny" (*unheimlich*). Freud demonstrates that the root and apparent opposite of *unheimlich*—that is, *heimlich*, or, in English, "homely, familiar, belonging to the house"—"belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight."[66] The *Cells* are an interesting combination of both apparent openness and physical restriction, of the safety of the familiar and the threat of entrapment.

Freud distinguishes between two kinds of *Unheimlichkeit*, both of which are relevant to Bourgeois's *Cells*. One kind consists of those feelings arising from repressed infantile complexes, such as the castration complex, which has been treated briefly above.[67] The other class of the uncanny consists of those feelings arising from animistic beliefs, such as the belief in the omnipotence of thought.[68] Interestingly, it could be argued that the primitive animistic perspective that Freud describes here is equivalent to that of the infant in the paranoid-schizoid position, who reigns aggressively omnipotent in his phantasy part-object relations.

But, even with these Kleinian modifications to Freud's theory, it is not clear that we have adequately accounted for the sense of the uncanny evoked in Bourgeois's later work. While many of the *Cells* acknowledge the aggression of the paranoid-schizoid infant (akin to the animistic perspective) in their provocation of curiosity and their denial of access, they more explicitly encourage the reparative involvement of the depressive viewer. The later *Cells* are representations of childhood, but of a childhood this viewer cannot enter. They thus evoke a strong sense of loss; the various, carefully arranged objects in these restrained spaces suggest pieces of memory that are present but untouchable. The objects' delicacy, particularly that of the spheres in *Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands)*,[69] also depicts a confined vulnerability that is apparent to, but safe from, both the dangerous and protective capacities of the viewer. This confined vulnerability can be interpreted as a reflection of the viewer herself; many of the *Cells* contain mirrors, which encourage this reflective stance. More significantly this is a reflection of the loss of the primary object, the mother, which is also the loss of ultimate intimacy and safety, and the beginning of vulnerability. However, as the enduring stillness of the *Cells* suggest, this loss is not in itself singular and final. Rather, it is continually re-experienced in other situations of loss, and thus continually requires the reparative efforts made in the depressive position. The *Unheimlichkeit* of these *Cells*, then, derives from their careful provocation of the viewer's realization that mourning is never complete, that the loss of the primary object will continually inform our experience and remind us of our essential vulnerability.

VI

I have suggested that the *Cells* appeal to both the dangerous *and* protective capacities of the viewer. The response to this latter appeal is the most significant achievement of the depressive infant and of the viewer of a work of art; the recognition of her own potential for restoration, for a creative reply to the loss that motivates her relationship to reality. This relationship is always a bodily one, and as I have argued, always informed by vulnerability. Indeed, I believe that much of Bourgeois's work demonstrates that one's sense of bodily vulnerability is the common ground for feelings of both empathy, which involves identification with and fear of aggressive impulses, and the *Unheimlichkeit*, which calls one back to her original experience of being a "restorer, a repairer of broken things."

Notes:

[1] For example see: Donald Kuspit, "Louise Bourgeois: Where Angels Fear to Tread," *Artforum International* 25 (March 1987): 115-120; Christian Leigh, "The Earrings of Madame B . . . : Louise Bourgeois and the Reciprocal Terrain of the Uncanny," in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993*, ed. Charlotta Kotik, Terrie Sultan and Christian Leigh (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1994), 51-69; and Deborah Wye, "Louise Bourgeois: 'One and Others,'" in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Deborah Wye (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 13-34.

[2] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Christiane Meyer-Thoss, "Self Expression is Sacred and Fatal: Statements," in *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall* (Zürich: Armann Verlag, 1992), 195.

[3] See Melanie Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego," in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 91-111.

[4] Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 1991), 40, 86.

[5] Hanna Segal, "A Psycho-Analytical Approach to Aesthetics," in *Psychoanalysis and Art: Kleinian Perspectives*, ed. Sandra Gosso (New York: Karnac, 2004), 44.

[6] Louise Bourgeois, quoted in Meyer-Thoss, 134.

[7] Ibid., 135, emphasis added.

[8] Marie-Laure Bernadac, *Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Flammarion, 1996), 164-66.

[9] Bourgeois quoted in Donald Kuspit, *An Interview with Louise Bourgeois* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 20.

[10] Meyer-Thoss, 134.

[11] Louise Bourgeois, *The Destruction of the Father*, Plaster, latex, wood, fabric and red light, 1974, Cheim & Read, New York; Galerie Karsten Greve, Köln, Germany; Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, Switzerland. Bourgeois commented on this work in greater detail in her interview with Kuspit (23-25): "Now, the

purpose of *The Destruction of the Father* was to exorcise the fear. . . . So the reason for making the piece was catharsis. What frightened me was that at the dinner table, my father would go on and on, showing off, aggrandizing himself. And the more he showed off, the smaller we felt. Suddenly there was a terrific tension, and we grabbed him—my brother, my sister, my mother—the three of us grabbed him and pulled him onto the table and pulled his legs and arms apart—dismembered him, right? And we were so successful in beating him up that we ate him up. Finished."

[12] Louise Bourgeois quoted in Meyer-Thoss, 53-54.

[13] Klein, 96.

[14] Ibid., 97.

[15] Ibid., 98.

[16] Melanie Klein, "Infantile-anxiety situations reflected in a work of art and the creative impulse," in *Psychoanalysis and Art: Kleinian Perspectives*, ed. Sandra Gosso (New York: Karnac, 2004), 37.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Bourgeois quoted in "*Femme Enfant*," in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Frances Morris (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 138.

[19] Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, ink on linen, 1946-47, collection of Ella M. Foshay.

[20] Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, oil and ink on linen, 1945-47, private collection.

[21] Klein, "Infantile anxiety situations," 40.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, oil and ink on linen, 1946-47, private collection.

[24] Bourgeois quoted in Frances Morris, 138.

[25] Ibid.

[26] This will be discussed in more detail in a later section of the paper.

[27] This bodily vulnerability imagined in the form of a house also perhaps reflects the weakness the young Bourgeois perceived in her mother's conservative, traditional response to her husband's extramarital affairs, a weakness that in the young Bourgeois's eyes affected the stability of the home itself.

[28] Bourgeois quoted in Kuspit, *Interview*, 43.

[29] Donald Kuspit, "Words as Transitional Objects: Louise Bourgeois's Writings," in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Frances Morris (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 300.

[30] Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art*, 96.

[31] Bourgeois quoted in *Louise Bourgeois: Destruction of the Father/Reconstruction of the Father: Writings and Interviews 1923-1997*, ed. Marie-Laure Bernadec and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 195.

[32] Bernadac, *Louise Bourgeois*, 171.

[33] Deborah Wye, "Louise Bourgeois: 'One and Others,'" in *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Deborah Wye (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 20.

[34] Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, Marble and two wooden timbers, 1983, Collection of Jean-Louis Bourgeois.

[35] Two seated female figures and a messenger, 437-432 BC, Parthenon, Athens, east pediment.

[36] *Berlin Kore*, Marble, ca. 570-560 BC, Antikenmuseen, Berlin, Germany.

[37] John Griffiths Pedley, *Greek Art and Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 171.

[38] The inscription of one such *kore*, Phrasikleia, reads: "I, Phrasikleia's sêma, shall always be called girl/maiden, having received this name from the gods instead of marriage." Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: an anthropology of reading in ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, (Ithaca: Cornell UP: 1993).

[39] Leigh, "The Earrings of Madame B . . . ," 55.

[40] Klein, "Symbol Formation in Ego Development," 96.

[41] Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art*, 28.

[42] Ibid., 28.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 27.

[45] Ibid., 20-21, 27. While Segal does not specifically detail the psychosomatic effects of the infant's phantasied relationship to the persecuting breast in her discussion on page 21, I think this is nevertheless a fair conclusion to draw from her discussion of the psychosomatic effects of emotion on pages 20-21.

[46] See Kuspit, *Interview*, 38.

[47] Donald Kuspit, Lecture at Stony Brook University on 28 March 2008.

[48] Kuspit, *Interview*, 38.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Louise Bourgeois, *Ventouse*, Black marble, glass, and electric light, 1990, Collection of the artist.

[51] "*Ventouse* 1990," *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Frances Morris (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 290.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Perhaps for the young Bourgeois this susceptibility was a sad literal counterpart to that continually emphasized emotionally in her father's extramarital affairs.

[56] Bourgeois quoted in Frances Morris, 292.

[57] Bourgeois quoted in an interview with Paulo Herkenhoff, *Louise Bourgeois*, ed. Robert Storr, Paulo Herkenhoff and Allan Schwartzman (New York: Phaidon, 2003), 25.

[58] Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art*, 93-94.

[59] Louise Bourgeois, *Articulated Lair*, Painted steel, rubber, and metal, 1986, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

[60] "Concealed Zones of Introspection: *Articulated Lair* (1986)," in *The Secret of the Cells*, ed. Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg (New York: Prestel, 1998), 13.

[61] "Imminent" literally means "hanging over one's head," as defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, www.oed.com.

[62] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, trans. Alix Strachey, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 946.

[63] "It is an important aspect of the depressive position that the recognition of mother as separate person includes the recognition of father as her partner. . . . When

the depressive processes are initiated it enables the child to recognize the father as a separate object and that object in turn becomes a necessary factor in the further elaboration of the depressive position." Segal, 46-47.

[64] Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*, Steel, glass, marble, ceramic, and wood, 1993, Collection of the artist.

[65] Leigh, "The Earrings of Madame B . . . ," 61.

[66] Freud, 933.

[67] Freud, 949.

[68] Freud, 944.

[69] Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (Glass Spheres and Hands)*, Glass, marble, wood, metal, and fabric, 1990-93, collection of the artist.

Understanding *The End of Art* as a Critique of Arthur Danto

Rachel C. Parker

> An installation that the popular and pricey British artist Damien Hirst assembled in the window of a Mayfair gallery on Tuesday was dismantled and discarded the same night by a cleaning man who said he thought it was garbage.
>
> The work – a collection of half-full coffee cups, ashtrays with cigarette butts, empty beer bottles, a paint-smeared palette, an easel, a ladder, paintbrushes, candy wrappers and newspaper pages strewn about the floor – was the centerpiece of an exhibition of limited edition art that the Eyestorm Gallery showed off at a V.I.P. Preopening party. . . .
>
> Mr. Hirst, 35, the best known member of a generation of conceptual artists known as the Young British Artists, had put it together and signed off on it, and Heidi Reitmaier, head of special projects for the gallery, put its sales value at "six figures" or hundreds of thousands of dollars. "It's an original Damien Hirst," she explained.
>
> . . . The cleaning man, Emmanuel Asare, 54, told *The Evening Standard*: "As soon as I clapped eyes on it, I sighed because there was so much mess. It didn't look much like art to me. So I cleared it all in bin bags and I dumped it."
>
> . . . Far from being upset by the mix-up, Mr. Hirst greeted the news as "hysterically funny," Ms. Reitmaier said. . . . Since his art is all about the relationship between art and the everyday, he laughed harder than anyone else.[1]
>
> Warren Hoge, "Art Imitates Life, Perhaps Too Closely," New York Times, October 20, 2001

This quote from Warren Hoge's article in the New York Times, which was reproduced as an epigraph at the beginning of Donald Kuspit's book *The End of Art,* is to me an extremely disturbing story. How could it be that fine art can now be mistaken as trash, or is supposed to resemble trash, or *is* trash? How has art progressed from Rembrandt to trash? Is there more validity in fact

that the layman mistook Hirst's work for trash, or in the fact that the gallery director mistook Hirst's work for art? Similar arguments about many postmodern artists' works like Hirst's can be heard daily when walking the halls of any modern art museum. It is a conversation I have had with friends and family who do not consider themselves knowledgeable about art but still feel no constraints in passing value judgments on what they see in these museums. At some points I am no longer able to defend the art as fine art, let alone low art. Sometimes, as with Damien Hirst's story, I am left to shrug and smile and say "I don't know," which is why when I picked up *The End of Art* I felt relief. Finally I would be able to answer the smug person off the street, to defend fine art as more than "trash." However, Kuspit's book ends up being an eye-opening look at the state of art that does not defend the "trash," but attempts to expose it for what it truly is.

In five chapters that could double as stand alone essays, Kuspit examines the death of aesthetics and the affect that that death has had on the art that is produced from that point onward. He examines the actual state of art, saying that post-modern art should in fact be called "post-art" (a term borrowed from Allan Kaprow), and that post-art isn't going anywhere or saying anything beyond "I am here, I am anything you say I am." Kuspit focusses on the rise of the cult of personality, and the loss of an object's critical meaning to the object's value as an accessory to the artist's personality. These opinions that Kuspit regards as truths are explored in *The End of Art* and are a welcome critique of the current state of artistic affairs. In a time when critics are less likely to critique a piece of art than they are to discuss the merits of the artists personae, Kuspit has given us permission to ask the question, "But what is the point?"

The End of Art is also an interesting counterpoint to the philosophical writings of Arthur Danto, including his *Abuse of Beauty*, and more obviously *After the End of Art*, both of which were published earlier. In The *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Martin Donougho called *The End of Art* "a fascinating indictment of much of late twentieth-century art, particularly of postmodern art, and even as an implicit critique of Danto."[2]Although only quickly stated by Donougho,Kuspit's "implicit critique of Danto" can indeed be revealed through apoint by point (or counterpoint) comparison of both scholars' works.Due to the confines of this paper, this comparison must be restricted to *The End of* Art, a small volume published in 2004, and Danto's 2003 publication *The Abuse of Beauty,* which is of comparable length and includes many of the ideas that Kuspit also critiques. Through an examination of how Danto and Kuspit address the decline of aesthetics, the presentation of art in museums, and the future of art, I argue that Kuspit's book is an implicit critique of Danto's ideas.

While there are many subjects that overlap, the first is the discussion

of aesthetics. It would be quite impossible to read *The End of Art* without knowledge of aesthetics and what Danto wrote about aesthetics. For Danto aesthetics begins with philosophy. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines aesthetics as "a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste and with the creation and appreciation of beauty." In the introduction of *The Abuse of Beauty* titled "The Aesthetics of Brillo Boxes," Danto explores the philosophical awakening he experienced when he realized that Warhol's Brillo Boxes represented the point at which "the aesthetics of Pop Art opened art up for . . . philosophical analysis."[3] He explains that prior to Pop Art "aesthetics itself has until now had little to contribute to my philosophy of art. That in part is because my interests have largely been in the philosophical definition of art."[4]

Danto concentrated less on concepts of beauty (because as we will see this seemed old fashioned) than he has on the philosophical implications of modern art. What can he possibly mean? Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy according to Merriam-Webster, and yet Danto said he showed no interest in it until he saw the Brillo Boxes. This implies that before this it was not important to Danto to determine whether or not something was aesthetically pleasing, or whether or not it was beautiful. Danto explains that in the eighteenth century "the philosophical conception of aesthetics was almost entirely dominated by the idea of beauty,"[5] but that in the twentieth century aesthetics "had almost entirely disappeared from artistic reality . . . as if attractiveness was somehow a stigma."[6] But this idea could not, and should not, be applied to Abstract Expressionism. It would be ludicrous to examine one of Pollock's works and not speak about the beauty of form found in the rhythms of his gestures. A formalist critique would begin with such discussion of composition before it ever got around to examining Pollock's personal philosophy. It could even be said that Pollock didn't have a philosophy; he had a method.

But what does Danto mean by beauty as stigma? "To speak of something as beautiful . . . is not to describe it, but to express one's overall admiration. And this could be done by just saying 'Wow'—or rolling one's eyes and pointing to it. Beyond what was dismissed as its 'emotive meaning,' the idea of beauty appeared to be cognitively void."[7] This means that there was nothing intellectually important about art that couldn't be discussed philosophically, that beauty was unimportant compared to artistic intention and meaning. Beauty is relegated to emotion, something base and animal, and is not intellectual. And yet Danto says it was the aesthetics of Pop Art, specifically Warhol's Brillo Boxes, which contributed the most to his philosophical ideas about art.

When speaking of Warhol's Brillo Boxes, it should first be noted that the boxes were appropriated by Warhol from another artist, the designer of the original commercial Brillo box, James Harvey. Harvey was also a talented painter, but in relation to the Brillo boxes he was a designer. According to

Danto, Harvey was a designer who was perhaps more inclined to create something compelling because of his painting abilities (Harvey as a painter is something that Danto seems to privilege, crediting the success of the Brillo box design to Harvey the painter more than Harvey the designer). But the aesthetic appeal of the Brillo boxes is important because it caused Warhol to appropriate the design instead of other possible commercial choices, and also stood out for Danto amongst the other designs Warhol appropriated. However, for Danto, this aesthetic superiority is not as important as the philosophical ideas given to the box once Warhol takes hold of them. So when Danto says that Warhol's Brillo Boxes caused him to take a particular notice of aesthetics he is speaking of the visual pleasure caused by the aesthetics of Harvey's successful box design: the proportions, arrangement and colors used that were perhaps more pleasing to viewers and consumers than other products' design. Danto calls this the "psychology of everyday aesthetics."[8]

Ultimately, "as with the Brillo Boxes of Andy Warhol and James Harvey, aesthetics could not explain why one was a work of fine art and the other not, since for all practical purposes they were aesthetically indiscernible: if one was beautiful the other one had to be beautiful, since they looked just alike."[9]With this, Danto begins to discuss "internal beauty" that is to say a beauty that is integral to the meaning of the work, an idea that he says he came to through the writings of Hegel. Danto says that Hegel believed that there was a distinct difference between natural beauty and artistic beauty, artistic beauty being superior to natural beauty, and he quotes Hegel: "born of the Spirit and born again."[10] In reference to this Danto uses an example of a field of flowers. An actual field of flowers and a painting of a field of flowers would seem to have identical aesthetics because they have the same subject matter, but while the actual field of flowers is beautiful because of its natural formal beauty, the painting of the flowers would exhibit artistic beauty, something internal, and caused by the intentions of the artist. This helps to explain for him the dilemma caused by the Brillo boxes, why one is fine art and one is just package design (Though I find it strange that the original Brillo box is likened to something with natural beauty that grew out of the ground). "It was with this in my mind that I found a way of drawing a distinction that began to seem quite fruitful. I began to think that the beauty of an artwork could be internal to it in the sense that it was part of the artwork's *meaning*."[11]

If aesthetic beauty is an important philosophical point of one work of art, than its beauty doesn't come from physical form but from an internal beauty, the integrity of the art object. Similarly, Danto says that the beauty of the Brillo Boxes is in fact external to the work, since philosophically the appropriation of the Brillo boxes themselves was not important to Warhol's intentions. Danto says that he doesn't know if Warhol's Brillo Boxes have any aesthetic of their own because it is purely a "conceptual work."[12] The pleasing aesthetics of the

original Harvey Brillo box is in fact unimportant to the concept behind Warhol's replications. Similarly, Danto believes the supposed beauty of Duchamp's famous *Fountain* is also external, and unimportant to Duchamp's intended concept. Duchamp may have chose one urinal over another for its design and/or form, but in the end the form of the urinal is incidental when compared to the philosophical implications of elevating a urinal to the status of fountain, sculpture, or art object. What this implies is that Hegel's distinctions about beauty are directly applicable to Danto's ideas. If something is pleasing to the eye because of form then it has natural beauty. If something creates a beauty because of concept, it has internal beauty, what Hegel would call artistic beauty. Artistic beauty is what concerns Danto, beauty tied to the meaning of the work, or rather the artist's concept behind the work, what Danto calls internal beauty.

Using Duchamp as a touchstone, one can then move on to Kuspit's discussion of aesthetics in *The End of Art*. Kuspit is not concerned with types of aesthetic, or in examining how aesthetics function within a work like *Fountain*. In fact, he believes that there are no aesthetics at work in *Fountain*. Duchamp's choosing to call an upside down urinal a piece of art does not in fact make it a piece of art or transform it into anything other than a urinal. *Fountain* is a statement about the spectator, not the object itself. Kuspit states: While Duchamp recognizes the inevitability of aesthetic judgment he wants to dispense with it, for the posterity it promises is beside the immediate subjective point of creativity. . . . Only when one approaches the work of art non-judgmentally does it begin to reveal the artist's personality and creativity . . . the work of art should have no aesthetic appeal . . . it should not try to be tasteful for taste always changes. It should not try to be good, only to be.[13] While Danto believes that the significance of art can be found in the artists intentions, and concept, Kuspit believes that in dispensing with aesthetics Duchamp is "reversing the 'esthetic osmosis' that Duchamp thought was the essence of 'the creative act'"[14] Duchamp is creating "nonart," reducing art to cultural artifact, devoid of all the qualities inherent in art and turning them into "symptomatic relics of a certain remote society with a particular function in that society."[15] By cutting out the spectator, Duchamp has done away with the need for a formal or aesthetic analysis of *Fountain*. If it can no longer be seen and judged as a piece of art, then it must be seen and understood as a cultural artifact.

How could Kuspit be critiquing Danto with these ideas? Kuspit outlines his opinion by introducing Duchamp's work as the origin of post-art, that is the non-art we are stuck with today that contributes nothing significant to art or even to society. Duchamp's readymades are the direct ancestors of Warhol's Brillo Boxes, but what has the readymade really done by raising the ordinary to the level of art object? In effect, Duchamp cut the spectator out of the art. This means that no matter what Danto says about *Fountain* or Warhol's Brillo

boxes, in the end his opinion is a joke because opinions cannot be made about these appropriated objects since Duchamp declared the readymade and its heirs indecipherable.

> In short, Duchamp's readymade exists to mock and defeat the spectator. Indeed for all his yeasaying of "the role of the spectator" - for all the honor he accords the spectator's creative act of interpretation – it seems "made" only to undermine the spectator's expectations. It exists to ridicule posterity, symbolized by the critical and aesthetic judgment the spectator passes on the work of art.[16]

He goes on to say that any judgment from the spectator (or critic) "obscures [the] purpose"[17] of the artist. But if, as Danto states, the internal beauty of a work of art comes from the artists concept, and a spectator's judgment obscures that purpose, therefore the spectator is effectively cut out of the dialog that creates meaning; there is no longer is a three way dialog between artist, medium and spectator. Duchamp created art that held its meaning not in itself, but in the artist. We, the viewer, are to understand the work of artthrough the artist's intention, and the artist's definition. The object is merely what the artist says it is. This is not a critical act, especially when considering that Duchamp thought "no work of art can ever be a perfect translation of the artist's passions . . . the work of art is doomed to fail."[18] The critic, forced to base his opinions about the work of art on the artists intentions rather than the result of those intentions (the work of art itself) is also forced to base his judgments on the artist's mistranslated intentions.

Assessing the process from Kuspit's viewpoint, many problems arise with Danto's reliance on the idea of internal and external beauty. In a New York Times article Barry Gewen agreed that there is a problem with Danto's philosophy, and that according to Danto, "if an artist creates a work, what the critic should do is interpret it according to the artist's own intentions. In a world of slashed flesh and tortured penises, this is an oddly enfeebled view, passive and even circular."[19] This is certainly not the purpose of the art critic.

When reading Kuspit's *The End of Art* as a critique of Danto's aesthetic philosophy, one can see that Danto is not just supporting the changing the role and significance of the art critic, however inadvertently, but also the commercialization of art itself. For example, in chapter six of *The Abuse of Beauty*, "Three Ways to Think About Art," the role of the museum is examined as evolving away from its traditional role as inspiring education about formalism: "Formalism is no longer quite the favored posture for addressing works of art in museum and academic precincts that it had been in the 1960s, when we were invited, by critics and docents, mainly to consider diagonals and rhythms and internal references, similarities, repetitions, and the like."[20] Danto claims that museums are also presenting art as a cultural product, and that "we

visit the museum in order to see how the art of different cultures relate to the lives of those whose form of life they defined."[21] Danto tells the story of visiting the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, walking through its anthropologically designed displays of marriage portraits, and learning about the seventeenth century Dutch as if they were a tribe of pacific islanders: "And I then thought about the American tribe to which I belong. But no painting tells more about what it is to live American culture than the movies, the sitcom, the popular music, the dances, the clothing, the hair-styles, the automobiles, the plumbing, the guides to sex and stock investment . . . ."[22]

Leaving aside Danto's implied assumptions about western and nonwestern cultures, he reveals the shifting categories of high and low art; categories destroyed by artists like Duchamp and Warhol who elevated the everyday ordinary object to art work, thereby shifting the focus of our understanding of art to the cultural sphere. Popular technologies and objects like television and automobiles become cultural objects as well, becoming even art objects that speak of American culture. Danto goes on to talk about the exhibition *Kitchen and Bathroom/The Aesthetics of Waste,* a collection of American appliances and commercially designed objects and advertisements. These were examined from a feminist perspective, connecting the domestic enslavement of women with the commercial market, industrial manufacturing and the paintings of Edward Hopper (the new industrial modern kitchen was a parallel to the "lonely America"[23] seen in Hopper's work). Danto says that this focus on commercial products is part of the anthropologizing of art, and he goes on to ask, "So what is the point of an *art* museum filled with expensive fragile objects collected by various rich persons for their private taste, and turned over to the public in exchange for tax benefits?"[24] But I ask, what is the difference between these two kinds of collections: the high art objects collected by individuals, and the commercially produced objects collected by Duchamp and Warhol? If Brillo boxes can be elevated to the status of art object, and Danto says that the superior aesthetics of the box's design is besides the point, then why not washing machines and their accompanying advertisements? True, these commercial objects have not been translated through the hands of the artist, "born of the Spirit and born again" as Hegel said, but Duchamp also merely chose the object and called it art. So by being included by the curators, could these commercial pieces also be then elevated to art objects? That is of course if Duchamp's actions have not already elevated all commercially designed pieces by implication? It is problematic that Danto considers the work of Duchamp and Warhol to be significant and deny the validity of commercial art as cultural object in a museum, especially when we consider that Kuspit has described how Duchamp's choices rendered the art object a cultural object.

Kuspit also discusses a museum exhibition that presents art objects as cultural objects. However, he examines the implications of the exhibition

instead of asking rhetorical questions. He actually beings *The End of Art* with a chapter called "The Changing of the Art Guard," in which he details Frank Stella's reaction to the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Modern Starts*. It is through Kuspit's inclusion of Stella's opinions that we are also to learn of his own opinions. Stella is quoted as disagreeing with MoMA's decision to group the work in the retrospective not by movements, but "in terms of 'People, places and things.'" "A more apt subtitle [Stella declared] would have been 'Pointless, clueless and soulless'."[25] "People places and things" can be easily seen as an anthropological way of organizing the exhibition. According to Kuspit, "...what used to be called high art no longer exists, perhaps not even in name. Indeed, to use the term 'high art' these days is to suggest some elitist, exclusive, inaccessible phenomenon, different in kind from everyday phenomena, and as such self-privileging and beside the point of everyday life."[26] However, unlike *Kitchen and Bathroom/The Aesthetics of Waste,* MoMA's *Modern Starts* doesn't exhibit cultural objects as art objects, but presents master works of art like Picasso's *Guitar* as mere cultural artifacts; representations of people, places and things. "This exhibition [Stella asserts] neither re-evaluates nor reinterprets; it simply plays around with the collection in the spirit . . . of some fashionable act of de-legitimization of the ideas of greatness, genius, and uniqueness that the collection embodies."[27]

Kuspit goes on to discuss the consequences of the new anthropological trend, which are said to better attract and entertain the unhappy masses, using another quote from Stella,: "A wall of Cézanne landscapes is totally convincing as a display of framed reproductions ready to be charged to your Visa card and taken home."[28] Kuspit goes on to describe MoMA as "a hip, fashionable venue of commercial entertainment" that attempts to popularize, and thus trivialize, the difficult-to-understand but important masterpieces in the collection. It "blur's the lines" between high art and commercial art for the museum patron, turning modern art into entertaining everyday objects that are better understood through mass reproduction, a medium better suited to mass consumption, than in their original states. *Modern Starts* presents the collection as if it was a Sunday special at the mall, not to be missed, and definitely to be consumed. "The whole point of 'Modern Starts' is to habituate the public to modern art, suggesting that it is not as bizarre and disturbing as it has often been thought to be, but continuous with everyday life, if a bit more entertaining and exciting, perhaps only because it has no clear use."[29]

What is the use of art, what is its ideal purpose? Most importantly, what is the future of art? Danto turns to a philosophically traditional purpose of art, that of the mirror: "Art is one of the ways in which we represent ourselves for ourselves, which is why, after all Hamlet spoke of art as a mirror. Philosophy is a struggle to put into words what we as human beings are in the most general terms we can find."[30] Danto believes that the presence of beauty

was not necessary for an art based on concepts; therefore beauty is no longer a defining factor of art. While content becomes the basic component of art, Danto believes that there are still moral obligations that must be met concerning beauty in art: "We have seen in this chapter that it is right or wrong to present certain contents as beautiful. This is so much the case that a cultural decision, if one were made, to have art that was beautiful would ipso facto be a decision as to what content art would have."[31] This brings us back to Danto's support of the "acculturation" of art. Art is now a social tool, one that an artist can use to make political statements, or really any topic of the artist's choosing:

> Aesthetic attributes do not stand alone. They are part of much, much larger frameworks, for just the reason that art itself is inseparable from the rest of life. When one puts beauty in art in the context of life, then to predict that the beauty will be the issue of the future is implicitly to say that the whole of life, in which beauty plays its roles, will be the issue of the future.[32]

This is consistent with Danto's other writing detailing the loss of aesthetics: good art need not be beautiful, the socialization of art occurs through the erasure of high and low art distinctions, and all art objects are branded as cultural objects. "The whole of life" is said to be the issue of art and it's future. This is a broad and sweeping statement, but it fits with Danto's conception of art as one having any purpose designated by the artist's concept, and relayed to the spectator through some kind of transference that does not necessarily pass through the art object to the spectator. Add to that Danto's unexplored ideas about morality in art and you have a confusing picture of Danto's vision of the future of art; anything goes.

On the other hand, Kuspit sees the future of art very specifically. While his ideas about postart mean that no art is, was, or will be made, he does name a small group of artists he calls the New Old Masters that embody the return to the studio that is needed to once again make viable and actual art. What he means is that in postart the studio gives way to the street: "Braque's kind of sacred studio – in effect a hortus conclusus, that is, an aesthetic paradise – disappeared when the artist looked to the street for inspiration, as though acknowledging there was no inner drive or reason to make art."[33] Before this the studio was a sacred space of creative acts. Kuspit talks about Picasso's open studio with powerful models and Braque's "hermetically sealed space" where "The creative act does not depend on the muse."[34] This is related to Kuspit's earlier ideas of art becoming banal and easily accessible to the crowd, and the studio is essentially part of the street, no longer sacred, and merely ordinary. Bruce Nauman's *Mapping the Studio II* is used as an example of this new street-studio. A large gallery space is emptied of everything but one office chair and huge images of a studio full of garbage and useless objects is pro-

jected along the walls in an incredibly long film loop:

> The studio has become a postartistic alley littered with garbage, that ultimate entropic happening. Nauman cleverly turns this lifeless space into a performance – a somewhat tedious, pretentious performance. . . . The studio's empty space, amplified by the gallery's empty space, is turned into a postmodern performance space. It is a pseudo-creative environment – an environment brought to "creative" life by the viewer's movement, not by anything the artist does. He simply sets it up – sets up the viewer in the wasteland the studio has become."[35]

Kuspit suggests that this new entropic studio of the street fills one with a sense of "emotional as well as physical barrenness;" it is a physical manifestation of the "deadness of the unconscious." It is the physical marker of the new origin of postart. But in the postscript of his book he speaks of abandoning this new studio of the street and rebuilding it to have the characteristics studios used to have, a symbolic space indicative of the art produced inside it. He discusses the future of art as lying in the hands of the New Old Masters, a phenomenon signaling "post-postmodernity:" an art that " . . . is neither traditional nor avant-garde, but a combination of the two."[36] Kuspit's New Old Masters combine "the spirituality and humanism of the Old Masters and the innovation and criticality of the Modern Masters." They place an artwork's meaning in both its conception and the actual art object, and they "believe that originality is possible only on the basis of working knowledge of the past."[37] It is important that although they are aware of the past, these New Old Masters do not imitate or appropriate what came before, it serves merely as inspiration. Their art "is an unexpected gift in these dark postart times. It is an alternative art, without the condescension that money, the media, and popular entertainment – the postart, which is their lackey – have to their audience."[38]

Danto seems to open the arena of the future of art to anything; an art therefore truly open to any and all ideas, whims and intentions, and whatever the artist can dream up will be accepted as art. This philosophy looks good on paper, but appears questionable in practice. For Kuspit, postart rules and will more than likely continue to rule, this despite his singling out of the New Old Masters whom he suggests offer a hopeful alternative for the future of art should it continue to exist after postart.

While I've only had the space to deal with a few subjects covered in *The End of Art* and *Abuse of Beauty*, I have focussed on the ideas I found the most illuminating. Each author addresses the beginning of the end of art, the death of aesthetics, the art world's response to this lack of aesthetic (as represented by museum exhibitions), and finally what they believe the future of this aesthetically free art will be. It is not my intention to set Kuspit's book up as

only a critique of Danto, but to better understand what Martin Donougho meant when he implied this in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Through this comparative process I have found that an analyses of *The End of Art* complicates Danto's claims, if not actually unraveling them, and this suggests that Kuspit's writing is indeed a response to Danto.

Notes:

[1]Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xiii.
[2]Martin Donougho, "Review: The End of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63 (2005): 85. The idea that Kuspit is critiquing Danto was introduced to me through this review. Donougho noted that Arthur Danto is conspicuously left out of Kuspit's *The End of Art*, stating that this could be read "even as an implicit critique of Danto." I wanted to further examine this idea.
[3]Arthur C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003), 6.
[4]Ibid.
[5]Ibid., 7.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Ibid.. 8.
[8]Ibid., 7.
[9]Ibid.
[10]Ibid., 12.
[11]Ibid., 13.
[12]Ibid.
[13]Kuspit, *The End of Art,* 20.
[14]Ibid., 14.
[15]Ibid., 22.
[16]Ibid., 23.
[17]Ibid., 20.
[18]Ibid., 24.
[19]Barry Gewen, "State of the Art," *New York Times*, December 11, 2005, 5.
[20]Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty,* 126.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid., 129.
[23]Ibid.
[24]Ibid., 130.
[25]Kuspit, *The End of Art,* 1.
[26]Ibid., 2.
[27]Ibid., 4.
[28]Ibid., 6.
[29]Ibid.,10.
[30]Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty,* 119
[31]Ibid.,120.

[32]Ibid.,124.
[33]Kuspit, *The End of Art*, 180.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid.,181.
[36]Ibid.,182
[37]Ibid. 183
[38]Ibid. 192.

Arts and Languages: A Comparative Study

Ömer N. Soykan

Our primary goal in this study is to mutually address art and language, along with their subtypes, and to outline in table form their respective properties in terms of forms of expression with the aim of creating a classification of art and language.

Each branch of art expresses something from its own perspective and by its own means. Differentiation among these expressions according to the type of art means that each has its own unique language. Due to this diversification of instruments of expression, we should not therefore speak of a language of art, but rather of languages of art.[1] The language of music, as a notational system that does not describe anything but represents/proposes something to be done, is different again in character.The expression of a branch of art is characterized by the style of description, representation, imitation or reflection of that art. This expression is realized through words in verbal arts and through color, line and form in painting and plastic arts.

We may classify languages of arts into two groups as a first step.[2] Verbal (natural) language possesses symbols related to the object of description. For example, the word "tree" is the symbol of that object in language. The symbol symbolizes something owing to agreement between people using that language. Natural language relies on cultural consensus. We learn and participate in the language that has existed before us. Symbolization is not personal. We use the symbol in two different ways. One is the agreed (cultural) verbal symbol of the natural language, and the other is the visual symbol, which will be discussed in greater detail below in plastic arts and other visual arts. Visual symbol relies on likeness or direct imitation; it is reflection through imitation. Yet, there is no resemblance between the verbal symbol and the object it symbolizes, except in the case of reflective words (onomatopoeia). As *Saussure* points out, there is no causality between them.[3] If such a causal relationship did in fact exist at the beginning of language it has been lost over time.

Linguistic symbolization is not a reflection through imitation. A word is not the picture of the object for which it is a symbol. For example, the word "tree" does not illustrate the tree phonetically or as a written sign (pictograms, by definition, are the exception to this). Given that I have joined the cultural consensus as to what it represents, or I have knowledge of the language of

which this word is a part, when I hear or read it I can visualize a picture of the object in my mind. The word that represents tree in another language does not evoke any picture in my mind. Reflective words like "meow" or "ku kri ku" in different natural languages are imitations, not symbols. These work like effects in music, which will be dealt with below. Because of the symbolizing character of language, literary arts which use language are consensus-based verbal symbolizations. This symbolization is design-oriented and conceptual. All literary arts, from poetry to fiction, use natural language, and among them it is poetry which may violate the consensus most. For example, the phrase "round square," which is not acceptable in mathematics and daily language, gains validity in poetry. There is no object or situation this phrase represents or symbolizes. However, poetry is not an art of narration or storytelling. It works through the impression it leaves on and the emotion it arouses in the person who reads/listens to it. In this respect, poetry resembles the language of music, but differs from it in that it can explain and express something.

We group non-verbal languages under the heading "visual language" since their common characteristic is visualization, although they may differ more or less in form of expression. There is an important distinction between verbal language and visual language. For example, we cannot deem the verbal language and the visual language of a picture to be identical, but we may state that if a picture can tell us something through the image it creates by form, color and line, it is because we have a language. In this sense, visual language is verbal language extended into the visual domain. Hence, it may be argued that there is a common language and cognitive faculty, which underline all the types of language.

In verbal language, when words are brought together according to grammatical rules we obtain meaningful sentences. A sentence has to have a linguistic structure and it is this structuralism that makes sentences of words. If visual language is to express something, then it needs a unique grammar and linguistic structure, yet the grammar of ordinary language and visual language differ from each other, above all in their instruments of grammar. Grammar uses words and linguistic signs in the former, and color, form and line etc., in the latter. The common aspect of use of instruments in verbal or visual work is the desire to tell something and put forth a meaningful expression. Let us give a few examples from visual arts on the usage of instruments by the grammar of visual language.

If the condition of an object or an event is described in a picture, the elements of the picture are placed on the canvas as they are on the described object/event, or rather, as they seem to the artist. The arrangement of objects and events are reflected on the canvas. Thus, a meaningful answer is given to the question "What does the picture illustrate?" If the picture is a composition, then the coupling of colors and forms will display a system. There is even a

system at work in the Dadaist movement, in the use of meaningless voice and poetry, formed by arbitrarily chosen words, or their destructive opposition to conventional painting. Every systematical thing tells something.

In architecture, the arrangement in space of the structure's sections has a logic. This logic gives a meaningful answer to the question"Why are these sections arranged so?" In this arrangement, consideration of weather conditions, for instance, means something. A building having small windows and thick walls in a continental climate where days are hot and nights are cold has a meaning that is, it has something to say.

In drama and cinema, where visual and verbal languages are used together, the concurrence of two types of grammar shows itself in the arrangement of events in a certain sequence. Concordance between actions and speeches is a structural property that gives the play integrity and sequentiality. This, and all other similar structural properties, may be seen as the grammar which enables the formation of meaningful expressions in a play or movie.The ability to express the message of an art form via another art form is possible through this commonality of linguistic structure. For example, in his painting *Laokoon,* El Greco[4] illustrates the story told in the stanzas of *Virgil.* However, every art expresses its message best in its own way. There is always something missing in the musical arrangement of a poem or the verbal description of a musical work.

The narrative aspect of a non-verbal language is explored by comparing it to verbal language. In light of this, what may we say about the language of music? Musical notes do not represent or symbolize anything, like the words of verbal language. For example, the musical note "C" on a scale does not represent the tone "C" as the word "tree" represents a tree. It merely indicates that when a certain piano key is pressed, tone "C" will be obtained. The note on the scale is not the symbol (in both meanings) of the tone. The language of music is a notational system. On the other hand, the tone to be obtained by a note is consensus-based, just as what a word symbolizes is in verbal language. This requirement of consensus may mislead one into thinking that musical notes are symbols.

The "language of music" has two interrelated meanings, the first of which is the notational system on paper as written signs. The second is the tonal sequence which arises with the performance of these signs. There is no signifier/signified relationship between these two sequences. There is the musical instrument in between. The notational system shows what to do on the instrument, but not the tones.A musical sentence made of tones, a melody, is not remembered afterwards. We need to clarify this further, since the opposite of this proposition enjoys widespread acceptance. Tone, or sound, is just a vibration of air. There is no sound if there is no air and vibration. To remember the tones, the sounds would have to occur in our minds as vibrations. Since

this is impossible, it is pathological to hear sounds. If the claim that musical geniuses hear sounds as they compose is indeed true, it should be said that they also suffer from this pathological condition. However, we can keep an image represented by a picture or something described verbally in our minds and we can later recall and simulate it. Recalling a melody is not simulation of the tones that constitute it in our minds. A melody is not recalled as a sound, but if the impression (this is not the sound) it leaves on us is deep, it may be reproduced.

A musical note is not the symbol of the tone, but does a musical sentence made up of tones symbolize or express anything? This issue is widely misunderstood. It is said that music reflects feelings. This is not true. Music arouses feelings, but it does not reflect them. Since feelings aroused by music appear during the performance, we are misled into thinking that musical melody reflects, expresses or describes them. When we look at or hear a reflection, we see or hear the reflected object in it and we deduce what an expression expresses from itself. A musical sentence does not reflect or express anything, nor does it contain anything to that effect. A musical sentence is not an emotional pattern from which we may extract emotion when we sense in the music. Nor does a sentence of ordinary language possess any feeling or idea, but expresses it owing to its symbolizing nature. Reflection in music is possible through imitation only; for example, thunder imitated by tones. This is nothing but an effect, entirely unlinked to the essence of music. Hence, reflection, in the narrower sense, is a non-essential part of music, and only what comes forth through effect in visual arts. Effect, meaning the simulation of sounds artificially, is used in radio, TV, drama and movie dubbing. Here we perceive what is reflected as simulation.

So, is it meaningless to talk about "joyful" or "melancholic" music? No it is not! However, the underlying logic is this: When one is cheerful, one makes certain body movements and sounds. These movements are intermittent and rhythmic, with short pauses. If one is whistling, the same is valid. Tones, on the other hand, through specific uses of rhythms, push one to this sort of behavior. Music made using this style is called "cheerful." In contrast, when one is melancholic, one's movements are slow. "Melancholic" music involves this type of tonal movements, and long slow-moving sounds. One simulates the same sort of behavior with such a music. In both cases, the movements—musical and human—match each other. In other words, psychological moods reflected through certain movements are matched by musical movements or movements made up of tones. This matching does not express feelings, but may lead to their arousal.

Another point that needs to be explained further is the term "musical sentence," which we may compare to the mathematical-logical sentence. Neither of these tells anything,[5] yet, calling them a "sentence" is more than a

metaphor. The mathematical sentence has a structure more robust than the sentence of the verbal language. For this reason, it is called a "sentence." In a musical sentence, as a notational system, tones are not arranged arbitrarily, but in a definite order. This is what justifies the term "musical sentence." We pointed out above that every systematical thing tells something, but now we say that the musical sentence, which is a system, does not do so. There is no contradiction here because, like the mathematical sentence, the musical sentence speaks itself only. Much as the mathematical sentence does not convey a message, the musical sentence does not convey a feeling.

Neither in music nor in natural language, may we speak of a reflection similar to drawing a picture. In this respect, we cannot label verbal forms of art reflective. In musical language there is no reflection other than the effect and there is no way of expression through symbolization. As mathematical language is for doing mathematics, musical language is for making or performing music. Musical art is a practical art, as musical language is a practical language. A partition on paper becomes music only when it is performed (played), and performance takes place in time. Music is an arrangement of tonal sounds in time. The saying that "music starts with two sounds" emphasizes the need for at least two sounds and their sequentiality. In this respect, we call musical language audio-temporal language. Our proposition that music does not represent anything other than itself is valid for both languages of music.

Painting and plastic arts are arts of space. The instrument of expression of this art is called visualspatial language. Sculpture, which is included in plastic arts, is no different from painting in terms of perception and expression. Although a picture is two-dimensional and a statue three-dimensional, we always see things in two dimensions and visualize them as such in our minds.A human face reflected in a portrait can be described by words. This way, the picture visualized in the mind may greatly resemble the portrait. As a result, there are two similar pictures of the same person, one on the canvas and one in the mind. There is no difficulty about the reflection on the painting with respect to our issue. The face of the model is reflected on the canvas in colors and lines, but the reflection in the mind is not created by putting words in place of colors and lines. The face is simulated in the mind by the symbolization of words, which, as we have said above, is understood because of the cultural consensus on which the language is based. However, there is no need for consensus to understand what the picture on the canvas represents. It substitutes for the object it represents, while a word's symbolization is dependent on linguistic-cultural agreement. Something that substitutes for another thing is in a way its symbol, but to differentiate it from the linguistic symbol we call it the "visual symbol." In the linguistic symbol there is no substitution, except for the pictogram, which in fact is a picture. When one looks at a picture one

perceives it, while words are visualized in the mind. That which is directly reflected in the picture is created in the mind through simulation by the observer himself using the symbol word. Perception is sufficient for the former, while for the latter, there is, in addition, the need for simulation and comprehension. For this reason, verbal arts are considered conceptual.

In the picture, there may also be visual symbols that depend on cultural consensus, alongside visual symbols that do not require such consensus, although this may be not be as explicit as in the usual language. To clarify further, a symbol-motif in the picture does not substitute the symbol-word of the language. We read the latter, but interpret the former. Nevertheless, one may talk about the "analysis" and "reading" of a picture as a phenomenon. But "analysis" and "reading" are, in the end, interpretations, and interpretation of a picture is done through disclosure of the cultural codes placed in it. However, decoding cultural codes is not something akin to an analysis of sugar, for example.

One may speak of the language of architecture in terms of expression of something, and metaphorically, we may even speak of reading architecture as a text made up of architectural lines. A line expresses something through the similarity of its motif to its object, and by creating a feeling of movement. These two uses of line may be implemented separately or together. Yet, expression through these lines and other architectural elements is indirect; it is visual, symbolical and allegorical.The Russian Orthodox Church is a good example of the expression of line as a motif. The resemblance of the church's dome to an onion is an indication of symbolism, a visual symbol not based on cultural consensus. Rather it is reflective and imitative. There is no need for cultural consensus to perceive it, since the onion is the same everywhere. Hence, architectural expression is included in visual language.

Let us give an example from Islamic architecture for the expression of line through a feeling of movement. Let us take the decorative motifs that consist of curved and/or geometric lines. The eye moves along these lines, thus creating a feeling of movement. Yet, the same eye cannot find the end of the path, and so infinity is also expressed. At the same time, interlocked lines means deadlock. Hence, through these motifs, deadlock and infinity are visually symbolized. But what kind of similarity exists between these abstract concepts and concrete motifs that renders such symbolization possible? There is no similarity between the two that is analogous to the visual formal similarity between dome and onion, but a visual conceptual similarity is constructed by interpretation. We see the interlocked lines and ascribe deadlock to it, and ascribe infinity to their having no end. This is an allegorical, metaphorical expression.Eero Saarinen's TWA terminal building at New York Kennedy Airport is an appropriate example of symbolic and allegorical expression by concurrent use of line as motif and feeling of movement. The building represents

symbolism in its resemblance to a bird newly landed or preparing to fly, and it also gives us the allegory of bird with the feeling of movement evoked by its structural lines.

Architecture also makes a similar metaphorical expression possible through its style and genre. For example, the declaration that the Doric style was the "representation of the new order" in Hitler'sNazi Germany[6]is exploitation of this potential. Here, expression is the impression the building leaves on us. The magnificence of palaces pertains to similar meaning. Power impresses the observers through the strength of the building. For this reason, architectural language resembles musical language, except that musical impression is auditory, while architectural impression is visual. Auditory impression is, without doubt, stronger than visual impression. In the former, the impression is left through sound touching us directly. In the latter, it is left through interpretation of the perception of the object (architectural work), and so is indirect. This indirect process weakens its influence. However, music directly influences us without the need for drawing a meaning out of sounds (tones).

Performance and moving arts usually utilize a combination of speech and movement. Through movement accompanied by speech, the described event is simulated before our eyes. In the performance of the play, action adds spirit to the speech, and the speech provides better understanding of the action. This reinforces the influence of the play on us. Action uses visual language, which is reflective. Hence, through their use of speech, we may say that these arts are, on the one hand, reflective and, on the other, verbal symbolic.Unity of action-speech is best established in drama. Drama is conceptual in its speech aspect, and visual-perceptual in its action aspect. The same is valid for cinema, which is one of the moving arts. In mime, ballet and dance, which are performing arts, the instrument of expression is movement. Therefore, the language is visual. In mime, action is used directly in an imitative way to express something, so it is reflective. There is always some sort of reflection in visual arts. In dance, and ballet in particular, aesthetic considerations precede imitation and description. Among these arts, modern dance is the one that prioritizes expression, with the body functioning as instrument of expression and as visual language. Visual language is used more in some of these arts and less in others. Since in moving image arts the images really move on the screen or on the reflection, there is no difference between these images and people acting on the stage with respect to our issue; visual language relies on real movement in both.

The form of expression of the caricature (a visual-conceptual art) depends on whether it is with or without caption. Let us deal with the cartoon without caption from our perspective. Line precedes both writing and the picture. This is true both historically and ontologically. Visual language formed by the line is universal, much like the language of a picture. If the theme is

limited to a certain social-cultural environment, then the readability of the lines and forms made up of lines depends on the culture. If the theme is universal, then the reading, and thus the language, is universal. This shows that language is reflective. The fact that a cartoon makes us think and laugh with its form and the feeling of movementthe lines give, is an indication of its conceptual aspect. Without doubt, in cartoons with a caption, conceptuality prevails. With the addition of words to the cartoon, the meaning of the represented object/event is described and stressed. If a picture leaves on us effects such as laughter, tears or thought, this indicates its resemblance to a cartoon in transition from perceptual to conceptual. When the descriptive and narrative side of a picture prevails then it loses something of its illustrative-artistic value; in a similar fashion if illustration and sufficiency of perception prevail in a cartoon, it loses something of its subtlety and may even become an example of banality and coarseness.

The comparison of arts and languages up to this point also renders possible a classification of art types and instruments of expression. This will be a classification of languages as well, from the opposite direction. Let us now show both directions in a single table:

Classification of Arts According to the Forms of Language	
Art	**Language**
Music *Properties:* *Aural / perceptual* *Temporal* *Arousing, generating*	I. Notational System *Properties:* *Guiding* *Consensus-based* II. Tonal Sequence
Literary Arts (poems, stories, novels, plays, etc.) *Properties:* *Cultural consensual* *Verbal symbolical* *Simulative/ conceptual* *Narrative, descriptive*	Verbal Language
Non-Verbal Arts (painting, sculpture, architecture etc.) *Properties: Reflective: visual / perceptual* *Conceptual: visual / symbolical and allegorical / interpretive*	Visual Language
Arts that Make Simultaneous Use of Verbal and Non-Verbal Expression *(performing and moving image arts, cartoons etc.)*	Verbal and Visual Language

Explanation for the Table:

Arts that do not show up in this table may be put in an appropriate place depending on their forms of expression.

Properties written under the art types are valid for their language as well. Still, there is a difference as there is for music. Properties of the musical art show the properties of the musical language as tonal sequence; but do not show the properties of the musical language as notational system.

Art types in the lower line of the table use the properties of both when they use verbal and visual language together, and properties of one if they use only one of them.

Notes:

[1]I am referring here to Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1984).

[2]See my article: "Sprache als Traeger der Kommunikation," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosopie*, 10 (1991), for my remarks on the classification of language. See also my article: "A Proposal for the Classification of Arts," *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 25, no.1-2 (2002), for my remarks on the classification of arts.

[3]See: Part Two: Synchronic Linguistics, §3, Absolute arbitrariness and relative arbitrariness in Ferdinand de Saussure's, *Course in General Linguistics* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1989).

[4] El Greco, *Laocoon*, oil on canvas, 1614, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

[5] The idea that mathematical and logical sentences do not tell anything comes from *Wittgenstein*. Here, the following sentences may be recalled from his *Tractaus* (London: Routledge&Kegan Paul Ltd, 1961): "Therefore the propositions of logic say nothing" (6.11), and "A proposition of mathematics does not express a thought"(6.21).

[6]Spiro Kostof , *A History of Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 718.

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Printed in the United States
141538LV00004B/54/P

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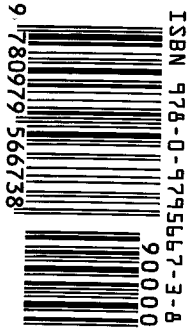
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