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ART CRITICISM

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Contemporary Jewish American Art: A Short Review

Matthew Baigell

I

Within the last thirty-odd years, an astonishing number of Jewish American artists have turned to subject matter based on the Holocaust, Jewish feminist concerns, spiritualism, and the fundamental texts of the religion, including the Bible, the Talmud, and the kabbalah. But most of their art, even the fact of its existence, has passed under the radar screens of mainstream critics and art historians. As a result, the development of new Jewish iconographical motifs and new ways to interpret well-known biblical stories remain basically unknown. The artists, of course, feel that the seriousness of their intentions has not been acknowledged, let alone appreciated, their differing approaches to their subject matter largely ignored, and their significant contributions to a modern Jewish art and culture little noticed—unlike, say, the attention given to Jewish novelists and Hollywood figures.

How to explain this neglect? Perhaps critics and art historians still seem to be guided (or gulled) by the insistent secularism that characterized much of twentieth century art. Perhaps those who are Jewish are embarrassed by their Jewish heritage and choose to ignore this art—with the exception of those who write for the Jewish press. In addition, I have listened to otherwise intelligent people who argue that there is no such thing as Jewish art—which is not the issue here—and who basically refuse to contemplate the fact that there is an art of Jewish content being produced today.[1] And even in studies written within the past half century about, say, Mark Rothko and Barnett Nedwman, it is virtually impossible to find material by either Jewish or non-Jewish critics and historians that deals directly with the importance of their Jewish backgrounds as well as the effects of the Holocaust on their work.[2] It is as if their religious and cultural heritage is of little consequence or, more insulting, of little value in assessing their work. Yet, scholars who study Chinese art are aware that they must know something about Buddhism and those who study European art from the early Christian period through the nineteenth century must be familiar with aspects of the Christian religion, its history and liturgy.

A similar dynamic seems to be present concerning those artists who have turned to Jewish subject matter in the past thirty-odd years. But the artists persist despite little support from art historians, critics, gallerists, and curators in major Jewish museums. Clearly, inner necessity rather than possible sales drives their artistic motors. In fact, compared to the production of recent generations of Jewish artists, it is safe to say that more works with Jewish subject matter have been produced since the 1970s than perhaps at any other time in the history of Jewish American art. The importance of this development lies in the very fact of its existence. The artists, too young to have participated in the experiences of the immigrant generation in the early twentieth century or to be targeted by the overt and sometimes virulent anti-Semitism of the middle years of that century, feel quite comfortable as acculturated Americans. They identify as Americans, but an astonishingly large number prefer not to disappear into or be absorbed by the American artistic mainstream. Rather, they have shown an overwhelming desire to explore present and past Jewish history as well as their Jewish cultural and religious inheritance. They do not belong to an all-encompassing movement and their work adheres to no particular style, chronological development, or sectarian preference within Judaism. In fact, they live all over the country, not just in the major urban areas, and they might or might not be religiously observant or attend synagogues. But it is safe to say that they explore a greater variety of subjects and from a greater diversity of points of view than any previous generation of Jewish American artists.[3]

Because of the open and relatively free contemporary American environment, it is commonplace today to say that Jews today are Jews by choice. Artists who create works based on Jewish themes are also such artists by choice. So we might ask: why chose to work with subject matter that might be considered parochial as well as ghettoizing and that is not as financially rewarding as creating mainstream art; why create works based on the Holocaust which are not always easy to look at or to live with; and why explore religious subject matter that defies the decades-long history of modern secular art and that is not necessarily in tune with the secular habits of potential viewers?

Several relevant factors can be suggested to account for the turn to an art of Jewish content. First, Israel's successes in the Six Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1974 gave Jewish Americans a new sense of pride in their religion and culture. Most important for our purposes, it provided artists with the psychological incentive finally to confront the Holocaust in their art which had been largely avoided through the late 1940s and 1950s.[4] Second, the near Israeli defeat in the war of 1974 revealed to many, perhaps for the first time, their profound connection to their own sense of Judaism and to the state of Israel. Third, the civil rights movements of the 1960s, although initially associated mainly with African Americans and gay/lesbians, inspired Jews to assert

themselves, to come out, as it were, as Jews within mainstream culture. Fourth, beginning in the 1970s, the feminist movement encouraged women artists to explore their Jewish heritage and to question traditional patriarchic versions of biblical history.[5] A fifth related factor revolves around the complete freedom of Jewish American artists to create whatever they wish. Without central rabbinic or religious authorities who might inhibit open-ended explorations and examinations of biblical materials and without guiding traditions of any type, but rather with the example of the various liberation movements that encouraged re-evaluation of traditional modes of thinking, artists began to re-study and re-evaluate the ancient sacred texts. A sixth important factor might very well be negative responses to the strong assimilative tendencies after World War II and to the often demeaning and unpleasant ways deracinated Jews were portrayed in American popular culture by figures such as Philip Roth and Woody Allen.[6] And seventh, the rise of the multi-faceted Jewish Renewal Movement in the 1980s, with its concerns for spiritual regeneration and renewed Jewish identity, was of major consequence

In conversations and correspondence with several artists over the last two decades, several have indicated their concerns about the attrition if not outright loss of their culture through assimilation and inter-marriage. As a result, they have become part of a broad movement to build a recognizably modern Jewish American culture distinct but not entirely separate from the majority culture and in no way beholden to the now second- and third-hand memories of their eastern European ancestors. Interest in klezmer music, trips to destroyed European ghettos by American children and grandchildren of the immigrants, the development of JCCs, (Jewish Community Centers), the proliferation of Jewish Studies programs in colleges and universities, and the growing numbers of those who study the Yiddish language are instances of the desire to establish a modern Jewish culture commensurate with their decentralized Jewish American experiences.

Narrowing the focus to individual artists within this larger framework, there is no simple or single explanation or overarching theory to explain the turn to Jewish subject matter. In fact, explanations are all too vague, even if deeply heartfelt. Today, artists who create such works often do so quite independently of each other. In fact, several have told me that they do not know of each other's existence—which suggests that such interests have arisen spontaneously and simultaneously all over the country. Conversations and correspondence over the past twenty years with about one hundred artists concerning motivations only emphasize the fact that each one has his or her reasons for working with Jewish subject matter. First, some artists explore Jewish themes occasionally, others constantly. Second, artists cannot always explain why they turn to Jewish themes. Reasons often elude them, and, for some, subjects emerge randomly in their imaginations. They say that it just

seems to happen. Third, the importance of a Jewish environment created by parents and grandparents was in some instances crucial. Fourth, contrarily, those raised in completely secular households have also turned to religion and Jewish subject matter. And, fifth, those who work primarily with Holocaust themes often say that they want to memorialize those murdered whether thee are family connections or not, and they want to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive in the hope that such an event might never happen again, and as a gesture of, in the Hebrew phrase, *tikkun olam*, or repair of the world—which will be discussed blow.

Because contemporary Jewish American artists approach their chosen subjects from so many different points of view, the only shared common denominators are the desire to communicate personal feelings, to express spiritual and religious concerns, and to project a sense of personal authenticity. All have repudiated the kinds of irony and rejection of values associated with late-twentieth century post-modernism. Instead, they might be considered post, post-modern in that they find through their explorations of Jewish secular and religious themes ways to express what is meaningful and relevant in their lives and to communicate those qualities to their viewers. Most important from the perspective of the history of Jewish art in America, the artists are forging their own versions of Jewish culture in America based on their own contemporary experiences. They have not, for the most part, built their art on the experiences and styles of earlier figures.

I want to refine that thought somewhat. By insisting on exploring their religious and cultural heritage, the artists reject the kind of universalism that had been a goal of many Jewish artists since the Emancipation in Europe in the nineteenth century. They no longer feel it is necessary to abandon or hide their Jewish identity in order to fit into the mainstream culture in which they live; now, they identify both mainstream and minority at the same time. More to the point, they study, interpret, and exult in their heritage and want to see it perpetuated. Their aim is Jewish cohesiveness and continuity rather than, as in the past, Jewish rupture. Ellen Holtzblatt, a Chicago-based artist who has created narrative cycles, most notably one based on the Noachian Flood, expressed a commonly held thought in an email message of April 21, 2007. She wrote that gaining acceptance in the art world by avoiding Jewish content is no longer an issue for her. At this time in her life, she wrote, "Jewish text is intimately relevant, and that is all that matters. Art making cannot be compartmentalized from my intrinsic nature."

But exploration of Jewish subject matter does not mean reverting to a parochial point of view or ignoring current art and social movements. Their works vary in style from the abstract to the figurative. Some, like Archie Rand (b. 1949), work in both modes. He and others are very clear about incorporating mainstream styles into their work, or, rather, infusing their mainstream styles

with Jewish themes. Approaches to subject matter also vary considerably. Some artists stress moral values. Others find in biblical figures reflections of their own existential searches for a meaningful existence. Some might start with a contemporary event and imbue what might have been a journalistic account with additional meanings. Others might create a narrative cycle that includes several inter-related paintings or they might make single stand-alone works. In a phrase, the situation is happily anarchic.

When taken altogether, the activities and interests of these artists mark a new chapter in the history of Jewish American art. Although, as just mentioned, interest in creating an art with Jewish content seems to have arisen spontaneously all over the country, at least two Jewish artist-run organizations have been recently formed in order to bring artists together to discuss issues related to their Jewish and American identities, to exchange ideas about styles and content, and to figure out ways to call the public's attention to their efforts as well as to encourage exhibitions of their works. The two organizations are the Jewish Artists' Initiative founded in Los Angeles in 2004 and the Jewish Art Salon founded in New York in 2007.

Of course, several artists of the immigrant generations, those born before and after 1900 such as Max Weber (1881-1961) and Ben Shahn (1898-1968) produced art with Jewish content—secular scenes of the Jewish street and religious scenes based on the Bible.[7] But figures like Shahn and, say, Philip Guston (1913-1980) who matured during the inter-war decades and who were allied with movements such as Social Realism and Abstract Expressionism also ignored or tried to ignore their ethnic and religious heritage in part because of open American anti-Semitism and the violence against Jews in Europe. They wanted to become part of the American and international art mainstream. For them, a broad-based universalism trumped parochial or ethnic concerns. One has only to read the remarks of some artists such as Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974), William Gropper (1897-1977), Jack Levine (b. 1915), and Seymour Lipton (1903-1986) to understand the depths of their feelings, their fears at being called "a Jewish artist," and the distance they wanted to travel from their family roots.[8]

Those who came of age after World War II, such as Leon Golub (1922-2004), knew they were Jewish but, for the most part, eschewed Jewish subject matter. Born in America, they were secular in outlook and viewed themselves as assimilated figures in the mainstream art world.[9]

But those artists born during and after the 1930s, not interested in the kinds of political art that characterized the 1930s or overwhelmed by the various art movements of the last decades of the twentieth century, even if they employ some of the techniques of these movements, wanted to reconnect with their Jewish heritage. Their three main subject areas, admittedly somewhat arbitrarily derived for this essay, include honoring those murdered in the Holo-

caust, investigating feminist concerns, and, leap-frogging back over the centuries, past the experiences of their recent and more distant elders, finding inspiration and subject matter in the ancient texts. Some concentrate their attention on one of these subject areas. Others, such as Ruth Weisberg (b. 1942), have created works in all three areas.

II

Of these broad categories, works based on the Holocaust, by their very nature, are the most secular in subject matter. They range from the horrific to the hallucinatory and include scenes of torture and cremation at one extreme to literally veiled memory portraits of the anonymous dead and on to landscape scenes that invoke the presence of the labor and death camps at the other. But taken as a whole, representations of victimhood predominate, forcing artists to negotiate constantly the terrain between creating images perhaps too upsetting to contemplate or too sweetened and possibly too dishonest to suggest adequately the horrors of the Holocaust.[10] Jerome Witkin (b. 1939) put his finger on the matter very succinctly. When asked why he creates Holocaust scenes (and he has created some of the most violent and horrific, with titles such as *The Butcher's Helper, Buchenwald 1941-1945*, [1991-1992]), he said, "I have to admit that I don't really know. It's a matter of faith. More and more, I'm doing pictures no one is going to buy."[11]

Actually, he does know, and his reasons for creating scenes of torture and butchery are so profound that they trump his concern for sales. He has said that creating such works is "my purpose in life. I'm saying 'fuck you' to Nazism and all that is eternally stupid and ignorant and violent in all governments and in ourselves."[12] Marty Kalb (b. 1941) who has relied on documentary photographs of the camps among other sources offers his "work as a protest against the insane acts of the past as well as a warning against the insane acts of the future." There is a great need, he feels, to support and maintain the social fabric of society.[13] Several other artists have expressed similar thoughts and concerns that indicate an ulterior motive. They do not want merely to illustrate round-ups, trains filled with prisoners, and murderous camp scenes. Through their Holocaust images, they want their art to project a sense of empathy for the victims as well as an earnest desire to help create a better and more just society. As several have indicated to me, they bring to their art a sense of social obligation and responsibility learned at home or in their synagogues—in any event, based on their Jewish heritage. A surprising number have also directly invoked the kabbalistic notion of *tikkun olam*, the spiritual/religious version of secular obligation. It is possible, therefore, to subsume any number of Holocaust works under the rubric of *tikkun olam*.

For many years, the Hebrew phrase has become a catch-all term used

by Jews and non-Jews to describe activities that contribute to the betterment of humankind. It connotes the desire to repair the world by performing good deeds, supporting charities, and, for observant Jews, engaging in religious activities and practices. *Tikken olam* is best understood today as part of the cosmology of the sixteenth-century figure, Rabbi Isaac Luria, who, after being exiled from Spain in 1492, settled in Safad, now part of Israel. Very briefly, he held that at the creation of the world, light from the divine vessels broke which allowed evil to enter our world. In order to complete the Creation—at which time the messiah would appear—the shards of light had to be returned to the vessels. How could this be done? By Rabbi Luria's truly brilliant and guilt provoking notion of making people (Jews) responsible for completing the creation of the world by performing *tikkun olam*, which included religious worship as well as acts of human kindness and social benevolence. Therefore, if all individuals performed their religious rituals, aided the helpless and those less fortunate—notions reiterated in the 613 commandments Jews are supposed to honor in their lifetimes and in the words of prophets such as Isaiah—then the Creation would be completed and the messiah would arrive.

The concept of responsibility to others, then, has been an integral part of Jewish culture for millennia whether in a strictly religious or broadly secular sense. And although none of the artists actually believe that their art will bring about the coming of the messiah, they undoubtedly absorbed some notion of *tikkun olam* in their childhood as handed down by their parents and religious figures. As adults and as artists, then, they are motivated by the same feelings that prompted the popular twentieth-century theologian, Abraham Joshua Heschel, to say, "Who is a Jew? A person whose integrity decays when unmoved by the knowledge of wrong done to other people," and "[Judaism] leads us to regard injustice as a metaphysical calamity."[14]

An interesting sub-group of Holocaust artists are those who invoke directly the concept of *tikkun olam* in their art. For example, Edith Altman (b. 1930) experienced brutality in her native Germany before immigrating to America in 1939. A student of Kabbalah, she has said that she wants her art to be "a vehicle for contemplation about humanity and its relation to God. Everybody has a function. I see mine as healing. The idea of *tikkun*—which means repair—is part of Kabbalistic thinking."[15] In developing a visual language that allowed her to begin to deal with the Holocaust, Altman devised a performance piece entitled *When We Are Born, We Are Given a Golden Tent, and All of Life Is the Folding and Unfolding of the Tent* (1986). It includes an actual tent in which she sits with people (in America, Europe, wherever) who need to speak about and share past sorrows. She has said, "As I fold and unfold my tent, I hear my great-grandfather telling me father who then told me that the work of the Kabbalist is to repair himself or herself and to work toward the repair of the world—to bring it back into balance."[16]

Pearl Hirshfield created a series of walk-through installations in the 1980s that tried to give the viewer some sense of the experience of being in a concentration camp. Passages were narrow, lights were dim, noises were loud, and concentration camp numbers painted on mirrors reflected onto viewers bodies. One installation is entitled *Shadows of Auschwitz*. In a personal letter written in 1992, she said that she was outraged by human brutality. "Judaic tradition has always emphasized the roll of the Jew as being of help to those in need regardless of who they are. In the present climate, we seem to be losing part of our heritage. My art carries on the tradition of Jewish conscience."

Ruth Weisberg best summed up the meaning of *tikkun olam* to those who have worked with Holocaust materials in a personal letter concerning her feelings apropos her book of etchings, *The Shtetl: A Journey and a Memorial* (1971), composed of images of a community just before the round-ups and the inevitable murders of its inhabitants: "It really seems self-evident that an artist engaged with Judaism would also be involved with *tikkun olam*, or repair of the world. It is the goal of Jewish study to integrate the intellectual, the emotional, and the ethical with the spiritual. *Tikkun olam* is also a spiritual quest and a redemptive act. In relation to the Holocaust, the acts of remembering, of depicting, or embodying, or evoking—all are redemptive."

And, finally, in 2009, Yona Verwer created a series of amulets entitled *Temple Talismans: Protection Amulets for Synagogues* in memory of the destruction of the twin towers at the World Trade Center. One of them includes the Statue of Liberty as seen through a smoky haze and a hamsa which represents God's protective hand. She has said, "in my artworks, I hope to invoke protection from acts of destruction of buildings, bridges, and the Statue of Liberty [which is] a protective beacon honoring immigrants in search of freedom of religion. My aim is to achieve a sense of healing and wholeness after a tragedy fractured our world."

Invoking *tikkun olam* is not limited only to artists who explore images of murder or destruction. For example, Tobi Kahn (b. 1952), an abstract painter and a maker of objects used for various religious rituals, who eschews violence of any sort in his work, has told me that he wants his art to bring about a better world. "In the rabbinic tradition, we are mandated to continue God's work, partners in renewing the world." Kahn and all the other artists know, of course, that their art will not change the world, but they feel that creating works motivated by a sense of *tikkun olam* provides them with a sense of purpose they might not otherwise find in today's insistently market-driven, profit-making artistic climate.

Feminist artists have also invoked *tikkun olam* but their concerns are channeled more into celebrating women of the Bible and challenging patriarchy wherever they find it.[17] Compared to artists who explore Holocaust themes, feminist artists are much more transgressive in their imagery. Over the last

three decades, they have offered new interpretations of traditional themes and have invented new iconographical motifs by, say, placing women in positions (i.e., as officiating rabbis) once occupied only by men.[18] They are serious students of the ancient sacred texts and fearless in presenting images they consider important and relevant to their own lives and the lives of other women. Without reviewing here the histories Jewish feminist art within the history of feminist art—these are different—it can be said that the artists' overall contribution to the development of Jewish art in America is both generous in the range of their subject matter and progressive in that their interpretations ignore traditional readings of the ancient texts. As much if not more than male artists, they, as a group, are responsible for the very popular current interest in Bible-based imagery among Jewish American artists.

Their motivations are based as much on their interest in women-as-women as on their desire to learn as much as possible about Judaism. In correspondence over the years, many have indicated to me the reciprocal relationship between their interest in both feminism and their Jewish heritage. The concern for a strong, gendered self-identity provoked an interest in a more vital religious identity, and the social and political values inherited from their Jewish cultural backgrounds played a key role in their interest in equality for women. For them, feminism and Judaism go hand in hand.

As might be expected, they do not accept the manner in which women were treated in the Bible or the way they are considered today by religious traditionalists. Undoubtedly, they would completely reject the spirited but no longer tenable account offered by the great Talmudic scholar, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.[19] According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, marriage creates an existential community—not just a partnership between husband and wife—which allows the covenantal relationship with God to be passed on from parents to children down through the generations. Both parents are intimately involved with educating their children, but, as Soloveitchik repeatedly pointed out, women are more concerned with motherhood than fathers with fatherhood. "The woman is bound up," he wrote, "with the child and she experiences her motherhood role in all her thought and feeling." Her "self-sacrifice and superhuman devotion [is the role] in which a woman finds self-fulfillment."[20]

On his behalf, Soloveitchik did acknowledge that the destiny of humankind and the perpetuation of the covenantal community were shaped by the activities of the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel. And he did consider, if all to briefly, the non-motherly, non-domestic activities of figures such as Miriam and Deborah, but he never allowed the reader to forget that for him biology is destiny. Not so the artists. They have instead portrayed biblical women both bound to and triumphant over their position in society.

On occasion, a particular woman is presented in a manner at odds with traditional interpretations. For example, Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab is

one of the most hated persons in the Bible because she dominated her husband and promoted idol worship (First Kings 21; Second Kings 9). When she was murdered, her body was thrown out of a window and except for her skull, hands and feet, was devoured by dogs. The famous Talmudic scholar, Adin Steinsaltz, called her "perhaps the most perfect representation of the force of evil in the whole of Scripture."[21] But Carol Hamoy, a pioneer Jewish feminist artist, found a legend about Jezebel that redeemed her despite the millennia of condemnations. The legend states that Jezebel, not an unsympathetic person, often joined mourners at funerals and entertained wedding couples by dancing at their weddings, to this day still praiseworthy activities in the Orthodox community.[22] So Hamoy created an assemblage-portrait in 1993, titled *Queen Jezebel*, composed of dancing slippers studded with rhinestones.

Obviously, not all feminist portraits are about thumbing one's nose at or mocking tradition. Pat Berger (b. 1929) has painted images of several biblical women. Her portraits of Tamar (Second Samuel 13) and Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11), both painted in 1991, point up differences between the ways male and female artists might present such scenes. Berger shows Tamar after she is raped by her half-brother, Amnon, sitting disconsolate in a lush green field having already rent her clothing and covering herself with ashes. It is a very sympathetic portrayal of a woman who has been brutalized. Now, imagine how a male artist might show such a scene. For example, French artist, Eustache Le Seur (1617-1655), depicted Amnon attacking Tamar in his *The Rape of Tamar* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). The subject is male action rather than female response, and no sympathy is shown to the victim. In addition, I doubt that a feminist artist would show Tamar's brother, Absalom, killing Amnon in revenge, which is exactly what the Italian artist, Guercino (1591-1666) did, in his *The Assassination of Amnon at the Feast of Absalom*.[23]

Jephthah's daughter, unnamed in the Bible, was murdered by her father because he had vowed to God that if he returned victorious in battle he would sacrifice whoever emerged first from his house. It was his daughter. Feminist biblical scholars have pointed out that the disastrous ending of the story marks just another example of a daughter who suffers for the sins of her father.[24] Traditional views of the episode, such as *The Return of Jephthah* by Giovanni Antonio Pellegrino (1675-1741, concentrate on Jephthah's distress, not on the consequences awaiting his daughter when she greets him at the front door.[25]

Berger finds a different part of the story to represent. In Judges 11:31, the daughter, learning that she is to be sacrificed, asks her father for permission to go into the hills for two months with her companions to bewail her fate. He consents; she goes. In one of the legends that has accrued around the biblical account, Sheilah—she is so named in legend—cries out, "Hearken, ye mountains, to my lamentations, and ye hills, to the tears in my eyes, and ye rocks,

testify to my weeping. My words will go up to heaven, and my tears will be written in the firmament." [26] That is the image that Berger captures—the daughter alone in the woods, her arms lifted up as she bewails her fate. *Her* grief, like that of Tamar, is the subject of the painting, not her father's distress. Perhaps, as this legend might imply, she is invoking the sympathies of woodland spirits. If so, then one can also read her sacrifice—in contrast to God halting the sacrifice of Isaac, a male, at the last moment—as a symbolic victory for the patriarchal, monolithic God of the biblical Israelites in His enduring struggles with those who still worshipped various goddesses and idols.[27]

Siona Benjamin, a woman of color, a feminist, and a student of Judaism, is a native of Mumbai. Because of her background, she often finds her subject matter among those biblical women who are on the margins such as Lilith, Adam's first wife in the legends, or Joseph's Egyptian wife, Asenath. In one such work, *Finding Home #61: Beloved (Fereshteh)* (2004), Benjaim portrays Sarah and Hagar embracing each other despite the relevant passages to the contrary in Genesis 16 and 21. Siona Benjamin hopes that the enmity between the women, obvious surrogates for Israelis and Palestinians, will end soon, but the male figures Benjamin has added to the right and left margins of the painting suggest that she knows otherwise. Those on the right, intending mayhem, extend a friendly hand but have bombs attached to their bodies. Those on the left, well-intentioned amputee soldiers, will probably be unable to stop the expected carnage.

Basically, her position is to seek tolerance in diversity, which gives her art purpose and meaning, in this instance in her exploration of biblical texts. Finding the past alive in the present, she is among those feminist artists who find biblical episodes applicable to or parallel with current events. She has said, "I explore the women of the Bible and bring them forward to combat the wars and violence of today in a *midrash* [commentary] of intricate paintings... I attempt to create a dialogue between the ancient and the modern, forcing a confrontation of unresolved issues." For her, the concept of *tikkun olam* lies at the heart of her work. "To repair the world through images is what I seek to do."

Of the many works by other feminist artists that could be mentioned, there are three that stand out because of their subject matter and the ambition of their authors. I do not doubt that these three works ultimately will be considered among the major landmarks not just of Jewish American feminist art but of Jewish American art as a whole—the first is a performance-cum-assemblage piece, the second a ninety-four foot long painting, and the third an assemblage.

Israel Revisited (1981), is by Beth Ames Swartz. It is a series of ten related performance pieces created in honor of women in the Bible. It is, to my knowledge, among the first, if not the first, contemporary, large-scale feminist

work with Jewish subject matter derived from the Bible, and, as such, is among the most historically significant Jewish American feminist art works of the 1980s.

Briefly, Swartz, familiar with developments in feminist art, ritual, and performance, chose ten sites in Israel in 1980, the same number as the ten *spherot*, or emanations or aspects of God, as described in the *Zohar*, a major kabbalistic text written in Spain in the late thirteenth century. At each of the ten selected sites, Swartz, dressed in a white outfit, created her own rituals to honor the Shekhinah (the feminine aspect of God), the Queen of Sheba, Rebecca, Rachel, Deborah, Miriam, Beruriah, Huldah, Dona Gracia (a sixteenth-century Portuguese woman), and the unknown woman. Swartz placed long sheets of paper on the ground, cut and punctured them, rubbed each with glue, poured acrylic gel on them, set them on fire, and covered them with soil. After returning to her home with the remnants, she rearranged each one, colored and then "froze" them.[28]

Swartz associated each woman with a specific spherotic emanation of the Deity. For example, Deborah, the prophet, was paired with *gevurah* or power and judgment. Rebecca was paired with *binah*, or understanding, because of her self-determination and self-knowledge. Miriam was paired with *hod*, or intelligence, because of her willingness to speak her mind concerning the marriage of Zipporah, a Cushite, to her brother, Moses, as well as his role as a prophet (Numbers 12). And Huldah, paired with *malkuth*, the emanation of God closest to our own world, is also associated with Jerusalem because she predicted the destruction of that city after the death of King Josiah (Second Kings 22:17-20). Colors associated with the different *spherot* dominate each work: red for Deborah, indigo for Rebecca (*binah*), orange for Miriam (*hod*), and russet for Huldah (*malkuth*). Given the vagaries of Swartz's process of firing and reconstruction, a semblance of a Hebrew letter might appear in the interstices of a piece but no specific message was intended. Rather, each piece exists as a commemoration of the specific ritual.

(As a side-bar, we need to place *Israel Revisited* in a different context. Although the presence of kabbalistic thought and imagery in Jewish American art has yet to be fully explored, it is known that figures such as Hyman Bloom, Ben Shahn, Barnett Newman, and Abraham Rattner incorporated kabbalistic elements into their work—Bloom about 1940, Newman in 1948, Shahn and Rattner in the 1950s. West coast artists Wallace Berman began to experiment with kabbalistic imagery in 1957 and Sam Erenberg did so by the late 1970s. Swartz began to read about kabbalah by the mid-1970s. In her generation, then, both she and Erenberg can be considered pioneers. Over the subsequent decades, Swartz has explored Native American and east Asian spiritual systems, but she inevitably returns to her own religious roots. Other artists in search of both spiritual and religious enlightenment would probably agree

with her when she said, "I've always thirsted to connect with G-d, and I think, through my work, I'm trying to—I'm still seeking"[29]. (For religious reasons, many Jews omit the letter "o" when writing God's name.)

Ruth Weisberg's *The Scroll* (1987, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles) remains one of the most audacious works in all of Jewish American art.[30] A ninety-four foot mural, it is not a survey of "Great Men in Jewish History" or "Highlights in Jewish History", but a contemporary exploration of the ways Jewish history can be made relevant to contemporary Jewish life and thought. It is about Weisberg's Jewish memory—selective, personal, non-traditional—in which she has combined biblical stories and legends along with life-cycle as well as contemporary events into a continuous narrative of the Jewish people interspersed with events in her own life. It is a work unthinkable in the past, and the explicitly feminist sections unimaginable before, say, 1970. As she has said of this and other works, "I'm making visual things that have been written about a lot, but no one has ever drawn."[31]

Presented in a free-standing circle rather than attached to a flat wall, as if *The Scroll* were an open Torah scroll surrounding the viewer, the scenes include the exodus from Egypt, a circumcision ceremony, a young girl's *bat mitzvah* presided over by a woman rabbi, a series of wedding scenes including one in which the bride and groom ascend a staircase to the Temple in Jerusalem placed in front of an upside down tree that represents the kabbalistic mystical tree of life, two sets of children dancing, one suggesting their impending death in the Holocaust and the other their joy in beginning a new life in Israel, contemporary celebrations in a synagogue that suggest the replacement of eastern European immigrant customs by new American ones, an Israeli landscape scene, and concentration camp uniforms.

In a letter written to me written in October 2003, Weisberg indicated that in creating works such as *The Scroll* she was not merely trolling the Bible and Jewish history as well as her own personal memories for subject matter, but rather that the research for and the creation of *The Scroll* contributed to her own intellectual, spiritual, and moral well- being. In a personal note, she has said,

> Jewish observance and ritual provide... sustenance and at their best have many rewards: providing a moral compass, a true sense of community, and an opportunity for some collective repair of the world. I have also found that the study of Torah can integrate all aspects of ourselves, be they moral, intellectual, or spiritual. I love Judaism's embrace of all my capacities. I do not have to disengage my mind. As in art, it provides moments in which all you know is in tune. Intuition and knowledge provide new insights and a renewed integration of body, soul, and experience.

It is an important statement with which other artists would undoubtedly concur because it counters what many people think Judaism represents—a series of jokes about mothers or mother's-in-law, Seinfeld comedy routines, Sunday bagels-and-lox brunches, and visits to the parents and grandparents in Florida. Helene Aylon (b. 1931), probably the most confrontational and fearless artist who finds subject matter in the ancient texts, is less concerned with spiritual uplift or recording events in Jewish history than with challenging patriarchic and misogynist passages in the Hebrew Bible. In this regard, she has attacked the very foundational text of Judaism through a series of works dating from 1990. Where others have found comfort and solace in the Bible, she finds insults. Where others have interpreted and commented upon the events in the lives of women in the Bible, Aylon wants to know who hijacked the Bible from God and added all those terrible passages about women or who simply ignored their presence in history.[32]

Her most famous work is *The Liberation of G-d* (1990-1996), a large, mixed media installation composed of fifty-four books comprising the fifty-four chapters of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) and five stands on which each of the five books is placed. In each of the books, she has underlined with a pink marker on the transparent parchment that covers each page the "empty spaces" where a woman's name or presence has been omitted and where words of vengeance, deception, cruelty, and misogyny appear. Although she knows that the Bible cannot be re-written, her project in this and subsequent similar works is to question why the male perspective has been accepted—at least until the 1960s—as the normative perspective in all aspects of the religion. It is important to point out here that Aylon is not ridiculing the religion or targeting stereotypical representations of people or institutions within contemporary Jewish culture, but rather displaying an appropriate anger similar to that of many others, ranging from novelist Cynthia Ozick to religious historian Judith Plaskow who have sought to create a contributive roll for women within Jewish religious practices and contemporary Jewish culture.

There are also several artists who create narrative cycles based on the stories of figures such as Jonah and Esther, or on particular stories such as the various interactions between Jacob and Esau and Leah and Rachel, or even on passages in *The Zohar*. They do not illustrate the texts in a traditional narrative manner but rather reveal their own feelings and points of view through the texts. For these artists, as for the feminist artists, the Bible and other ancient texts are not considered sacrosanct or infallible but are instead palimpsests upon which to build interpretations and reveal personal concerns and private musings. Styles range from neo-Renaissance to contemporary and include cartoon-like, comix, and graphic novel formats. What gives these works particular significance is the fact that collectively they are a relatively new

development within Jewish American art, appearing, as far as I know, not before the 1980s and which has escaped notice by critics and art historians.

Again, only a few examples. Ruth Weisberg completed a fourteen-panel narrative, titled *Sisters and Brothers* in 1994, concerned with the psychological and physical interactions between Jacob, Esau, and their father, Isaac, as well as between Leah and her sister Rachel. Weisberg's images emphasize the duplicity and moral failures of individuals within families in ways that viewers today might find relevant to their own lives and experiences. In this series, Weisberg suggests that the Bible is not just about dead people who lived in ancient times, but a book with stories that have contemporary applications worth considering and might even be about people who have similar stories to tell whom we actually know. In other words, the Bible can still be considered a living document.

Sisters and Brothers is clearly meant for the general rather than a specifically Jewish public. But narrative cycles by other artists take on more specifically Jewish as well as personal meanings. I will cite two here. First, Ellen Holtzblatt's *Hamibul (The Deluge)* (2005) interprets in seven woodcuts the story of the Noachian Flood as both a ritual of the rebirth of the world and as her own private ritual of cleansing and symbolic rebirth. Second, Richard McBee has made a number of narrative cycles, but the one to which he is most attracted is the binding of Isaac. Over the last twenty-odd years, he has made over seventy paintings of the story from the points of view of the principle figures, Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah, based on the biblical text, on various legends and psychological interpretations as well as his own observations and explanations. The questions that recur in his mind are these: how could God make such a request of the father of the first Jewish family in the Bible, and why did Abraham acquiesce without argument? McBee says that he was initially confused by story. Years later, he says he is still confused but at a deeper level than before.[33]

The most ambitious and adventurous among the artists discussed here is Archie Rand (b. 1949). Among his over 1,000 works based on the Bible, the Talmud, writings of Jewish sages, and the Kabbalah, there includes his murals for B'Nai Yosef Synagogue in Brooklyn (1974-1978), totaling 13,000 square feet, probably the first synagogue covered with thematic murals since the synagogue at Dura Europos (244-256 CE), *Fifty Four Chapter Paintings* (1989), one each for the fifty four sections of the Torah that are read weekly with some double-ups for the remaining two sections, *Sixty Paintings from the Bible* (1992) in cartoon format, *The Nineteen Diaspora Paintings* (2002) in comix format, and *The 613* (2008), six hundred thirteen paintings based on the number of commandments a Jew is supposed to perform in his/her lifetime.[34]

In a series of statements made over a period of time, he speaks to the seriousness of purpose of all of the artists considered here. "I am by no stretch

of the imagination an observant person, but I demand the right to proclaim my Jewishness... I just came in and invaded it," an open, public assertion impossible to imagine before the 1960s.[35] "The world is a lonely place. As Jews we need to feel that God is sharing some special teachings or even some conversation with us so that we are reassured that God cares. Those conversations for which we yearn convey God's respect for our secret avenues. God dotes lovingly on our imagination knowing that, in faith, it expands glory and further demarcates holiness."[36] In a yet more personal vein and as a statement of his most profound feelings, he has admitted that he "had the feeling that it [creating Jewish-themed works] had not come from me, but through me—that I had been the instrument of God. I think every good artist who ever lived gets that feeling when he does the work he really has to do."[37]

In his art, Rand freely invents in both abstract and figurative modes. Images might be reasonably close to the source text or light years away depending on his imaginative fancy of the moment. When individual panels of his various series are exhibited close together, they form, as he has said, coherent visual but not necessarily coherent iconographical patterns. As much as he wants his images to understood, he also wants to engage his viewers' imaginations, to make the viewing of an art object an interactive experience. But Rand also wants to bring his art to deracinated Jews and, like Weisberg, to suggest that the Bible can be read as a book about recognizably human rather than mythic individuals. To that end, some panels in his various series, especially in *Sixty Painting from the Bible*, are intended to be funny. For example, one which shows Adam and Eve naked includes the large cartoon blurb, WE'RE NAKED. Or he can also be serious and contemporary by showing the first murder in the Bible, Cain killing Able, in a panel from *The Nineteen Diaspora Paintings*, as taking place on a grungy, urban street, the body of Abel surrounded by emergency ambulance attendants, a photographer, and policemen, one of whom is already consoling Abel's wife. Whatever else is implied by this episode, Rand turns it into a human drama with which the modern viewer can easily identify.

Paralleling efforts by Rand to reach out to the public through his art, at least two artists have turned to the graphic novel format as a way to reignite interest in biblical stories. Both JT Waldman and David Wander have created images interspersed with text based on the Book (or Scroll) of Esther, the former in 2005 and the latter in 2007.[38] Wander is currently preparing graphic-novel versions of the other scrolls—The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes. Both embellish the basic stories with references to other biblical episodes and interpretations garnered from the legends.

For all of the artists considered here, the interest in an art of Jewish content does not necessarily revolve around belief/non-belief but rather around commitment to, as chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Arnold

Eisen, has suggested, a "live relation with aspects of our inheritance that speak with 'inner power'"[39] I mentioned earlier that, by and large, the artists' knowledge of the experiences of the immigrant generations are probably known from family stories told by older relatives that involve shared experiences, common cultural and religious practices, and a sense of communal bonds now quite tattered in the early twenty-first century. Consequently, their interest in Jewish themes might very well indicate a desire to recreate, obviously at some remove, the kind of life style, that sense of togetherness and concern for the Jewish community, which characterized life in the European *shtetl* and the early days of immigrant life in America. All of the artists with whom I have communicated in the last twenty years have described the desire to belong to a Jewish community however loosely defined, their sense of an internalized Jewish identity which they feel but cannot easily describe, their connection to Jewish history, and, for some, their discovery of newly found spiritual needs that can be fulfilled only within a Jewish context.

Religious concerns are also part of that desire. Many have joined *havuras* (independent study groups that might also hold religious services) or they have turned to the Bible and the ancient texts not always because they have religious and spiritual yearnings, although many do, but as a way to access core Jewish culture and history. Many study ancient texts not as the Orthodox might—to figure out God's intentions—but as a way to learn about traditions, ancestor figures, the history of Jewish communities, methods of worship, and, not least, how to apply the Bible to their present lives. Choices are entirely individual and seem to be a matter of personal negotiation. They shun superficial modes of identification such as wearing red strings around their wrists—which does not make the wearer a kabbalist—but rather through their readings and personal meditations find their own particular path to emotional and spiritual wholeness that they express through their art. Probably, all would agree with the following general and open-ended observation: "One is Jewish if one identifies with Jewish history as one's own. This involves positioning oneself in relation to Jewish history, however central or tangential."[40] The artists considered here have so positioned themselves, usually more central than tangential.

Notes

[1] See Matthew Baigell, "What's Jewish About Jewish Art: Some American Views," *Art Criticism,* 20/1 (2005): 76-85.

[2] There are of course exceptions. See, for example, Donald Kuspit, "Is the Concept of Jewish American Art Viable?" in Jewish Artists on the Edge (Santa Fe: The Marion Center and the College of Santa Fe, 2000), 23-24; Andrea Pappas, "Haunted Abstraction: Mark Rothko, Witnessing, and the Holocaust in 1942,"

Journal of Modern Jewish Studies 6 (July 2007): 167-183; and Pappas, "Invisible Points of Departure: Reading Rothko's Christological Imagery," *American Jewish History* 192, no. 4 (2005): 401-436. I have considered this issue briefly in my *Artist and Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Chapter 16; *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), Chapter 4; and *American Artists, Jewish Images* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), Chapters 4 and 5.

[3] Material on artists who explore Holocaust themes is derived in part from my *Jewish American Artists and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); and an article forthcoming in *Ars Judaica* titled "Sacred Concerns and Tikkun Olam in Jewish American Art." Other material considered here is derived from a forthcoming, book-length study provisionally titled *Sacred Texts in Jewish American Art.*

[4] Baigell, *Jewish American Artists and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Baigell, *Jewish Art in America: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 2007), Chapter 8.

[5] Baigell, *Jewish Art*, Chapter 10.

[6] Barry Rubin, *Assimilation and Its Discontents* (New York; Times Books, 1995), Chapter 4.

[7] See Baigell, *American Artists* for discussions of these and other artists.

[8] See, for example, Baigell *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years*, 42-43. 98-99; Baigell, *Jewish Art in America*, 96. In addition, Raphael Soyer told me on many occasions that he was an American, not a Jewish, artist. For the Jewish issues of art critics Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, see Baigell, "Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, and Their Jewish Issues," *Prospects* 30 (2005): 651-664.

[9] This is of course a generalization. Figures such as George Segal, Larry Rivers, and especially Leonard Baskin did explore Jewish subject matter.

[10] The major text for Holocaust art is Ziva Amashai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1993). Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is based on my Jewish American Artists and the Holocaust.

[11] Sherry Chayat, *Life Lessons: The Art of Jerome Witkin* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 68.

[12] Chayat, *Life Lessons*, 28.

[13] Personal letter, March 18, 1994.

[14] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed., Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), 32, 7. On a different note, the concept of *tikkun olam* helps explain why so many Jewish artists in the 1930s joined left-wing causes and became Social Realists, a topic that I am currently researching.

[15] Statement in *Kunst Arbeit* (Chicago: State of Illinois Gallery, 1992), 4.

[16] Edith Altman, *Photo/Text/Object* (Rockford, IL: Rockford Art Museum, 1989), not paged.

[17] Much of the following material is taken from *Sacred Texts in Jewish American Art.*

[18] Some of the well known feminist artists such as Eleanor Antin, Judy Chicago, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Elaine Reichek, and Martha Rosler are identified primarily as mainstream artists and rarely address secular or religious Jewish themes. See for example Lisa E. Bloom, *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[19] Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, edited by David Shatz and Joel B. Wolowelsky, (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2000). I want to thank Rabbi Ephraim Edelstein for calling this book to my attention.

[20] Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed*, 106, 52.

[21] Adin Steinsaltz, *Biblical Images*, trans., Yehuda Hanegbi and Yeduddit Kesket (Northvale, VT: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1984), 211.

[22] Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968 [1913]), 189.

[23] Both of these images are illustrated on Wikipedia.

[24] Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 130, 133. See also Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 93-116; and Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing; The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (Spring 1989): 35-45.

[25] An image can be seen on Wikipedia.

[26] Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV: 45.

[27] Although he does not allude to mountain spirits, Raphael Patai in his *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd. ed., (Detroit: Wayne State University Press,1990 [1967]), spends the first 50 pages describing the ongoing battles between believers in a monolithic god and multiple gods.

[28] For Swartz, see *Beth Ames Swartz: Inquiry into Fire* (Scottsdale, AZ: Scottsdale Center for the Arts, 1974); *Beth Ames Swartz: Israel Revisited* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1981); Melinda Wortz, *Tradition in Transition: Bruria, Gilleh Yellin Hirsch, Beth Ames Swartz, Michele Zackheim* (Irvine: Fine Arts Gallery, University of California: Irvine, 1982); Mary Carroll Nelson, *Connecting: The Art of Beth Ames Swartz* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1984); and David S. Rubin, "Ritual and Transformation: An Introduction to the Art of Beth Ames Swartz," in *Reminders of Invisible Light: The Art of Beth Ames Swartz* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2002), 12.

[29] Barbara Horowitz, "Jewish Artist Expresses Healing Experience," *Jewish United Fund News* (June 1999): 22. For other artists, See Baigell, *Artist and Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 229-242; Baigell, *American Artists*, 35-39, 81-85, 109-111, 116-117, and 151-152; Baigell, *Jewish Art in America*, 174-175, 189-211; Baigell, "Contemporary Jewish American Artists and Kabbalah," *Tikkun* 14 (July/August 1999): 42-53; and Baigell "Spiritualism and Mysticism in Recent American Art," *Ars Judaica* 2 (2006): 135-150.

[30] *Ruth Weisberg Unfurled* (Los Angeles: Skirball Cultural Center, 2007). The two major essays in this exhibition catalogue are by Donald Kuspit and myself.

[31] Betty Ann Brown, "Ruth Weisberg," *Lilith* 16 (Spring 1991): 20.

[32] For a fuller discussion of Aylon's position, see Baigell *American Artists*, Chapter 10.

[33] See Baigell, "Richard McBee's Akedah Series: Reimagining and Reconfiguring Jewish Art," *Ars Judaica* 5 (2009): 107-120.

[34] See Baigell, *American Artists*, Chapter 12; and "Archie Rand: American Artist with a Judaic Turn," to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Images*.

[35] Lea Lynn Rosen, "Wisdom of the Heart: Portraits of Five Contemporary Jewish Visual Artists, An Inquiry into Identity, Community and Spirituality," Masters essay, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2001, 50, 57.

[36] Rand, "Some Thoughts on Midrash and Art: Midrash as Parable," *Living Text* 6 (Winter 1999): 3. Rand's notion that imagination demarcates holiness in the eyes of God suggests that he views creative humans as divine vessels.

[37] Elenore Lester, "Brooklyn Artist's Paintings Were His Path to Judaism," *The Jewish Week* (May 13, 1988) (artist's personal file). Rand, having made twenty-nine self-portraits based on the second set of Sonnets to Orpheus by Rainer Maria Rilke in 1984, must have known that the German poet also saw himself as merely a conduit for his poems. See Wolfgang Leppmann, *Rilke: a Life*, trans., Russell M. Stockman (New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1984), 286; Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans., C.V. MacIntyre (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), vii; John Yau, "Archie Rand: The Figure of the Artist," *Sulfur: A Literary Bi-Annual* (Fall 1989): 186-190.

[38] Only Waldman's version has been published. See JT Waldman, *Megillat Esther* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2005).

[39] Arnold Eisen, *Taking Hold of Torah: Jewish Commitment and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 28.

[40] Michael Krausz, "On Being Jewish," in David Theo Goldberg and Michael Krausz, eds., *Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 272.

The Ghost of Hamnet or Hamnet's Last Act

Eugene Mahon

(Place: *New House, Stratford upon Avon.*
Time: *February 1616. Shakespeare has returned home from "a merry meeting" with Ben Jonson, Drayton et al.*
Scene: *Shakespeare at his desk, writing. He hears a noise and looks up. He ignores it. He hears it again and notices that a child has entered.*)

Shakespeare: Who's there?

Hamnet: That's how you began your play Hamlet. Act 1, Scene 1, the very first line, Who's there?

Shakespeare: You are right. But who are you?

Hamnet: (*in a teasing tone*). You don't recognize your own son?

Shakespeare: Hamnet? Can it be you? After all these years.

Hamnet: (*touching his father's head with an outstretched finger*). While memory holds a seat in this distracted globe.

Shakespeare: Distracted indeed. You left and took this globe and all its contents with you.

Hamnet: (*continuing to tease*). You invented another. A Round O where ghosts convene among the living, the line 'twixt life and death suspended for an evening.

Shakespeare: All too short, those evenings. All too short.

Hamnet: Yes. Like mine, father. No evenings at all in fact for morning youths like me whom the gods love so much they snatch us off in our prime. (*Pause.*) Only human memory invites us back along that fragile bridge unites the living and the dead. Thanatos I bring you, father, nestled in the palm of Eros. (*He extends his hand. Shakespeare grasps it fervently.*) After your "merry meeting" you are close to death, father, and I am granted one last hour with you on Earth before we walk in Elysian fields forever.

Shakespeare: You must have known I named the play after you?

Hamnet: All the shades in Hades sang your praise for that!

Shakespeare: When your death slammed its door in my face I ran to the door of dreams, night my only key to the underworld.

Hamnet: Theatre too and the magic pathways of words.

Shakespeare: Yes. With words I dug the dead up again and made them speak.

Hamnet: And did I speak again, did I speak to you?

Shakespeare: "Grief fills the room up of my absent child
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words
Remembers me of all his gracious parts
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form."

Hamnet: The doors of Hell are hard to open. We have no sky like you to look to, hope abandoned as Dante put it.

Shakespeare: Were we not knocking on the same door perhaps with useless imploration?

Hamnet: Our tears united us, if not our dreams.

Shakespeare: We were ghosts of each other, alone and wandering, memory the fragile bridge we walked on into the past, into the future.

Hamnet: (*as if it were not a non sequitur*). I dreamt of Ashbery last night.

Shakespeare: Ashbery! What's he got to do with anything?

Hamnet: I do not have to explain my free associations to you. I'm not your child anymore!

Shakespeare: (*chastened, hurt, amazed*). You dead can dream of past and present and to come?

Hamnet: Life taken, that's all that's left to us, all that's left of us. Would you strip us of that, too?

Shakespeare: Sweet rain of dreams. It can bring daffodils to Hades?

Hamnet: They come before the swallow dares, and haste away so soon, courage all that's left to us ghosts of daffodils that come no more.

Shakespeare: In hell or heaven courage is fear isn't it, staring in the face of death for signs of life?

Hamnet: You put headstones over us or we would come again above the wind, above the grass.

Shakespeare: In dreams you come and when we wake you go, grief the only remnant on tear stained linen. (*Returning defensively to the earlier subject.*) Ashbery you say. Not a bad poet, despite his years in France.

Hamnet: My dream was heaven in hell, a ray of light, a memory of the sun and all the dawns of childhood. Ashbery was there in the crowd. A cocktail party. He was young. Blond. Not himself at all.

Shakespeare: A vision of yourself in childhood, perhaps, before the dark child of death ran off with you?

Hamnet: I awoke and couldn't remember. I couldn't remember Ashbery's name. I searched and searched through all the files of identity since naming first began in Adam's garden, but Ashbery like a grave had a stone on top and memory couldn't lift it.

Shakespeare: And when it came again, when the name came, it came like resurrection?

Hamnet: Yes. Yes. At first the face and then the word, image and symbol holding hands.

Shakespeare: And did you dare to pull the meaning from that cleft, that savage cleft 'twixt word and image?

Hamnet: I did. I did. And in the cleft I saw the buried hatchet.

Shakespeare: Axe. Buried.

Hamnet: Yes. Yes.

Shakespeare: (*defensively, dismissively*). But ash and berry could mean phoenix, death the womb of life, berries in the ash like Spring.

Hamnet: (*insisting on the truth*). Father it was a buried hatchet, unburied by the courage of the dream. (*There is a determined silence as the truth sinks in.*) I was angry that I died and passed like spent seasons, the way of all flesh, passing through nature to eternity. Angry that you left me, my loneliness worse than death, eternity without you a night without a single dream to soothe it.

Shakespeare: Nothing to knit the raveled sleeve of care.

Hamnet: A life unrounded with a dream of sleep.

Shakespeare: You quote me, misquote me well.

Hamnet: (*angry, nostalgic*). I hung on your every word. I imagined learning every line you ever wrote. Such is the extravagance of imagination when flesh is gone and only ghost remains. I walk among the other shades quoting Shakespeare, until like gluttons overfed they bite the hand that feeds them!

Shakespeare: (*wounded*). I cannot imagine such a disembodied audience, choking on my words.

Hamnet: There are more things in earth and heaven, father, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Shakespeare: (*more and more amused at his son's teasing*). Touché!

Hamnet: Quoting every line you ever wrote kept you alive for me, kept you alive in me.

Shakespeare: I also kept loss at bay with a torrent of words. I had my disguises of course.

Hamnet: A title like Hamlet! You call that a disguise!

(*They both laugh.*)

Shakespeare: It is terrible to want to reveal and to conceal all at once. The magic of words—a sleight of hand that hides tears in laughter, and grieves behind closed doors, in the hidden chambers of the heart.

Hamnet: You littered the play with ones and twos, with characters that move as couples, a play within a play and a dumb-show within the latter, your play marsupial with pouches as if you carried twins as your words ran off with you.

Shakespeare: You saw through all disguises.

Hamnet: (*angrily*). There are none here. We dead are done with hiding!

Shakespeare: What savage irony! (*After a silence.*) A consolation perhaps?

Hamnet: Yes. But at a price.

Shakespeare: You'd go into hiding again, clothe yourself with many-folded flesh for one forbidden apple, and the leap of taste again in a human mouth?

Hamnet: Yes. For that we would abandon paradise. (*Thoughtfully.*) In Oriental folklore dead children build the castled earth again but demons of Mount Dread knock them down. The children weep and build again. The demons topple their towers again, a demonic game that has no ending.

Shakespeare: It was fathers wrote such folklore, not the sons!

Hamnet: The castles tumble on the young and old: it is blind demons sever life strings day and night.

Shakespeare: It is no job for sighted eyes, no job for lovers of the light.

Hamnet: Death is a twisted game of hide and seek: you seek for ever and you

never find.

Shakespeare: I used to think grief was a game of holding on.

Hamnet: Freud said it was a game of letting go.

Shakespeare: (*surprised*). You read Freud in paradise?

Hamnet: It would be hell here without him.

(*Laughter followed by silence followed by sadness. The sadness is unbearable and eventually has to break.*)

Hamnet: Quoting every line you ever wrote kept me alive in hell, kept you alive for me in Hades, kept you alive in me as I wandered among the shades. "Why I would hang on your words as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on." You should have seen me wandering the corridors of hell quoting you as ghosts stopped in their tracks, making gestures toward their temples, as if to say Hamnet is at it again, mad as ever: he has more soliloquies than poor Prince Hamlet, the hallucinating Dane ever had.
(*Becoming more dramatic and agitated.*) I was a chameleon, a real ham if you'll pardon the dreadful pun. I could be sad as Antonio one minute:

"In sooth I know not why I am so sad;
It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn;
And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
That I have much ado to know myself."

or bitter as Shylock's hatred of Antonio next minute:

"How like a fawning publican he looks!
I hate him for he is a Christian;
But more for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis, and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
If I can catch him once upon the hip
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him."

I used to imagine you, father, as Antonio and I as Shylock hungry for my broken bond, my pound of flesh. We were twins, Judith and I, but death chose only one of us: to me it seemed you loved her more or

you would have come between death and its designs on me. (*Suddenly as if surprised by the afterthought.*) Oh and I knew what you meant by Portia's trickery of Shylock, the last act turning of the tables, the legalistic trickery that confounded him, the riddle of the pound of flesh. Shylock had in strict observance of his bond to take a pound of flesh, a pound of flesh only but spill no drop of blood. That very riddle I once answered with my life, for death swept all my pounds of flesh away in a bloodless coup, in August 1596, the bloodless instrument of death never recorded!

Shakespeare: Ah Hamnet, you have riven your father's heart in twain.

Hamnet: Throw away the horrored half and listen on half heartedly.

Shakespeare: (*indignant*). I listened to my grief with all my heart.

Hamnet: Listen on then. I shocked the dead with all I had to say. Why not you! I could charm the dead, console them with visions you claimed only they could see, unmuddied with the vestures of mortality.

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica: look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

Shakespeare: And were they consoled? Was the music as I imagined it?

Hamnet: Yes. Yes. But we miss the cadence of the footfalls
Of the muddy vesture of decay
"The slow smokeless burning of decay"
as that Shakespearean Robert Frost once put it, the slow smokeless burning of decay casting a more human flame, a more human light than all the incandescence of the fires of hell.

Shakespeare: Oh my prophetic soul!

Hamnet: (*dismissively*). Prophecy is human speculation. Here nothing's left to chance.

Shakespeare: Uncertainty the thing you miss the most?

Hamnet: Sure as hell: how merciless my humor has become. Time makes cynics out of innocence, toughens the tenderest flesh, shows no mercy even to a child.

"The quality of mercy is not strained
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Shakespeare: I am twice blest: once to have sired you, and now to see you again. But if only I could have seen you age a little! Seen you as old as my creation Romeo, or Orlando pinning poems on trees to win the hand of Rosalind.

Hamnet: (*assuming the posture of Orlando*).
I pinned your words
On all the trees in hell
Until the gods themselves
Grew weary of your verses.

Shakespeare: If only I could have seen you age a little like Hamlet or Horatio or Laertes, young men tugging at the sun itself to light the tapers of their wild exuberance.

Hamnet: (*assuming the posture of a cynical Hamlet*). Words, words, words! And yet with words I tried to rival you, stitching together with verbal needles and thread, my own soliloquies.

"Ah what a foolish foal am I to half-
Believe that I could conquer hell itself
With verbal fire and borrowed words, a father
Speaking through the mouth piece of his son in hell
Of all places, where words resound like echoes
Heard only by indifferent walls that mock
Communication, as if listening merely mirrored
Speech and meaning came to naught but sound
Resounding on itself like thunder talking

To none but thunder in the empty cistern of the sky."

Shakespeare: (*applauding*). Empty cistern of the sky is good, a fine phrase trippingly on and off the tongue.

Hamnet: Words, words, words.

Shakespeare: You could have played my Hamlet and I as the ghost would have fathered you all over.

Hamnet: (*an outburst of savage anger*). You hardly fathered me at all.
(*Pulling an imaginary dagger, he thrusts it at his father.*)
"Thou wretched rash intruding fool farewell"

Shakespeare: Wait. Wait. There's still a thread or two of time unsevered. Morning has not lit its tapers yet.

Hamnet: I have always wondered if you came back from London to Stratford on that August day I died. Was the theater of my fast spent life enough to lure you from the grease paint of the halls of London? History has no record of your return.

Shakespeare: Grief never traveled faster than the horse that bore me fifty miles in half a morning. Sorrow is never recorded: the heart breaks alone in silence between the folded pages of unwritten grief.

Hamnet: Let us not slobber about forgiveness and regret. Dignity can yet be rescued from defeat.
Ripeness is all.
Readiness is all.

Shakespeare: Even for precocious fruit the bladed wind struck down unschooled, unripened, unwomaned and unwed?

Hamnet: Who can say when human fruit's whole- ripened and ready for its first and final falling?

Shakespeare: A fool. Only a fool.

Hamnet: (*assuming the posture of Jacques*).
A fool, a fool! I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool; a miserable world!

As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,
And railed on Lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms, and yet a fool.
"Good morrow fool" quoth I. "No sir " quoth he,
"Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune."
And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
Says very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock;
Thus may we see' quoth he "how the world wags.
"Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
And after one more hour 'twill be eleven;
And so, from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale."

(*Hamnet begins to laugh. Shakespeare too. Their mutual laughter drowns the stage with metamorphosed tears. Eventually sobriety returns, and in a sober moment Hamnet makes one last request of his father.*)

Hamnet: Father, I have one request before I go.

Shakespeare: All that time took from us I now would grant you, if human breathing could, if human grieving could.

Hamnet: Write a play for me that I can honor the dead with, a play no living soul has ever heard, or ever will.

Shakespeare: It will be like a child I've given birth to, not for the living but for the dead.

Hamnet: It will be hard to create and then never see it performed.

Shakespeare: I've written that play already. It went with you the day you died.

Hamnet: Write it again!

Shakespeare: I've written nothing else since the day you left me.

Hamnet: (*insistent*). Write it again.
Write it again.

(Shakespeare takes many sheets of foolscap and with quill and ink begins to write.
The pages accumulate and fall gently on the floorboards like tears from the playwright's eyes, as Hamnet watches in a kind of ecstasy.
Hamnet keeps saying "Write it again" not unlike the ghost's "Remember me" in Hamlet.
The pages keep falling on the stage like tears and eventually the image of Hamnet disappears. Shakespeare sits alone. Eventually the curtain falls.)

Alfred Stieglitz and "291": A Laboratory for Fostering Creativity

Lillian K. Cartwright

Introduction

By the early 20th century the United States had become a world leader in commerce. The country possessed abundant natural resources and a fast growing, powerful class of entrepreneurs as well as remarkably ingenious inventors. Rapid industrial expansion fueled massive waves of immigration. Theodore Roosevelt's crusade for reform of unfair labor practices and his advocacy of a "square deal for all", led Americans, new and old, to adopt a positive, optimistic view of their country. The 20th century mindset had high regard for the practical, a taste for the new, and confidence in the inevitability of progress. However promising America's economic destiny, within the art world, Europe was the still the undisputed center of power and innovation. The U.S. cultural scene was backwater, with few exceptions such as the milieu of the Ashcan School which recorded the gritty urban landscape and the motley characters inhabiting it. In the early 1900's, American artists with means went to Paris to study as they had since the Civil War.

The later ascendancy of American art to world class status owes a large debt to Alfred Stieglitz who passionately believed in an "American" way of seeing. His forward looking vision gave birth to and sustained Modernism in the United States. He created a rich environment for American artists to show their work and have their work seriously critiqued and collected, eventually transforming the New York art scene from the doldrums to an avant-garde adventure. At the same time, he resituated European Modernism in America and appropriated and daringly combined it with the new American Modern aesthetic by bringing the work of Auguste Rodin, Henri Matisse, Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso and Francis Picabia to New York City. With help from colleagues in 1916, he mounted a ground breaking exhibit of African art in the United States. Stieglitz had a remarkable breadth of talents which went far beyond his acknowledged connoisseurship and reputation as a superb pho-

tographer and propagandist for photography as fine art: He was also an educator, an essayist, a key disseminator of aesthetic practices, a gallerist, a collector, and a charismatic, if opinionated, raconteur.

Creative Art Spaces

I became interested in Stieglitz (1864-1946) while writing about Georgia O'Keeffe[1] and the circle of American modernist painters who comprised her artistic world: Arthur Dove, John Marin, Charles Demuth, and Marsden Hartley. The circle's viability and lasting influence was a direct result of Stieglitz's imagination and large vision. He shaped a creative space for them. There are many spaces where art is viewed and made: Museums, art schools, galleries, salons, and art colonies to name but a few. I use the term "creative art space" to define places where demonstrably fewer constraints exist for the artist. There is less emphasis on hierarchy, on marketing, on an established canon of excellence, and less dependency on the interpretive art community—critics and patrons, for example—and their privileged views. Said simply, there is a lot more room for the artist in the creative environment.[2]

This paper addresses Stieglitz's life prior to meeting O'Keeffe in 1916 and spotlights his unique gallery space, "291" which opened in 1905 and shut down in 1917. Donald MacKinnon stimulated my thinking on creative spaces when he noted the multifaceted nature of creativity: There was the creative process, the creative product, the creative person, and the creative environment.[3] He noted perceptively that insufficient time was spent studying the situation—the spawning ground for creativity and this paper is a long overdue attempt to fill that gap. In examining Stieglitz's personality and life story, we will identify some of his contemporaries who also mounted creative spaces and we will seek out both commonalities and differences in their background and motivation.

Creative art spaces were and continue to be rare. In the early 20th century, the only space which approached parity with Stieglitz's 291 was the Société Anonyme (1920-1950) established by Katherine Dreier and Marcel Duchamp with a little help from Man Ray. This group continued the Stieglitz tradition in negating commercialism and advocating public education.[4] Dreier, a wealthy Theosophist and artist, bought a huge number of art works, national and international, later bequeathed to Yale University. The Société, as a creative lab, never matched Stieglitz's influence for a couple of reasons. First, the group had no permanent home and relied on traveling exhibits to showcase art. Second, the motivations and personalities of Drierer and Duchamp, dubbed as the quintessential odd couple by Gross, worked against their establishing a viable art space. Dreier, lacking Stieglitz's charisma, was viewed as dowdy and

eccentric even though her wealth and pedagogic zeal permitted her to influence the public and to support many artists. Duchamp, provocatively attractive and immensely gifted though he was, bored easily and turned from art to chess. Duchamp's views about what constitutes art continue to be immensely influential among artists and art critics[5] yet he had little desire to foster other's careers in art. Self-invention was more intriguing for Duchamp who valued ideas about art far more than the physical work of artists. Stieglitz and Duchamp were both brilliant and aesthetically astute—the difference was that Stieglitz was an educator and Duchamp an intellectual provocateur.

In the early 20th century, the period in which we are interested, salons frequented by artists and patrons were popular.[6] These salons and *saloniéres* —-women who transformed their homes into subcultures for the arts— offer a discerning counterpoint to "291". The salons were privileged settings for the informed elite who had little interest in public education. A good example was Gertrude Stein's home in Paris—a renowned gathering place for artists and writers. Yet you could not imagine knocking on Gertrude Stein's door on Rue de Fleurus and asking Alice Toklas if you could see the Picassos. Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun studied the salons of Jewish women including Stein and the three Stettheimer sisters, Florine, Etta, and Carrie—all contemporaries and friends of Stieglitz—and posit that for these women the salon was compensatory.[7] The women managed religious and gender marginality by turning their homes into avant-garde sub-cultures. Like Stieglitz, they loved art and conversation yet their scope of operation was their living rooms where Stiegltiz's aims were considerably broader. Besides being a preeminent photographer, he was a teacher, in that sense, a populist, who wanted to inform the public about the art practices that mattered most to him. His gallery would be open to you and whether he would converse or not depended on your curiosity and your taste.

Although you could purchase art at 291, its mission was fundamentally non- commercial in marked contrast to Macbeth's Gallery, the only commercial art space that exclusively showed American Modern Art in New York prior to 1913. Note there were other commercial art galleries in New York, established in the middle to late 19th century that sold the Old Masters, engravings, European art as well as non-controversial American paintings. Michael Knoedler, imaginative and entrepreneurial, was prototypic of the art merchants selling to business men whose expansive mansion walls cried for decoration. Malcolm Goldstein reviews the history of art dealers and galleries in the United States with flourish and humor.[8]

But let's return to William Macbeth, born in 1851, who was Stieglitz's only real peer. Described as quiet, small and clearly not magnetic, Macbeth was nonetheless a persuasive salesperson who influenced many wealthy collectors to buy American art.[9] Macbeth had much skill and strength as a dealer and his influence was considerable. He developed a circle of patrons who trusted

his judgment and his business practices.

Macbeth's background was modest; he was born in Dublin of Scotch Irish parents and served an apprenticeship before opening his own business in New York in 1892. He, unlike Stieglitz, was self-made, lacking family wealth. He understood, way before it was fashionable to do so, that art could be regarded as a commodity. He would reason there was no reason that you can't enjoy art and also make a profit from it. Yet he did exhibit the members of the Ashcan School in 1908, but he made the group guarantee the show with a $400 deposit. Although the show was a financial success, there was much criticism of the works and since Macbeth did not court controversy, the group went elsewhere to exhibit. Macbeth's taste avoided the radically new and in this way he also parted company from Stieglitz.

Stieglitz: Family Background and the Early Years

Who was Alfred Stieglitz? Although it might seem conceptually cleaner to consider creative environments, persons, processes, and products separately, it's almost impossible to do so. Let me then tell you about the man but also about his family background and personality so that his talent at constructing a creative milieu becomes decipherable.

Born in 1864 in Hoboken, New Jersey he described himself as an American.[10] The first born child of German Jewish immigrants, he hardly led a typical American life. His father, Edward, was a successful business man who embraced the arts and conducted a salon in his home where artists, poets, writers met. The family moved to Manhattan when Stieglitz was 7 years old. Conversations about the arts continued in Lake George in upper New York State where the Stieglitz's spent their summers beginning in 1872. These group gatherings and spirited conversation accompanied by good food and wine offered him a template for creative environments. Never a fan of silence, Stieglitz later would voice his own ideas on art with undeniable, and often contradictory, authority.

The presence of twin brothers and three sisters gave the young Stieglitz a ready made group. He apparently envied the twinship of his brothers and some biographers think he was always looking for his twin or soul mate.[11] Perhaps. A parallel story line is that he became especially gifted at getting his mother's attention despite the always present competition of bright and clamorous siblings as well as his not-to be-overlooked dashing father. Hedwig Stieglitz called her son her "little Hamlet"—sensitive, theatrical, moody, and hard not to notice. He developed a philanthropic narcissism early on, an unusually skillful way of managing both sibling rivalry and oedipal conflicts. One apocryphal tale finds him offering money and sandwiches to an organ-

grinder who appeared many times at the family home during dinner. When asked by Hedwig years later, did he remember the indigent organ-grinder? He replied that of course he did and furthermore, he was not giving to the organ grinder but really giving to himself. She asked if he knew that then, and he replies, he always knew. "... I was the organ-grinder. I never gave to him, nor have I ever given to anyone else, except myself."[12] There's a narrative theme if there ever was one.[13]

His father's influence on his development was complex: Indisputably, he encouraged his son's creativity and love of the arts. Edward Stieglitz provided the whole family with a rich cultural life. At the same time, Edward Stieglitz was a successful entrepreneur and can be regarded as an early capitalist—he was in the wool business and was so financially successful that he retired at the age of 49. Most problematic for Alfred was his father's attitude toward money. Alfred remembered the constant wrangling and bickering about finance that seemed an everyday occurrence in the Stieglitz household, with his father accusing his mother of being a spendthrift. Alfred swore that money would never mean that much to him. His support of artists in his circle, particularly John Marin, as well as his purchase of so many artists' works spoke to his generosity.

At the same time, let's not airbrush away his ease in getting others to fund his art enterprises—publications, luncheons, and gallery rent—his friends and wife, Emmeline, not only admired him but often supported him as well. The ambivalent relationship with his father's authority permeates his personality, his art, and close relationships: Alfred was most comfortable with the role of seer and he handled idolatry well. Not so with dissenting opinions where he often dropped people from the circle when their ideas or agendas challenged his. Although never especially interested in politics per se, he was a radical dissenter when it came to art. Like many of the creative individuals studied by psychologists, he preferred the new to the old and furthermore had the competency to make the new, to write about the new, and to sell it. Counterbalancing his autocratic style, was his ability to work prodigiously, to be intrinsically motivated, to demonstrate integrity, and to place an immensely high value on creativity.[14] Even if you did not like him, you had to respect Alfred Stieglitz.

Education Abroad

Alfred attended private schools in Manhattan and enrolled at the then new City College. At this point, his father decided that a first-class education for his children could only be obtained in Europe where schooling was broader and more flexible. A surprising amount of anti-Semitism was present at City College which seemed to be the tipping point for Edward Stieglitz's decision to depart. In 1881, the still very successful Edward sold his holdings, and with wife, children, much luggage, and servants returned to Europe where he

placed his children in German private schools and began himself to paint and tour the continent accompanied by his wife. During vacations, the family would come together and resume their close connections. This sojourn in Europe was pivotal in permitting Stieglitz to bridge cultures and relocate aesthetic forms later in his life. Dreier, Stein, and the Stettheimer sisters all shared an enriched education abroad, spoke foreign languages, and benefited from not only considerable material wealth but from what Pierre Bourdieu called "cultural capital"[15] as well.

Alfred would remain in Europe for almost a decade. He, unlike his twin brothers, was not interested in the pure sciences although he studied briefly with Hermann von Helmholtz. And by chance he took a course on photochemistry in 1883 with Dr. Hermann Wilhelm Vogel. This meeting was a turning point for Stieglitz who finally connected with something challenging that was a perfect fit for his interests and personality—photography was new, precise, aesthetic, and offered an unlimited experimental possibilities. Soon after, he bought his first camera. The rest is chronicled in the history of photography and in numerous biographical works on Stieglitz's life.[16]

Briefly, he studied with Vogel and proved to be an amazing student: His work entered many competitions and quickly won prizes—over 100—and recognition for technical and aesthetic excellence. In Europe he traveled with friends to Italy, France, and Switzerland and took pictures of street urchins, peasant women, monuments, and the countryside. Self-portraits taken during this period reveal him to be striking and he continued to be visually intriguing throughout his life—an intense gaze, elegant bone structure, tousled, thick hair, a large mustache, and a serious manner. He had romances, loved Wagnerian opera, played cards, and enjoyed all kinds of theater including both Shakespeare and vaudeville. He led a bohemian life and from all accounts had a great time.[17]

Return to the States—1890

His father who had already returned to the States a few years before began to think, perhaps, he was having too good a time and called him back to the duties/life tasks of a young adult. His younger sister had recently died in child birth and the family needed to re-group and re-establish family bonds. Coping with the loss, reinforced the seriousness of life: It was time to marry, to settle down, to start a business. And Stieglitz did. In 1893 he married Emmeline Oppenheimer, his best friend's sister, 10 years younger than he was. Emmeline admired him greatly but never shared his passion for adventure, art, and new ideas. She enjoyed the conventional life of a wealthy young woman in New York—fine clothes, traveling first class, and a well run bourgeois household. Retrospectively, the marriage was a fatally bad choice, especially for her whom he divorced after meeting O'Keeffe and for their daughter Kitty who spent

most of her adult life in an institution following a botched lobotomy. Still it was primarily her wealth that provided Stieglitz with the resources to rent gallery space, to publish magazines, and to entertain poets, artists, and critics in good style. For five years, he followed his father's dictates and operated a printing house—Photochrome Engraving Company—with two partners in New York—and there he learned particular skills in printing which enhanced in his earliest photographic work. It will come as no news that the life of the businessman was "unsuitable"—too boring, too commercial, and definitely not beautiful.

Camera Clubs and Camera Notes—1890-1903

There were hundreds of camera clubs in the United States at the turn of the century. Remember these were the days before the Polaroid and the digital camera. People needed dark rooms to develop film and places to take portraits and advice on how to use the new and very popular technology. Photo-making absorbed Americans from all walks of life. Stieglitz, because of his European education and recognized expertise, seized the leadership of a major camera club in New York, the Society of American Amateur Photographers, and became its president in 1890-1891.

The passion not filled by business found a creative outlet in writing and editing the club's magazine. However, he became increasingly dissatisfied with the stuffiness of the New York camera clubs and in 1897 combined the two largest clubs into the Camera Club of New York and expanded and transformed its publication, *Camera Notes* into a beautiful magazine, the most significant photographic journal of its times.[18] It was through this journal that his major contribution to photography was realized: He elevated photography from hobby status to fine art. By setting high aesthetic standard, he argued that photography could and should be much more than aiming a camera and pressing a button. Pictorial photography, (i.e. soft focused, evocative, emotional, and personal), represented the ideal way of working the medium although years later he would change his preference away from the painterly to "straight" photography.

Stieglitz's grand vision for photography absorbed him completely. He said on more than one occasion that he had all but killed himself for photography.[19] Stieglitz wrote for *Camera Notes*, gave lectures and demonstrations at the Club, and managed the Club's exhibitions. Although being the voice for the advancement of photography was incredibly consuming, he found time to take elegant, heartbreakingly beautiful images of New York. In 1901-1902 he shot "An Icy Night"; "Spring Showers, The Coach"; and "Spring Showers, the Sweeper." Also he began experimenting with his "portraits in time", believing that no one picture could convey the complexity of a person, he took a series

of photos of the individual. Kitty, his daughter, was the first subject. The memorable series of portrait photos of O'Keeffe[20] and later of Dorothy Norman[21] taken decades later had their start during this period.

After five years at the club's helm, a fast -growing rift emerged between Stieglitz's high aims and some of the members' views. Not everyone saw things his way. Some thought he was an elitist, an autocrat, and self absorbed. The apocryphal tale of the young Alfred, the organ-grinder, and the monkey, may help decode this split: Inarguably Alfred was giving away his time and talents—he took no salary for all his work. Yet there can be arrogance and tyranny to generosity. Disgruntled members may have felt like the monkey who didn't necessarily like the handout. Although Stieglitz left with a dramatic flourish ridiculing the amateurish attitude that seemed to take over the club, his critics did not take his criticism lying down. One wrote in rebuttal:

> A growing and very dangerous tarantism has inoculated the club, and it appears that nothing is artistic that is not *outré,* nothing beautiful that is not "bizarre"...This fad for muddy, fogged, bombastic, indistinguishable, unguessable monstrosities will soon pass away....[22]

Despite the insulting exchanges, many highly trained and esteemed photographers, including Eduard Steichen, Gertrude Käsebier and Clarence H. White, sided with Stieglitz's preferences for pictorial photography and they exited with him, beginning an independent movement. The movement was dubbed the Photo-Secession, modeled after the Viennese Secession. His last edition of *Camera Notes* as editor was in July of 1902. Under a more "understanding" editor, *Camera Notes* continued for only one more year. And Stieglitz soon published a new journal called *Camera Work* and simultaneously moved on to create one of the most interesting alternative art spaces of the early 20th century. First of all, it was a physical space the Secessionist could call their own.

The Creative Space—291

On Fifth Avenue between 30th and 31st Streets, a row of brownstones stood. Once quite fashionable in the late 19th century, by the time Stieglitz moved, the brownstones were taken over by small offices and shops. Elite New Yorkers had moved uptown.[23] The urban landscape was fast changing—8 blocks away the just completed Flatiron Building transformed the skyline and would captivate photographers, including Stieglitz, for years to come.

It was the young Edward Steichen who discovered 291. Steichen, a Lithuanian- born painter as well as a photographer, located a studio for himself

that was reasonable in rent and allowed him a street level showcase for his photography—there he hung his shingle as a professional portrait photographer. He photographed J.P. Morgan, Eleanor Duse, and in France took many photos of Auguste Rodin and his statues of Balzac—quite revolutionary for their time and still today they are seen as some of the landmark images in establishing photography as fine art. As his reputation for portraiture grew, he expanded his studio space and rented 293, leaving 291 vacant.[24] Steichen, 15 years younger than Stieglitz, was admired much by the older artist who called him "his man" when they met. Steichen became one of several key colleague-advisors who influenced him and helped him mount shows over the years. Stieglitz embraced him and welcomed him into his family. When Stieglitz separated from the Camera Club, he trusted Steichen's judgment and took his advice about turning the Steichen studio into a gallery where paintings as well as photographs could be hung. Steichen planned to return to France and promised that he would get a Rodin drawing exhibition for 291—the show, hung in January of 1908, marked the beginning of systematically initiating and expanding the public's taste for modernism.

Now the Photo-Secession Group not only had a name but it had a place and a future. The formal name "The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession" soon morphed into "291". The gallery opened in 1905 and closed in 1917 when World War I began. Stieglitz saw the space as "...a laboratory, and experimental station, and must not be looked upon as an Art Gallery in the ordinary sense of the term."[25] And what did this lab look like? Enter the narrow building and go to the top floor in a small, creaky, man-operated elevator. Step into a space defined by three rooms with a vestibule leading into a small art gallery, a 15 foot-square room, in the center is a table with a very large copper bowl holding dried flowers. The room is unpretentious but elegant. Steichen chose the colors for 291—olive painted walls with warm olive- gray burlap pleated drapery covering the lower half of the walls; the two other rooms maintained the muted color palette and introduced pure white moldings and woodwork to offset the subdued color scheme.

A "spiffy" space does not a creative environment make. What made this place special were the exhibitions. Starting with the 1905 opening exhibit of thirty-nine Secessionist photographers including Stieglitz, Käsebier, Steichen, and White, 291 went on to exhibit the foremost photographers of the early 20th century including Paul Strand and Paul B. Haviland . The gallery did not limit itself to photography but quickly expanded to include paintings and sculpture which ultimately surpassed the photography shows in number and attendance. Placing paintings in a photography gallery, according to Jonathan Weinberg, was a smart way of raising the status of photography.[26] Although Stieglitz's aim was to bring an American sensibility into the world art scene, he also brought to New York the work of the most innovative French artists which

included not only the ones mentioned earlier but also Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Pierre August Renoir, and Henri Rousseau. In addition African Sculpture and shows of children's drawings were exhibited. All in all there were 79 shows mounted at 291 in 13 years.[27] The gallery functioned as a museum of modern art—note that the founding of New York's illustrious Museum of Modern Art occurred in 1929, more than a decade after the close of 291.

The People and the Ideas

Beside the art exhibitions, the people made 291 special—the artists, students, poets, critics, collectors, and the general public. The people provided and were the excitement. If you wanted to see something new and exhilarating you went to 291. And if you were lucky enough, you might watch Stieglitz hold court and experience his animated, charismatically- charged comments on American Modernism or you might find him arguing with the students from the Art Students League, a rowdy group who mocked the high seriousness of Stieglitz's ideas. At noon a group of artists and poets gathered –The Round Table—who would then proceed to lunch together at a local hotel. S.W. Churchill states: "Entry into Stieglitz's studio certified not aristocratic blue blood, but red-blooded American artistic vigor."[28] The place, although physical and tangible and architectural, represented something intangible—it was a home—a haunt—for those who felt like "the other".

Others shared not only the space but an ideological perspective—a set of beliefs, preferences, and values. First, the Stieglitz circle favored the primitive. They agreed that sexual impulses drove artistic creation. Second, the credo of symbolism with its emphasis on the personal and the soul was very appealing.[29] Capturing and working from inner states rather than analytic ones produced work that was universal.[30] Last among the pivotal ideas were those focused on "Woman"—the group developed a romantic rhetoric rhapsodizing the "woman-child" —a pure, clean erotic woman, free of bourgeois guilt.[31]

Women and Homosexual Artists

Stieglitz was ahead of his times in respect to exhibiting the work of women and homosexual artists. This sponsorship was not a political statement but an aesthetic one. It is not common knowledge that Stieglitz sponsored many women artists before meeting O'Keeffe. Although O'Keeffe represented the iconic woman artist for him,[32] he tried to find the ideal woman in art many years before meeting her. His views of the sexes were situated in early 20th century gendered views—woman as pure, child-like, and sexually charged. Some saw him as a womanizer who rationalized seduction with flowery romantic rhetoric. He was successful with some women but the rhetoric did not work with others. Kathleen Pyne asserts that these early women artists were eclipsed

by O'Keeffe yet their work merits attention and recognition.[33] And recently they have been rediscovered and their work has been shown in several venues.

Interestingly, the first non-photographic solo show at 291 was Pamela Colman Smith's watercolors and ink drawings in 1907. She is best remembered today for her designs on Tarot cards; as a symbolist painter she projected an aura of mysticism and child-like innocence. She, like O'Keeffe, "packaged" herself to meet the expectations of the times. Another woman photographer, Ann Brigman, deserves mentioning because her experience with Stieglitz further illuminates his values. Brigman, who resided in California, visited 291 and showed Stieglitz her photos—she worked with nude female images placed in extraordinary environments—on craggy rocks and in wild landscapes. Stieglitz was intrigued with the novelty of the work and agreed to show it. When Brigman reflected that the other photographers represented by Stieglitz were more technically advanced, he agreed saying that the way she did her work was "rotten" but it was new—it was worthwhile.[34] One way of viewing Stieglitz's artistic quest is that he sought the "perfect new". Hard to get, but if you have to choose, new trumps perfect. Parenthetically, when the partnership with O'Keeffe flourished years later he did get what he wanted—she was meticulous and she was unique.

Stieglitz' sponsorship of homosexual artists including Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley was also progressive.[35] Stieglitz, was not a gay rights activist, but put talent first. Although Demuth produced a remarkable set of homoerotic watercolors of men in bathhouses, these were never shown publicly, but his abstract works and still lifes were. Hartley's early abstract work was not immediately decoded as "gay" and he had five exhibitions at 291, four of which were solo shows. Stieglitz thought so highly of his work that he not only provided him with emotional support but also with the funds to make his first trip to Europe in 1912. Stieglitz's stance was not extraordinary since it was common in the salons and bohemian circles to openly accept homosexual and bisexual artists, writers, and art dealers.

Colleagues

Stieglitz's connoisseurship extended to selecting colleague-advisors: Eduard Steichen, Marius de Zayas, and Max Weber to name but a few served as conduits to art and artists abroad. They informed him about new developments, advocated certain styles, and had the connections which made exhibitions possible. For example de Zayas was pivotal in bringing African Sculpture to the gallery by identifying Parisian collector, Paul Guillaume, whose 18 sculptures went on exhibit in 1916. Earlier Max Weber, who had moved to Paris, wrote to Stieglitz about the powerful influence of African Sculpture on Picasso's work and on his own painting. It is worth noting that all three men ultimately

went their separate ways after strong disagreements with Stieglitz. Trying to bridge the duality and complexity of his character and contributions, his gallery assistant and colleague, Herbert Seligmann wrote:

> He wasn't a saint. He was vain and theatrical; he could be vindictive and cruel. He could go to extremes in his admiration and in his subsequent depreciation of people...Wherever he was, Stieglitz created a magnetic center...he achieved moments of all but blinding awareness and release.[36]

Stieglitz defined himself differently:

> People think that I am interested only in art. That is not true...whether it is scrubbing a floor or painting a picture—only the best work of which man is capable will finally satisfy him...and what interest me is whether a man will fight for the opportunity of doing the best work of which he is capable. It seems to me that people will fight for almost anything else except that right. And nothing else will fill in the end.[37]

Camera Work *and Beyond*

The elegant magazine *Camera Work* (1903-1917) published by Stieglitz extended 291's influence by presenting stunning reproductions of the photos on exhibition and essays on art. *Camera Work* introduced works of such writers as Gertrude Stein to Americans. The 1912 issue of the magazine contained two articles by Stein and an editorial pointing out that her writing was analogous to the Post-Impressionist spirit seen in the visual arts. She was most proud of her publication and said "...he was the first one that ever printed anything that I had done. And you can imagine what that meant to me or to any one."[38] William Carlos Williams, Alfred Kreymborg and other poets were published in the journal. Bram Dijkstra describes in detail how *Camera Work* blended both literature and the visual arts.[39] Arbitrary boundaries among and between the arts were challenged in essays comparing, for example, Matisse and Isadora Duncan. The magazine's implicit mission was to unify all the arts illustrating the plurality of modernism and thus counterbalance the lack of soul in profit-mad materialism.

During this heady period of running 291 and editing *Camera Work*, Stieglitz himself took some unforgettable, iconic images.[40] The most famous was "The Steerage" taken in 1907. Here, he captured the lower level of the ship, where men, women, and children were crowded into a small space. The picture was taken from above, from the space of the wealthy whose pretensions he ridiculed. The interrelated shapes of the families in steerage were spellbinding for him and he said: "If all my photographs were lost and were (sic) repre-

sented only by The Steerage that would be quite all right."[41] The second block-buster image taken in 1902 was "The Hand of Man" where a locomotive spewing black smoke moves toward the viewer, train tracks elliptically criss-crossing and telephone poles in the background. The clout of industrial America loomed forebodingly large and the symbolism in the photo intrigued Stieglitz so much that he worked on it in multiple ways for many years. The image captured the two-edged sword of industrialism—the ability to connect the country and the power to enslave it. It was only eight years earlier that railway workers protested reduced wages and federal troops were brought in to break the strike.

Closing 291

Although he was to open other gallery spaces in the future, Stieglitz closed 291 in 1917. Why? The war and rising costs of running the gallery were central to the closing; subscriptions to *Camera Work* plummeted. Another more subtle factor was that 291 was no longer the center of art experimentation. The Armory Show in 1913 was pivotal in exposing U.S. audiences to European vanguard aesthetics. Several new modern art galleries opened and other experimental publications were available.[42] Mabel Dodge, a galvanizing saloniéres, became the catalyst in her Greenwich Village home for conversations focusing on the arts and political action as well. She invited Emma Goldman and many other immigrant radicals to her salon. John Sloan and Robert Henri, Socialist painters of the Ashcan School, frequented her gatherings. "Evenings" at Dodge's apartment trumped 291. Lifespan factors also played a role. Stieglitz was 53 when the gallery closed and he was extremely discouraged: His marriage, never fulfilling, was floundering. Katherine Rhoades, a young and alluring artist, rejected his physical advances and he had no muse to spark his creativity. He was "ready" for someone like O'Keeffe to make an entrance into his life and stir things up. And soon she would.

The last issue of *Camera Work* invited others to write about what 291 meant to them. Some quotes from that issue and other sources follow:

> If only England had had a Stieglitz! But Stieglitzes are rare. It suffices that one Stieglitz has been born in our generation, and our debt to him is enormous. He...is not only the greatest living photographer; he has been (and solely for the love of it) the greatest propagandist for photography.[43]

Arthur Dove said:

> ..."291" (does not) represent any definite movement in one direction, such as, Socialism, suffrage, and so on. Perhaps it is these

> movements having but one direction that makes life at present so stuffy and full of discontent. There could be no 291 ism. "291" takes a step further and stands for orderly movement in all directions.[44]

John Marin succinctly added: "A very tangible intangible place was and is this man's dream."[45]

Stieglitz's Relevance to Fostering Creative Environments

Creative persons, creative processes, and creative products are routinely studied yet creative environments and the people who mount such spaces are given short shrift. This neglect deprives us of a potentially fruitful arena for investigation. In examining Stieglitz's life as a single case study, we identify multiple factors associated with his ability to construct a creative environment which benefited artists as well as the public at large who now view his vast personal collection of European and American paintings and photography in major museums throughout America.

What did we learned from Stieglitz's life and the establishment of 291 that can be generalized to other creative environments? Foremost, you need a compelling, towering, creative person with a big vision to construct a viable space. That vision has to be coupled with a drive, a passion to fulfill the dream. The leader becomes the voice, the propagandist for creative activity. Attracting and keeping astute colleague-advisors should not be underestimated. So much of the formation and maintenance of 291 was spurred by Steichen's actions and connections. Resources are essential because somebody must pay the bills for the space. Besides vision, extraversion, finding wise colleagues, and resources, the ability to spot and nurture talent is absolutely necessary. Much of the time Stieglitz was inclusive and not divisive. If the person had talent and had something new to say, sexual orientation and gender were irrelevant.

Others who conducted salons and art societies shared some but not all of Stieglitz's brilliant gifts. They were wealthy, educated, tolerant, gifted conversationalists, worshipped the arts, and were often writers or painters themselves. Yet the *saloniéres* differed from him in several ways: Their scope of influence was personal and exclusive, and in that sense they were segregationists, none had a physical place, a gallery, open to the public. Their missionary zeal was subdued if there at all, and their artistic talents, although considerable, never matched his.

Perhaps Katherine Dreier, who founded the Société Anonyme, comes closest to Stieglitz in scope, zeal, and generosity of spirit. Unfortunately,

charismatic she was not. Her partner, Marcel Duchamp, matched Stieglitz in charisma and immense artistic talent but had no interest in generating and maintaining a group. Philanthropic he was not.

There are many art spaces calling for examination. The MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire and Yaddo in upper state New York have been extremely influential artists' communities for over one century; here artists of exceptional promise, from all disciplines, are awarded fellowships where they can work without interruption in a setting which nourishes creativity. Salons such as those run by Dodge and others are another appealing subject for further inquiry. More controversial spaces such as Andy Warhol's Factory and the Cedar Tavern in Greenwich Village, a hangout for Abstract Expressionist artists, had major influence on American art and invite inspection.

A taxonomy of creative settings has yet to be devised but is imperative for progress in this field. Relevant issues include the characteristics of the space in respect to inclusivity versus exclusivity; the traits of the leader as well as the conditions under which shared or collaborative leadership develop. In addition, unearthing the values and ideological stance of the members and disclosing the factors associated with the space's longevity merit attention. Studying Stieglitz and 291 reveal the special and rare combination of traits, motives, family and historical background factors associated with those who mount creative spaces and offers a preliminary template for considering and classifying other creative environments.

Notes

[1] Lillian K. Cartwright, "Georgia O'Keeffe: American Modernist," in *Women of vision: Their Psychology, Circumstances, and Success*, eds. E.A. Gavin, A. Clamar, and M.A. Siderits (New York: Springer, 2007), 79-93.

[2] Cartwright, "The Creative Space." Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, CA, August 2007.

[3] D.W. MacKinnon, "Creativity: A Multi-faceted Phenomenon," in *Creativity: A Discussion at the Nobel Conference*, ed., J.D. Roslansky (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1970), 17-32.

[4] See Katherine Sophie Dreier and Constantin Aladjalov, *International Exhibition of Modern Art* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1926); and J.R. Gross, ed., *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America* (New Haven: YaleUniversity Press, 2006).

[5] Anne Collins Goodyear, and James W. McManus, eds., *Inventing Marcel Duchamp: The Dynamics of Portraiture* (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution and Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2009).

[6] Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[7] Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New York: The Jewish Museum & New Haven: Yale University

Press, 2005).

[8] Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[9] Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan: The rise of the modern art market* (New York: Random House, 1992).

[10] Bram Dijkstra, *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969).

[11] Katherine Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light* (New Haven: Yale, 2004).

[12] Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Aperture, 1973), 23.

[13] Cf. Dan P. McAdams, *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity* (New York: Guilford Press, 1988); William Todd Schultz, ed., *Handbook of Psychobiography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 2005); and Jefferson A. Singer, "Narrative Identity and Meaning Making Across the Adult Lifespan: An Introduction," *Journal of Personality*, 72/3 (June 2004): 437-459.

[14] Teresa M. Amabile, *Creativity in Context* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996); K.A. Ericsson and A.D. Lehmann, "Expertise," in *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, M.A. Runco & Steven Pritzker, eds. vol. 1, (San Diego, CA and London: Academic Press, 1999), 695-706; Howard Gardner, *Extraordinary Minds: Portraits of Exceptional Individuals and an Examination of Our Extraordinariness* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Robert J. Sternberg, ed., *Handbook of Creativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sternberg, T.I. Lubart, J.C. Kaufman, and J.E. Pretz, "Creativity," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning*, K. J. Holyoak and R. G. Morrison, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 351-369.

[15] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1984).

[16] See D. Bry, *An Exhibition of Photographs by Alfred Stieglitz* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1958); Dijkstra, *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams*; Ted Eversole, "Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work*, and the early cultivation of American Modernism," *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 22 (2005): 5-18.; Hoffman, *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*; E.M. Kornhauser, *Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe, & American Modernism* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1999); Therese Mulligan, ed., *The Photography of Alfred Stieglitz: Georgia O'Keeffe's Enduring Legacy* (Rochester, NY: George Eastman House, 2000); Dorothy Norman, ed., *Stieglitz: A Memorial Portfolio, 1864-1946* (New York: Twice a Year Press. 1947); Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*.

[17] See Hoffman, Chapter 1 "The Nineteenth Century," *Stieglitz: A Beginning Light*, 1-193.

[18] See Christian A. Peterson, *Alfred Stieglitz's* Camera Notes (New York: Minneapolis Institute of Arts with W. W. Norton 1993).

[19] Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*.

[20] See Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait by Alfred Stieglitz* (New York:

Metropolitan Museum of Art and Viking Press, 1978).

[21] See Norman and Stieglitz, *Beyond a Portrait: Photographs* (New York: Aperture, 1984).

[22] Peterson, 49.

[23] See Eric Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Power in a Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale, 2002).

[24] Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 28.

[25] Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 47.

[26] Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for vice: Homosexuality in the art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley and the First American Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1995).

[27] See Hoffman, 320-323, for the complete exhibition schedule.

[28] Suzanne W. Churchill, *The Little Magazine Others and the Renovation of Modern American Poetry* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 28.

[29] See Charles C. Eldredge, *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting* (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1979).

[30] See Wassily Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914).

[31] Kathleen Pyne, *Modernism and the Feminine Voice: O'Keeffe and the Women of the Stieglitz Circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[32] Cartwright, (2007)

[33] Pyne.

[34] Stieglitz quoted in Peter E. Palmquist, *Camera Fiends & Kodak Girls: Writings by and about Women Photographers 1840-1930* (New York: Midmarch Arts, 1989), 214.

[35] Weinberg.

[36] Norman, *Stieglitz: A Memorial Portfolio*, 14

[37] Norman, *Writings and Conversations of Alfred Stieglitz*. (New York: Twice a Year Press, 1938), 78-79.

[38] B. Kellner, *A Gertrude Stein Companion: Content with the Example* (New York: Greenwood, 1988), 266.

[39] See Dijkstra, *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams*.

[40] See Stieglitz, *Camera Work: The Complete Illustrations 1903-1917* (Köln, Taschen, 1997).

[41] Quoted in Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer*, 77.

[42] Cf. Sarah Greenough and J. Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writings* (New York: Callaway and Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983); and Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

[43] Ward Muir, "*Camera Work* and Its Creator: A Historical Note," *The Amateur Photographer*, 56, (1923): 465-466.

[44] Hoffman, 276.

[45] Hoffman, 275.

Back to the Futurismo: Dromotude and the Ethical Unconscious of Contemporary Art

Mark Van Proyen

> "We shall sing of great crowds in the excitement of labor, pleasure and rebellion; of the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capital cities; the nocturnal vibration of arsenals and workshops beneath the violent electric moons; of the greedy stallions swallowing smoking snakes; of factories suspended from clouds by strings of smoke; of bridges leaping like gymnasts over the diabolical cutlery of sunbathed rivers; of adventurous liners scenting the horizon; of broad-chested locomotives prancing on the rails like huge steel horses bridled with long tubes, and of the gliding flight of areoplanes, the sound of whose screw is like the flapping of flags and the applause of enthusiastic crowds."
>
> F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," (1909)[1]

> Miss Casswell: "In television, do they have auditions?"
> Addison DeWitt: "That's all television is my dear, nothing but auditions."
>
> Joseph L. Mankiewicz (dir.), *All About Eve*, (1950)[2]

I

Celebrate? Well maybe a better word would be commemorate, but we get the idea. During the fall of 2009, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art was "celebrating" the 100-year anniversary of the publication of F.T. Marinetti's first *Founding Manifesto of Futurism,* and blogsters were talking, on the SFMOMA's own blog no less. Naturally, they pointed out that the document in question was a proto-fascist call to war and a plea for the suppression of women (which it was), and for these reasons, the anniversary should not have been "celebrated." But problems of word choice aside, we can still note that

the museum went to great length to host a week-long series of events highlighting several aspects of the Futurist legacy, all in keeping with a host of other Futurist-oriented museum exhibitions taking place around the globe.[3] These have made the important point that the Futurist legacy should not be forgotten, because there are many important things that can be gained from this particular topic of remembrance. And yet, despite all of this commemorative hoopla, there still remains the need for an accounting of the fact that some of those things might be embarrassingly inconvenient for any techno-bureaucratic arts institution's effort to sustain the all-too-facile analogy that exists between their implicit (or explicit) claims of upholding a progressive political agenda and their covert devotion to a neo-avant-garde ethics that may be tantamount to the embrace of neo-Futurist wolves lurking in the sheep's clothing of an alleged "social enlightenment."

For starters, we may want to note that this anniversary seems to come part-and-parcel with a renewed interest in 20th century Italian art. During the fall of 2009, The Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris have both mounted estimable exhibitions that examine multiple aspects of the Futurist project. In 2008, Giorgio Morandi was given a major retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum, and the same Francesco Bonami who is to curate this spring's Whitney Biennial also presented his exhibition titled *Italics: Italian Art between Tradition and Revolution at the Palazzo Grassi* in the spring of 2009 (traveling on to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago the following fall). The exhibition drew controversial attention to itself just a few weeks before the new Italian Pavilion would soon be opened at the 53rd Venice Biennale. For many years, the old Italian Pavilion has been used as the one of the sites for the Biennial's "curated exhibitions," meaning that Italian artists have been historically under-represented in the most important contemporary art event to take place on Italian soil. Goodbye to all that.

So, if we detect a renewed enthusiasm for 20th century Italian art, then lets go back to the start, which was Futurism. Its official birth can be traced to the publication (in French, Marinetti's preferred *langue de lettre*) of the initial Manifesto of Futurism on the front page of a Parisian newspaper (*La Figaro,* Feb. 20, 2009), showing a very early awareness of how the mass media could be manipulated to stage a profitable controversy. But it also had another attribute that invites our attention, that being its early valorization of velocity as both social fact and esthetic attribute. Many years later, Paul Virilio would coin the term Dromology in his slim volume titled *Speed and Politics*;[4] this was said to represent the systematic study of the effects of velocity, but it failed to note that its only measurable effect was to disable logic itself, recasting it as mere collateral damage in relation to technology's mad rush to control the relations of time and space. This is where the ethos of Futurism comes into play, because it was the initiating doctrine of 20th century velocity worship. Like Virilio's

book, It offers us much in the way of dromotude, even as it gives little in the way of a true logic of the dromos—that being the antique Greek word for speed. The key difference between the two terms is that dromology would imply the existence of a sphere of ethics that would stand beyond velocity-for-the–sake-of-velocity, where as the neological term dromotude comes closer to the overarching truth of 20th century art in that it is completely indifferent to any ethics, save those of a mania for self-aggrandizement.

Marinetti was from Milan (at the very center of Lombardy), a then recently industrialized city that had, and even to this day still has a French feel to it, no doubt owing something to the fact that the original Lombards were invaders from France. There is a durable body of Italian opinion that still regards Milan as being something other than a "real" Italian city, and like the area around Venice, it has a long history of harboring right wing political views that have traditionally been dismissive of the agrarian south. Even today, it is near the geographical center of two right-wing political coalitions, one called *Lega Nord* and the other called *Forze Italia.* Some even say that *Forze Italia* want to split Italy in half, with everything south of Rome to be thrown out of the over-taxed northern commonwealth.

I bring up these cultural-historical issues because I think they help us understand Italian Futurism. In 1909, Italy was still fairly new to the modern nation-state game, and just as some have said that the United States was the first country of the 20th century, so too might we say that Italy was the last European country to leave the 18th century (others might point to Russia as being worthy of that honor, that being another country that embraced Futurist poetics). That same year, Spain was experiencing a dramatic loss of prestige and colonial possession owing to its navy having recently been beaten down by American gunboats. At the same time, the aftermath of the Franco-German squabble of 1870-71 had both countries racing to keep up with British and American innovations in factory manufacturing. Gasoline powered automobiles and airplanes were the favored playthings of the newly affluent, and urban arcades were featuring demonstrations of the early motion-picture technology that the Lumiere brothers had invented a dozen years earlier. In Paris, artists such as Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso were showing strange and wonderful paintings to curious and confused audiences, and French newspapers were singing controversy about those exhibitions.

These observations describe the historical ring into which Marinetti sought to throw his hat, and when he did, Italian art joined the 20th century with an unprecedented vengeance that would eventually be embarrassed by a chain of disasters. The problem was (and still is), the 20th century was never really sure if it wanted to join this particular manifestation of Italian art, although the Great War of 1914-1919 certainly put ghastly paid to the claims of Futurist virtue. Aside from its tendentious braying about "the cleansing power of war,"

or its cruel dismissal of women, Marinetti's *Manifesto* seems like a veritable prophesy for many aspects of the 20th century that would soon become... manifest. More to the point of subsequent developments in Euro-American art and literature, it was also an early and particularly vehement attack on the weepy sentimentalism of the 19th century that was quickly passing away, and, without justifying the Manifesto's toxic political program, this might help explain some of Marinetti's strangely fetishistic attitudes about new technology. Symbolism was the most recent name for and manifestation of the previous regime of weepy sentimentalism, and even though Marinetti's earliest attempts at poetry were of that tradition, he soon thereafter turned on it with the irrational vengeance of a spurned lover.[5] As would later be demonstrated by many subsequent schools of Modernist poetry, the Futurists were right to see a cultural politics of aristocratic denial inscribed into a Symbolist poetics that had lingered far beyond the earlier Romanticism of which it was a cryptic vestige. But they were wrong in suggesting that a chest-beating theater of violence and precision should be the preferred antidote to those cultural politics.

On the subject of war, we might want to note that in 1909, Italy's recent experience of it was mixed. The first Italo-Ethiopian war of 1895-96 was a humiliation, as Ethiopian fighters were able to resist the onslaught of the colonizing Italians, marking the first success of any African nation to succeed in doing so. On the other hand, Italy's own struggle for nationhood (1860-1871) represented a high point; that was when Guiseppi Garabaldi led his small army of red jackets up the peninsula, simultaneously chasing out Austro-Hungarian Ottomans and leaving a new pan-Italian nationalism in his wake. So, in this particular instance, war *was* a good thing, and it provided a rare opportunity for masculine self-assertion that Italy hadn't seen since the middle of the 17th century, when Venetian war galleys secured the trade routes of the eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, a mere 10 months after the publication of Marinetti's first *Manifesto*, the earthquake of Messina reminded all of Europe that the dynamicism of nature could still dwarf that of machines, and the ensuing number of disaster-related deaths was measured in the hundreds of thousands, a mere omen of even greater disasters looming on the historical horizon. The Great War was one of those, and the Influenza Pandemic of 1919 was another, the death toll of the later besting the former by a factor of about four to one.

In 1915, as a celebration of Italy's entry into the Great War on the side of the Allies (and of turning its back on a 1881 treaty obligation with the Central Powers), Marinetti recapitulated his call for cultural cleansing when he wrote a short tract titled *War: The World's Only Hygiene.* Three years later, after almost no Italian military success and 650,000 dead (many of those having been lost at the disastrous battle of Caporetto in 1917), he was unrepentant, even when the

Treaty of Versailles gave Italy few of the war spoils that it had been promised in the earlier Treaty of London.

Soon thereafter, there came economic disaster, and this would be taken cynical advantage of by former Socialist and long-time Marinetti confidant Benito Mussolini. Much can be said about the relationship between Futurist ideology and the early, germinal phase of Italian fascism, especially when we compare Futurist exaltations about the dynamicism of the modern city with Fascist attempts to channel mass hysteria into a secular state religion. Witness this 1919 quote from *Il Duce*: "We worked with alacrity to...give Italians a 'religious concept of the nation'...to lay the foundation of Italian greatness. The religious notion of Italianism...should become the impulse and fundamental direction of our lives."[6] It is not hard to read these words and conjure the many demonically personified images of undulating cities populated painted by Boccioni, Russolo and Severini just prior to the Great War, and anybody with any attunement to psychoanalytic theory will recognize in those words and images a manically masochistic capitulation to the super ego's potential for meting out imaginary punishments ("serve the monster city or the monster city will destroy you!"). Simply stated, the twisted logic of this capitulation runs "to avoid punishment, we must punish—ourselves and others," and in the convoluted *mise-en-scéne* of Futurist *gesemtkunstpolemik*, it is the viewer of Futurist images and the auditor of Futurist verse who is asked to find displaced pleasures of bogus self-perfection in the anti-esthetic pain inflicted by their artistic punishments.[7] But it was according to this exact formulation that much of the characteristic art of the 20th century was born, based as it has been on the programmatic valorization of industrial technology and "difficult" esthetic speculations that runs steadily from the Futurists all they way up to and beyond the Minimalism of the 1960s. For this long lineage, and for the many failed utopias that it has fostered, we can say *Grazi Signor Marinetti!*

This leads to our second point, pertaining to women. Even as early as 1909, there might be some point to seeing Marinetti's dismissal of women as being essentially anti-feminist, because, even in Italy, new nationhood did bring new opportunities for women with it, especially in an industrial and commercial Milan. But these were few in comparison to those that were being enjoyed in other major European cities. That much said, we also have to remember that we are talking about Italy, and we are talking about Italy a full century ago, which was and still is the place where the cult of the mother reigns supreme. Amidst a plethora of *Madonnas col bambini*, and amid a seemingly all-encompassing mother church and a labyrinthine care-giving government bolstered by secret criminal societies, it seems reasonable that Marinetti's attack on women could be at least partially understood as an attack on the emasculating infantilism engendered by these matriarchal cultural priorities, tinctured with a delirious celebration of risk pointed at a repression of their

own (and other's) exaggerated fears of a quickly changing world. As Marinetti wrote: "We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap."[8]

But the important question remains: who was to be the intended target of that punch and slap? It would be easy to assume that it was the same hidebound middle class that was so scorned by Baudelaire and his ilk when they sought to *epater le bourgeois* five decades earlier, but it is interesting to note that the prosperous middle class was never explicitly vilified in Futurist writings, owing to the fact that their vast demonology went far beyond the categories of mere social class. What was vilified is summed up in a 1914 diagram titled *The Futurist Synthesis of the War*, attributed to Marinetti, although it bears the names of four other members of the Futurist group.[9] The interesting thing about the diagram is that it arrays all of the combatants of the Great War against a common enemy called *Passéism*, suggesting that the war itself was really a struggle to aggressively eliminate the vestiges of a stagnant past from an immanent future of unbounded, mechanically enhanced possibilities for sheer velocity and the profitable organization of labor. The fact that so many perished in this effort seemed to be a mere incidental problem in relation to Futurist urgings toward a brave new world.

II

In Alfred Barr's famous taxonomical diagram of the development of modern art that was featured on the cover of the catalog for his 1936 exhibition titled *Cubism and Abstract Art,* Italian Futurism is located at the very center of the chart, suggesting a kindred status to Cubism and a precursor status to Dada. This position seems to be at odds with how the movement is represented in the most recent display of Futurist painting and sculpture amid the New York Museum of Modern Art's newly re-hung permanent collection. To be sure, the Futurists have their own dedicated gallery within that collection (a small one), but it is positioned as a backwater eddy in relationship to the way that other early 20th century movements are located within an implied "mainstream" of art historical development, suggesting that their efforts are to be understood as a kind of oddball sideshow to other "more important" accomplishments in the development of Modernist esthetics.

This much said, we also have to note that some of the examples contained in that gallery are more representative of Futurist ideology than was the case in earlier hangings of their work by the same museum. The chief difference consists in the substitution of one image of a locomotive for another. The earlier presentation gave pride of place to a 1911 painting by Umberto Boccioni titled *States of Mind: The Farewells* (loaned out to the Tate Modern

during the summer of 2009, and to the Centre Pompidou during the fall of the same year), which features a fantastic image of a locomotive departing the Milan train station, suffused in billowing smoke, steam and the faint ghosts of muscular horses. We might well be reminded of J.M.W. Turner's earlier work titled *Rain, Stream and Speed* (1844), perhaps the first image in western art of an industrial juggernaut on the move. But in the case of Boccioni's painting, the only static element in its composition are the numerals 6943, which ominously float at the painting's center in a manner that anticipates Dadaist typographical play (and the many "free floating" signifiers celebrated by post-modern theoretics), Charles Demuth's *Figure 5 in Gold* (1928), and the subsequent reduction of painting to the manipulation of graphic emblems that was at the core of Pop Art and the various post-modern painting styles that derive from it. Demuth was in Paris from 1912 to 1914, so we can suppose that he might have had some contact with Futurist works. Another American (of Italian birth) who was defiantly influenced by Futurism was Joseph Stella, who was in Paris from 1909 to 1912. He met Boccioni in Paris in 1912, and his many paintings of the *Brooklyn Bridge* executed from 1913 through the 1920s are explicitly Futurist in form and content. It has often been remarked that, apart from the influence exerted by the faceted forms of an earlier Cubism, the important precedent for Futurism can be found in George Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon at La Grande Jatte*, (1886) where modern leisure-seekers are pictured "enjoying" the outdoors in regimented mechanical fashion—their moment of packaged reverie underscored by a stilted composition and divisionist technique. Divisionism emphasized a "scientific" regimentation of color dots that anticipated the fundamental trope of the digital images to be made a century later—pixels.[10]

In many accounts of the movement, Boccioni's *Farewells* is upheld as the *sine qua non* of Italian Futurism, or at least Futurist painting. But it is also important to note that Marinetti's notion of Futurism was not focused on the visual arts until after the publication of the *Initial Manifesto*, at which time Boccioni and others approached him for his sanctioning their work (Boccioni himself was the principal author of *The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* [1910-11] as well as a similarly titled manifesto devoted to sculpture written in 1912). And we should pay careful attention to the date of this particular painting, and note the high degree of likelihood of its being included in the February 1912 exhibition of Futurist works held in Paris at the Gallerie Bernheim-Juene. At that exact time, Marcel Duchamp was finishing the second of two paintings to be christened *Nude Descending A Staircase* (1912), a work that was destined to be a *succés de scandale* at the Armory Show in New York City in 1913. It seems unimaginable that Duchamp's painting was not influenced in some way by Boccioni's work, or the strident polemics that accompanied it.

According to Duchamp biographer Calvin Tompkins' account of *Nude Descending a Staircase #2,* "Duchamp submitted the just-finished picture to

for exhibition in the 1912 *Salon des Independents* exhibition which was scheduled to open on March 20."[11] We do know that Duchamp was aware of the Futurist exhibition: latter, he was recorded as saying that the Futurists were "urban impressionists...who make impressions of the city rather than the countryside,"[12] making him among the very first to note that Futurist art did not live up to the claims made for it by Futurist polemics. On the other hand, it also seems clear that Duchamp's dismissive attitude stems less from a serious consideration of the work and ideas in question than it did from a defensive intellectual jingoism that was common in Paris at the time; for example, witness the dignified chauvinism of Apollinaire's 1913 book on the Cubist painters, and then consider how it might be read as a polemic defense against the possibility that Cubism might be superseded by the invading (i.e. non-Parisian) Futurists in a fickle public imagination that might have started to grow weary of the earlier movement. We do know that Duchamp added a textual inscription to *Nude Descending #2* (clearly, at the end of its execution, possibly influenced by the floating numerals in Boccioni's *Farewells*), spelling out its title on the right side of its composition. This addition of text was one deviation from the Cubist practice of the day; Picasso had only recently (i.e. during the winter of 1911) begun to include floating text fragments in his work from the analytical phase of Cubism. The abandonment of synthesizing a single object simultaneously articulated in multiple points of view was another. Clearly, Duchamp's painting is of a figure represented in multiple phases of dynamic motion, a project closer to the practical concerns of Futurist painting than those of the several types of Cubism that were being practiced at the time.

My contention here is that Boccioni's *Farewells* (or other works similar to it), was available to Duchamp, and in all likelihood was an important influence on his work at a crucial juncture, despite his proclaimed dismissal of the Futurists. Further, if Duchamp had been aware of Boccioni's work in early 1912, he would also had to have been aware of the Futurist polemics associated with it (if not in early 1912, then a little later). If there is any basis for these contentions, then we might be able to trace Duchamp's famous indifference, perversity and veiled hostility toward the world to the deliriously de-humanized machine aesthetics of the Futurists, who in 1912 were bent on abolishing a much larger slice of the despised past than Duchamp had imagined up to that point. Thus, the reduction of human sexuality to a mechanical operation that forms the conceptual core of his 2nd *Nude Descending a Staircase* (called "a descending machine," by Robert Lebel)[13] as well as his famous *Large Glass* (1915-23) may owe something to an earlier and more explicit Futurist hostility directed at the autonomous human subject. And if this is true, than the real ethos of that dehumanizing hostility (veiled or otherwise), needs to be re-examined, especially in light of how that it has been distributed, replicated and elaborated upon through Duchamp's extensive influence on the Pop, Minimalist

and Conceptualist practices that have hence been enshrined as the stylistic paradigms of institutional post-avant-garde art.

As has been mentioned, *States of Mind: The Farewells* is no longer featured in the MOMA's Futurist gallery, although it likely will return when the current anniversary-related interest in Futurism subsides. It has been replaced by another image of a locomotive in motion titled *Armored War Train* by Gino Severini (1915). The change represented by this shift of emphasis is quite revealing. *Armored War Train* features an overhead view of an armored train hurtling up a mountain pass, cast as a compositional gash in the center of the painting. Riding the train are four faceless soldiers, who are pictured firing their weapons through ports on the left had side of their speeding juggernaut, and a heavy gun ensconced in a turret also training its sights leftward. The question is, who is the intended target of these weapons? The Austrian army? The political left? The past? *Passéism*? One thing is clear—modern war fighting is being celebrated in unequivocal terms, as is the reduction of the human operators of technology to the status of ancillary actors (and perhaps helpless victims) affixed to an engine of destruction that doubles as a metaphor for the industrial body politic, or the avant-gardist notion of historical necessity. The only thing that is missing is the companion piece to Severini's *Armored War Train, a* similar sized work titled *Hospital Train* (1915; in the collection of the Stedelijk museum), showing the tragic return trip of the aforementioned train, with wounded soldiers showing very visible suffering on their faces.

An important point to made about *Armored War Train* is its equation of the top of its composition with the relentlessness of the train's forward motion that cuts an aggressive phallic swath through faceted landscape and picture space alike. Aside from this exercise in pictorial violence, one other thing is clear: the soldiers are faceless, and are cast as ancillary entities attached to a determined mechanical purpose that is much larger and more powerful than they are. This is in keeping with virtually all of the human faces that inhabit their many other cityscapes and crowd scenes. Such images invoke a kind of homuncular sublime and remind us that Futurism was, in all seriousness, intended by Marinetti to be an art that reflected and spoke to the experience of the newly technologized urban masses. The problem was, those masses were indifferent if not out rightly hostile to such speechifying, opting instead to focus what little leisure time that they had on sport and other sentimental escapes from the mechanical drudgery that defined their lives. Even those escapes would be futile, because those same masses would be soon recruited and re-cast as "acceptable casualties" when the world rolled on to the unimaginable disaster of total war.

In that war, Boccioni was killed in a war-related accident in 1916, and during that same year, Severini became disenchanted with Marinetti in particular and Futurism in general, turning first toward Cubism and then toward a

post-cubist neo-classicism after 1920. In 1916, Carlo Carra repurposed his efforts in the direction of *Pittura Metafisica*, a movement founded by Giorgio De Chirico very soon after the Futurists became the subject of public attention. *Pittura Metafisica* is a movement that can be profitably analyzed on the basis of its being an introspective reaction-formation staged in direct response to the Futurist's manically aggressive extrospection—the latter having been discredited by its prominent association with the military adventurism that led to disaster; –witness the locomotives pictured in the distance of De Chirico's *Uncertainty of the Poet* (1913) or *The Philosopher's Conquest* (1915), and consider how they might be melancholy evocations of Futurism's hoped-for disappearance into a distant historical horizon, as if to wishfully say "good riddance!" Here, we are reminded of the fact that an art movement can be deemed to be influential not only if it inspires emulation, but also if it motivates contest and alternative reaction, and *Pittura Metafisica* and the variants of classical revivalism and Surrealism that followed in its wake can be said to represent just such a response, insofar as Futurism was concerned. Only Giacomo Balla continued to paint in a Futurist style, and his work slowly moved toward a kind of synesthetic abstraction that also distanced itself from Marinetti's controversial persona. Many other Futurist artists and poets were killed in the war.

Meanwhile, by war's end, Marinetti focused his efforts on writing projects such as his 1922 novel titled *The Untamables*, and he was always on the lookout for new disciples. He was also on the lookout for new opportunities to gain the attention of the mass media that was still in its infancy, though none of these efforts compared with the sudden visibility that he achieved by publishing the *Founding Manifesto* on the front page of the most prominent daily newspaper in Paris. In fact, aside from its being the first case where an artistic manifesto preceded the art movement that it described, Marinetti's *Founding Manifesto of Futurism* can also be called earliest contribution to the early avant-garde theater of media manipulation staged as a kind of performance art. In this, his is clearly an important precursor for subsequent media manipulators such as Salvador Dali, Yves Klein, Andy Warhol, Lynda Benglis and Jeff Koons. His credo of "anything of any value is theater" still haunts the highways and byways of international biennials around the globe, even if such exhibitions pretend to shy away from Marinetti's 1915 claim that "*The only way to inspire Italy with the warlike spirit today is through the theater.*"

Here, we have one of the earliest intimations of the real esthetic contribution of the Futurists—the recognition that dynamics could be understood as a distinct rhetorical property that could operate on a par with color and form. Their translation of dynamics from artistic subject matter to a fetishized theatrical effect may well be their most enduring legacy, insofar as the subsequent development of post-World War II art is concerned, as it not only anticipated

by the embrace of large scale as a signifier of artistic ambition and importance, but also in the embrace of noise as music and their cultivation of publicity stunts and other tendentious rhetoric as attempts to frame and eventually naturalize absurd propositions. In so doing, Marinetti was among the very first to show understanding of the emerging power of the mass media. The Futurist's focus on dynamics as a unique esthetic property seems important for another reason, if we ponder the common notion that gives art the mandate to speak art truth to power. By celebrating dynamics as a unique esthetic property awaiting artistic manipulation, the Futurists skewed the truth-to-power formula by highlighting the ways that power in itself is truth, meaning that the will to power represents the only ethical stance that could have any real meaning. Thus, it was only a mater of time before the celebrity portrait would displace the depiction of locomotives as the chief signifier of the kind of inevitable progress that has left the entire realm of ethics far back in its wake.

III

By the end of 1912, Kasimer Malevich and Vladimer Mayakovsky were propounding one version of Futurism in Russia, while during the same year, Mikhail Laronov and Natalia Goncharova were already practicing another variant of Futurism in Russia that they called Rayonism. An English variant called Vorticism was being advanced by Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound in London soon after the Futurists exhibited there in March of 1912,[14] indicating that Marinetti's ideas were not falling on deaf ears outside of Paris. But to further complicate things, Futurist artists and writers had begun to aggressively experiment with the full range of artistic media, ranging from innovative typographic "stagings" of Futurist poetry, Futurist theater, Futurist architecture and Futurist cinematic and musical "noise" performances, all achieved well before the 1916 advent of Dada in Zurich. The most famous of these experiments was Luigi Russolo's famous *Noise Concert* from 1913, featuring the discordant manipulation of 16 homemade sound-effect machines called "*intonarumori*." This early explosion of interest in multi-media performance is one of many under-acknowledged aspects of Futurist practice, and one that especially haunts the contemporary climate, defined as it is by terms such as "post-studio practice," "interdisciplinary and/or multi-disciplinary practice," "the technological de-skilling of the artist," and even "postart," as Allan Kaprow defined it in 1971.[15]

These innovations lead to the most important point that can be made about Futurism. It is commonly said that their movement ceased to exist after the first war, and because of that quick end, it was thought to be not very important or influential to the subsequent development of Modernist art forms

during the interwar period, let alone the post-World War II period. But a critical examination of the record suggests a different story. Like a disreputable relative, Futurism has been not-so-subtly disinvited to the family gathering of 20th Century art, but it seems that the only real sin that it committed was a forthright and guileless honesty and lack of hypocritical politesse with regard to the embarrassing family secrets of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art. Those secrets include that family's real (i.e. sadistic) motivations in relation to the idea of "a mother culture," its celebration of a will-to-power that is unmoderated by any consideration for others who were not part of its program, its willingness to seize resources and attention by any means possible, and its reliance on the rhetoric of "historical necessity" to bully its way into the forefront of public attention. Given this short catalog of sins, we can see that Futurist forms, motives and ethics continued to move forward in the art world in covert form throughout the entire second half of the 20th century, and are no doubt still alive-and-well in the first decade of the 21st.

And so, a definition of Futurist ethics and motives needs to be advanced at this juncture, and so they shall be. In a nutshell, they have to do with an idealized celebration of early adaptors to new technology (including social technology), who seize permission to presume that later adaptors can and should be excluded from social participation on the grounds that their frames of reference are not up-to-date, making them irrelevant to the inevitabilities of the world-as-it-is-becoming. If the art world of the early 21st century can be fairly characterized as an arena where narcissistic motives can be seen to run amok in a circus-like environment, then we can track that situation back to Futurism.

Indeed, from the time of Jackson Pollock's having been featured in the August 8, 1949 issue of *Life* magazine[16] to Matthew Barney's 2003 commandeering of the Guggenheim Museum as a found object for his presentation of *The Cremaster Cycle*, disguised Futurist motives have been fully in play in the evolution of contemporary art, so much so that they can be said to represent the ethical unconscious of that evolution despite what ever rationalizing counter-claims that might be made on its behalf. The history of the art of the past 50 years tells such a story again and again, making it seem new and "inevitable" simply by changing the props and characters that are ancillary to it.

Clearly, the Russian variant of Futurism can be seen as being crucially germinal to the subsequent development of Suprematist and Constructivist practices that were so revolutionary during the pre-Stalin period—this is especially demonstrable when we consider how the Constructivists also wanted to renounce the visual accoutrements of past art so that they could "affirm in these new arts a new element the kinetic rhythms as the basic forms of our perception of real time."[17] Like the Futurists, the Constructivists were inter-

ested in the esthetic possibilities of movement, and they were also focused on the forms and materials made available by new technology so as to speak to what they thought would be practical experience of the newly urbanized proletariat, this supposedly freeing them from the shackles of traditional religion and the mythographic representations of same.

Futurism also lurks as an oblique and distant influence in the inception and development of the educational program at the Weimar Bauhaus, which was conceived at the same time as the early establishment of the Constructivist movement in Russia. Though less traceable to Futurist influences than was their Russian counterparts, the Bauhaus's forwarding of a curriculum focused on the relationship between art, architecture and society predicated on establishing the artist as being involved with technological innovation and mass production seems to have some Futurist subtexts, and at least one of the early founders of that school had some contact with Futurism when Marinetti and Boccioni visited Berlin in 1912 to great fanfare. Here, I write of Lyonel Feininger, the second artist that Walter Gropius hired in 1919. His paintings from 1916 such as *Ville au Clair de Lune* or *The Green Bridge II* clearly took urban subjects, dynamic composition and faceted form from Futurist sources.[18]

Indeed, Futurism was the first modernist movement to fully see itself as an ideological *gesemtkunkstwerk* operating through multiple media rather than being just another enterprise in the stylistic evolution of any specific medium. Here we can see Marinetti's real role coming into a sharper focus: he worked tirelessly to cast himself as the directorial *"gesemtkunst-kunstler"* that provides executive guidance to a subordinate league of loyal *"gesemtkunst-workers"* that would unite their disparate artistic practices under an ideological banner that de-emphasized the cultures of competence embedded in their respective media in favor their alignment with the Futurist ideological program. This foreshadows so much in modern and contemporary art, ranging from Walter Gropius' central role in directing and reshaping the Bauhaus to the polemic roles played by André Breton and George Bataille in relation to Surrealism. Needless to say, the notion of the artist as provider of ideological and directorial guidance to other artists is now fully present in the more recent advent of the post-modern "executive artist" who manipulates studio assistants and sub-contractors as if they were so many ambulatory art materials. Of course, in Marinetti's self-invention as ideological impresario, we also see the early advent of another art practice typical to the 20th century, that being the director of major motion pictures who coordinates the "futurist cadres" of lights, cameras and actors to "create" within industrially-scaled dream machines—this for the sake of making a product that is supremely amenable to mass distribution for the sake of maximizing its address to a mass audience. Following from these examples, we can reasonably assume that the recent

valorization of curatorial practice as being an art form in its own right also owes much to Marinetti's founding model, and it is arguable that its mania for influence peddling owes much to his quasi-sadistic ethos.

After about 1960, the ethical unconscious of Futurism seems to have migrated from the arts to the rest of society, because the early modern technology of mechanically-assisted physical velocity had begun to be superseded by the late modern technology of electronically-boosted information velocity. Even this was prophesied by Marinetti, who was among the very first to understand the full social significance of Guglielmo Marconi's 1895 invention of radio transmission (for which he received the Nobel Prize in 1909). His short broadside from 1913 titled *Wireless Imagination* reads like a proto-Surrealist poem, or a giddy sales pitch for an internet start-up in the late 1990s. Here, I quote the entire document:

> By wireless imagination I mean the absolute freedom of images or analogies expressed by liberated words, without the conducting wires of syntax and *without any punctuation*... "Up to now writers have indulged themselves in direct analogies. E.g., they have compared a fox terrier to a tiny thoroughbred. Others, more progressive, might compare this same trembling fox terrier to a little Morse apparatus. I myself compare it to boiling water. The analogies here have become increasingly vast, the connections increasingly deep, though very remote. *Analogy is nothing but the immense love that connects distant, seemingly different and hostile, things.* It is through very vast analogies that this orchestral style, at once polychromatic, polyphonic, and polymorphic, can embrace the life of matter. When, in my *Battle of Tripoli*, I compared a trench bristling with bayonets to an orchestra, a machine gun to a femme fatale, I intuitively introduced a great part of the universe into a brief episode of African battle. Images are not flowers to be chosen and sparingly picked, as Voltaire maintained. They are the very lifeblood of poetry. Poetry must be an uninterrupted succession of fresh images, or it is nothing but anemia and chlorosis. The vaster the connections an image encompasses, the longer it will keep its stupefying power" (*Manif. of Futurist Literature*). The wireless imagination and words in freedom will lead us into the very essence of matter. In discovering new analogies between distant and apparently opposite things, we will evaluate them ever more intimately. Instead of humanizing animals, vegetables, and minerals (as we have done for so long), we can *animalize, vegetalize, mineralize, electrify, or liquefy* style by making it live with the very life of matter. E.g., a blade of grass that says, "I'll be greener tomorrow." Thus we have: **—Condensed metaphors. —Telegraphic images. –Sums of vibrations. —Knots of thoughts. —Fans of movement opening and closing. —Abbreviations of analo-**

gies. —Statements of colors. —Dimensions, weight, measure, and speed of sensations. —Plunge of the essential word into the waters of sensibility minus the concentric circles that the word produces.—Pauses of intuition. —Movements in duple, triple, quadruple, quintuple time. —Explanatory analytical poles carrying the wires of intuition.[19]

Needless to say, the transformation of social technology made possible by electronic media has exerted profound effects on art that operate of many levels, including the facilitation of the kind of the kind of massive disruption of shared assumption described and exemplified by the above-cited document. Given its proposal of an ontology of perpetual rupture, we see how it re-instituionalizes a model of artistic success that can be called "breakthrough and goodbye," earmarked by the circulation of fresh, newly minted artistic troops being marshaled to the front of the art world's contemporary "contest of meaning," only to be pushed into the no-man's land of (pseudo) public attention to then be left to wither and die when the next generation of recruits moves to the front of the art world's highly fetishized pseudo-history of next-new-things changing everything for the next-five-minutes. Their only hope is that they might be discovered by historical rescue workers with the power to give the miraculous resuscitation of historicizing explanation. But the ambulance of art history is poorly equipped to handle the task of triage conducted at this magnitude, so the no man's land has been well populated with those hoping-against-hope to partake of the narcissistic reward of social visibility that never arrives. Working from within this model, it may be possible to say that the multi-authorial *gesemtposework* called *Facebook* may represent the last great Futurist work of art. No doubt, it has Allan Kaprow smiling from beyond the grave.

IV

Even though Marinetti died in 1944, the movement that he initiated can be said to have lived on in a number of ways. For example, given the international surfeit of Futurist exhibitions and related events marking the recent centenary of the *Founding Manifesto*, it might be of interest to look back at the two major historical exhibitions of Futurist art for the sake of understanding their place in the context of the contemporary artistic practices that surrounded them. The earliest of these was Joshua C. Taylor's *Futurism* held at the Museum of Modern Art during the summer of 1961, six months after the inauguration of John F. Kennedy and only three months after the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Taylor's exhibition did much to synthesize the his-

addled notion of a manifest destiny that cared little about human consequence. And just as Marinetti's *Futurism* ended in the disaster of the Great War, so too did its McLuhanite revival run aground when the American dream that it fueled and reflected was dashed by the Vietnam war and its socio-economic blowback.

Artists who had trained in various aspects of commercial art, such as James Rosenquist (a billboard painter), Andy Warhol (an advertising illustrator) and Roy Lichtenstein were taking the commercial production techniques that they learned and applying them to making images that would eventually be called *Pop Art* when the British art critic Lawrence Alloway immigrated to New York in 1961. It was Alloway who was best able to translate the "social imaginering" of the aforementioned McLuhanites into an art critical practice that was responsive to the dramatic shifts of emphasis that emerged from Pop Art's wake during the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, it was Alloway who had coined the term Pop Art in 1958 as a short hand descriptor for the productions of artists who were flexible enough to embrace "the new role of the Fine Arts is to be one of the possible forms of communication in an expanding framework that also includes the mass arts"[22] and he was the first to suggest a radical repurposing of the artist's role in a way that opened onto a practice that could be responsive to both commercial and non-commercial opportunities. But after Taylor's *Futurist* exhibition, the emphasis shifted. In early 1962, Warhol's work became explicitly mechanical and willfully repetitious, as can be seen his subsequent use of silkscreen to remove the evidence of touch from his applications of paint to canvas—witness his suite of Campbell's Soup Can paintings, or his early celebrity portraits featuring sequenced variations of the same image. His famous statement attesting to his desire to be "a machine,"[23] might also reflect the influence of Futurism, as could his series of "disaster" works executed in 1963 and 1964. Roy Lichtenstein's 1963 painting titled *Image Duplicator,* and James Rosenquist's cycloramic painting from 1965 titled *F-111* also marshal Futurist influences into the foreground of the contemporary artistic concerns of the early 1960s, and the cast Alloway's important distinction between Pop Art/1 and Pop Art /2 in a clear raking light. For Alloway, the difference between the two was:

> Pop Art/Phase 1 involved an open attitude where art was scattered among all of man's artifacts, and could be situated anywhere... From 1961 to 1964, Pop Art came to mean art that included a reference to mass media sources...The productions of Pop Art/2 are dualistic, with unexpected structure conferred on existing subject matter or with structure following the display of unexpected subjects. The ambiguities of reference and speculation on the status of the work of art itself, basic to this period, are well within the iconographical limits of art from Futurism, to Dada to Purism.[24]

Alloway's distinction of Pop Art I and II can be read in several ways. Clearly, it bespoke a protectionist attitude that was pointed at preserving an awareness of the British roots of the movement (and his own Marinetti-like role as its theoretical instigator); it also announced the coincidence of the 2nd "American" phase of Pop Art as being connected with his own arrival on American soil. But the cat's cradle of motives and influences that were pushing and pulling on the evolution of Pop was far more complex than were described in any of Alloway's accounts of the movement, and along with Dada and Surrealism, Futurism should be seriously considered as representing an important impetus for Pop's move into the forefront of artistic interest during the 1960s. To support this contention, read Richard Hamilton's own prescient remark from 1961, and note his pointed conflation of Greenbergian post-painterly abstraction with the term "decoration":

> ...so has popular culture abstracted from Fine Art its role as mythmaker. The restriction of his area of relevance has been confirmed by the artist with smug enthusiasm so that decoration, one of art's few remaining functions, has assumed a ridiculously inflated importance...It isn't surprising, therefore, to find some painters are now agog at the ability of the mass entertainment machine to project, perhaps more pervasively than has ever before been possible, the classic themes of artistic vision and to express them with a precise cultural date-stamp. ...Two art movements of the early part of the century insisted on their commitment to manifest their image of a society in flux: Dada, which denied then-current social attitudes and pressed its own negative propositions, and Futurism, with its positive assertion of involvement. Both were rebellious, or at least radical movements... Dada anarchically seditions and Futurism admitting to a core of Authoritarian dogma...Futurism as ebbed and has no successor, yet to me the philosophy of affirmation seems susceptible to fruition... Affirmation propounded as an avant-garde aesthetic is rare. The history of art is that of a long series of attacks upon social and aesthetic values held to be dead and moribund...The Pop-Fine-Art standpoint...is, like Futurism, fundamentally a statement of belief in the changing values of society...a cross-fertilization of Futurism and Dada which upholds a respect for the culture of the masses, and a conviction that the artist in twentieth century urban life is inevitably a consumer of mass culture and potentially a contributor to it.[25]

Another way of investigating the potential avenues of Futurist influence that followed from Taylor's exhibition is to take note of its potential for impacting

the early inception and reception of Minimalist art. In 1960, Donald Judd was still painting in an abstract expressionist-derived style and writing trenchant essays and reviews for Arts Magazine and Studio International. But after the summer of 1961, he began making odd quasi-sculptural objects from painted plywood sporting odd additions of steel pipe and galvanized sheet metal. By 1964, he was having his work fabricated by the Bernstein Brothers according to his own specifications, giving birth to the objects that have since been labeled *Minimal Art* by Richard Wolheim in 1965,[26] and *Specific Objects* by himself during that same year.[27] If we were to reexamine these works today, we would no doubt conclude that they owe much more to Russian Constructivism than they do to Italian Futurism, remembering that Judd had a very well-informed sense of 20th century art history. Yet, they were never made in the kind of world that informed Constructivism, but the world in which they were made had a decidedly Futurist character.

Certainly, the Futurist's early interest in mechanical effect and industrial manufacture is evident in the three-dimensional works created by Judd, Andre and LeWitt throughout the 1960. But the Minimalists deviated from the Futurist program in one important way: their work sought dynamic effect not through any representation of velocity, but through the radical negation of it. To unravel this point, we should note that by the time that the Minimalists exhibited together in the *Primary Structures* exhibition at the Jewish Museum in 1966, velocity had became a commonplace feature of the American experience. The then-current coinage of the term "jet set" attests to this, as did the fact that galleries were either showing variants of the color field paintings that were being championed by the likes of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, or they were showing work that was informed by the type of Pop Art that Alloway and Lucy Lippard were advocating. In both instances, velocity was a given, be it of an optical kind in the former case (i.e. how fast the painting could 'hit' you), or, in the latter case, the kind that pertains to the speed with which a recognition of an emerging social pattern could be distilled into an icon. Thus, the effects of pictorial and iconographic velocity had become commonplace and passé.

The Minimalists recognized this circumstance and responded with the only thing that could create the jarring effect that was so much a part of Futurist aims, that being a radical commitment to absolute stasis that would challenge the normative velocities that viewers had internalized as a part of their lives. The effect of their work was that of a kind of phenomological crash that confronted viewers with an uncanny realness that unblurred the blurry giveness of the fast moving world. Of course, there was more to it than that, and that opens up onto an inquiry into the psychological exchange that takes place amid the "confrontation" of viewing Minimalist works of art.

One writer who has confronted the political and psychological dy-

namics of this exchange is Anna Chave, who published a controversial essay titled *Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power* in 1990. After pondering the fact that many of the titles of Frank Stella's early paintings reference a sly and curiously unexplained nostalgia for a kind of "Nazi effect," (she cites *Riechstag* [1958], *Der Fahne Hoch* [1959] and *Arbiet Mach Frie* [1958]), she concludes that,

> In their severity—in the violence they exhibit toward viewers—the black paintings, like Minimalism generally, might well be described as perpetuating a kind of cultural terrorism, forcing viewers into the role of victim, a role that may or may not bring with it a moment of revelation, depending on the viewer's previous experience with victimization. Like terrorism also, Minimalist art was, to a degree, designed to work through the manipulation of the media.[28]

Certainly, Stella's early dabbling in "violence toward the viewer' predated the arrival of Taylor's *Futurism* exhibition, but his may be the only example of Minimalist practice to do so, and given that the works in question are paintings, they may not even qualify as examples of the term. But it is undeniable that the Minimalists saw themselves as being engaged with a kind of theater of masculinity that was simultaneously physical, cerebral and strategic in relation to other practices that surrounded their work. Like the works made by many of their Futurist predecessors, their fetishization of machine forms comes with an aggressive celebration of the superiority of the disembodied subject who can transcend the category of "mere esthetic pleasure" so as to submissively embrace the authority met out by the Minimalist artwork's prosthetic extension of their author's veiled sadism.

It is also interesting to note that when Taylor's *Futurism* exhibition traveled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art during the following fall, local artistic production also seemed to go through a metamorphosis. Very soon thereafter, artists such as Billy Al Bengston and Robert Irwin started making works that would latter be dubbed examples of a distinctly southern California style called *Finish Fetish*, featuring three dimensional works sporting the space age look of technological manufacture that eschewed handicraft Soon, Irwin and James Turrell would move in the direction of creating installations featuring subtle manipulations of light, space and reflective surface, creating auras with no objects as a riposte to the New York Minimalist's creation of objects without aura. This technologically polished orientation would eventually lead to one of the most controversial "exhibitions" in the history of the Los Angeles County Museum. I refer to *Art and Technology*, curated by Maurice Tuchman taking place in partial intermittent forms and locations be-

with a text that shrewdly mimics the eleven-point structure and braying rhetoric of Marinetti's *Founding Manifesto*, written exactly 100 years later by Franco Bernardi. It is titled *The Post-Futurist Manifesto*:

> 1. We want to sing of the danger of love, the daily creation of a sweet energy that is never dispersed.
>
> 2. The essential elements of our poetry will be irony, tenderness and rebellion.
>
> 3.Ideology and advertising have exalted the permanent mobilization of the productive and nervous energies of humankind towards profit and war. We want to exalt tenderness, sleep and ecstasy, the frugality of needs and the pleasure of the senses.
>
> 4. We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of autonomy. Each to her own rhythm; nobody must be constrained to march on a uniform pace. Cars have lost their allure of rarity and above all they can no longer perform the task they were conceived for: speed has slowed down. Cars are immobile like stupid slumbering tortoises in the city traffic. Only slowness is fast.
>
> 5. We want to sing of the men and the women who caress one another to know one another and the world better.
>
> 6. The poet must expend herself with warmth and prodigality to increase the power of collective intelligence and reduce the time of wage labour.
>
> 7. Beauty exists only in autonomy. No work that fails to express the intelligence of the possible can be a masterpiece. Poetry is a bridge cast over the abyss of nothingness to allow the sharing of different imaginations and to free singularities.
>
> 8. We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries... We must look behind to remember the abyss of violence and horror that military aggressiveness and nationalist ignorance is capable of conjuring up at any moment in time. We have lived in the stagnant time of religion for too long. Omnipresent and eternal speed is already behind us, in the Internet, so we can forget its syncopated rhymes and find our singular rhythm.
>
> 9. We want to ridicule the idiots who spread the discourse of war: the fanatics of competition, the fanatics of the bearded gods who incite massacres, the fanatics terrorized by the disarming feminin-

ity blossoming in all of us.

10. We demand that art turns into a life-changing force. We seek to abolish the separation between poetry and mass communication, to reclaim the power of media from the merchants and return it to the poets and the sages.

11. And through solidarity revolt against exploitation. We will sing of the infinite web of knowledge and invention, the immaterial technology that frees us from physical hardship. We will sing of the rebellious cognitariat who is in touch with her own body. We will sing to the infinity of the present and abandon the illusion of a future.[32]

Notes

[1] Filippo Thommaso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," (1909) in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Copatelli (New York: Noonday Press, Farrer, Strauss and Giroux, 1971). 42.

[2] Joseph L. Mankewicz, (writer and director), *All About Eve* (20th Century Fox, 1950).

[3] See http://www.sfmoma.org/press/releases/exhibitions/804 (accessed October 10, 2009). The press release states: "From October 14 to 18, 2009, the legacy of Futurism—one of the seminal and most controversial avant-garde art movements of the twentieth century—will be celebrated in San Francisco in a citywide project entitled Metal + Machine + Manifesto = Futurism's First 100 Years. This year marksthe hundredth anniversary of Futurism's founding document, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's 'Manifesto of Futurism' (1909), which boldly denounced nineteenth-century nostalgia for the past and instead embraced the noise, technology, and rapid change of modern life. This series of performances, lectures, and events will examine Futurism's relationship to innovative artistic forms, radical and regressive politics, and performance work today." The SFMOMA "open-space" blog remarks can be found at http://blog.sfmoma.org/2009/08/why-i-wont-celebrate-futurisms-anniversary/ (accessed October 10, 2009). For a thorough review of the many institutional "celebrations" of the Futurist legacy taking place through 2009, see Maria Gough, "Manifesto Destiny," *Artforum*, October, 2009. 107-110.

[4] See Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (1977), trans. Mark Polizzaoti (New York: Semiotext[e], 1986). Virilio admits to the collapse of logic embedded in his "logic of velocity" when he writes "Speed thus appears as the essential style of conflicts and cataclysms, the current 'arms race' is in fact only 'the arming of the race' toward the end of the world as distance, in other words, as a field of action" (p. 136).

[5] For an analysis of Marinetti's early poetry, see Marjorie Perloff, The Futurist Moment: Avant-garde, Avant-Guerre and the Language of Rupture, (University of Chicago Press, 1986). Perloff writes: "Even more ironic, the Marinitti whose

'theories' were ostensibly more 'daring' than those of 'all previous and contemporary schools,' was writing, as late as 1909, decadent versions of Baudelarian lyric..." (p. 85).

[6] Benito Mussolini, quoted in Giuseppi Bottai, "Fascism as Intellectual Revolution," in *A Primer in Italian Fascism*, ed., Jeffery T. Schnapp (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). 20. Marinetti's own hyperbole-laced adulation of Mussolini from 1929 ("Mussolini shines forth like an electric lamp") was republished in English translation in Marinetti, *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, 158-159.

[7] On the subject of excessive obedience to the super ego, see Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), trans. Joan Riviere (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961). Freud writes "When it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside of the ego, as it occurs in melancholia... It may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects" (p. 19). For Marinetti, giving up the "object" of symbolist poetics seems connected to his "internalization" of the mechanical world that the Symbolists abhorred, casting Futurism as an elaborate sadistic fantasy enacted against whatever it was about Symbolism that was unattainable, or that failed to substitute for the unattainability of maternal reassurance. Given that Marinetti was fiercely anti-Catholic up to the end of his life (at which pointy he proclaimed that Jesus was a Futurist), we can also see this sadistic fantasy directed at the presumed failure of the mother church to continue to adequately function as a coherent organization of transitional objects in a radically changing world.

[8] Marinetti, *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, 41.

[9] Marinetti et. al. "Futurist Synthesis of the War," in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, 62-63. Note that this is an English language version that substitutes the francophone Passéism for the Italian Passsatismo, which was the word that was used when the document was first published in Milan.

[10] The best source for detailed information about the development and extended influence of Futurism is "The Dictionary of Futurism," which is a lengthy appendix in the exhibition catalog accompanying *Futurismo and Futurismi* (1986), curated by Pontus Hulton for the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. The 200-page dictionary was compiled by over 30 contributors working under Hulton's direction, and is a wealth of information about Futurism and its many related subjects. All unattributed facts stated in this essay are derived from this source, unless otherwise noted.

[11] Calvin Tompkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996). 79. It should be noted that Duchamp withdrew Nude Descending a Staircase #2 from the exhibition after a dispute with organizers Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, although it was later included when the same exhibition traveled to Barcelona some months later (see p. 81). The likelihood of it having been reworked during the intervening period of time is worthy of note.

[12] Quoted in Tompkins, 80. Much latter, Duchamp was more charitable toward Futurism in general and Boccioni in particular. In the Société Anonyme catalog of 1943, he wrote, "Unlike other movements, Futurism had its manager,

Marinetti—but the real brain was Boccioni, who conceived the most convincing manifestos at the time when the world was thirsty for new art expressions." See Hulton, et. al., "The Dictionary of Futurism," 469.

[13] Tompkins, 80.

[14] It is worth noting that by the time that the Vorticists had put out their own publication titled *BLAST!*, running in two numbers in 1914. In the 1st of those, (July 1914), the short romance with Marinetti was already fading, as Pound wrote "I have no doubt that Italy needed Mr. Mainetti, but he did not set on the egg that hatched me, and I am wholly opposed to his aesthetic principles." (see Hulton. et. al., 542.). But years later, Pound was still following Marinetti's lead by living in Italy (1924 to 1945), calling him (for political reasons) "thoroughly Simpatico" in 1933 and also writing about Mussolini in worshipful tones after the two men met in 1933, the same year that he One important difference is that Marinetti never embraced Pound's anti-Semitism. This is made explicit in his book *The Crisis of the Modern World* from 1938. It should also be mentioned that Mussolini also eschewed anti-Semitic statements and policies until the time that he needed German support for his failing military and political positions. See Lawrence Rainey, "The Creation of the Avant-Garde: F. T. Marinetti and Ezra Pound, " in Modernism/modernity - Volume 1, Number 3, September 1994. 195-220.

[15] "Postart" was defined by Allan Kaprow in his essay titled "The Education of the Un-Artist, Part 1," (included in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, [edited by Jeff Kelley, University of California, 1993, 97-109). The neo-Futurist implications of his assertion were spelled out when he wrote: "But nowadays, the modern arts themselves have become commentaries, and may forecast the postartistic age. ...we'll act in response to the given natural and urban environments such as the sky, the ocean floor, winter resorts, motels, the movements of cars, public services and the communications media.... Preview of a 2001-Visual-of-the-USA-Landscape-Via-Supersonic-Jet. Every seat on the jet is equipped with monitors showing the earth below as the jet speeds over it. Choice of pictures in infrared, straight color or black-and-white; single or in combination on various parts of the screen. Plus zoom lenses and stop-action controls.... Scenes from other trips are retrievable for flashback cuts or contrasts. Past comments on present. Selector list: Hawaiian Volcanoes, the Pentagon, a Harvard Riot seen when approaching Boston, Sunbathing on a Skyscraper.... Audio hookup offers nine channels of pre-recorded criticism of the American scene: two channels of light criticism, one of pop criticism and six channels of heavy criticism. There will also be a channel for recording one's own criticism on a take-home video cassette documenting the entire trip.... P.S. This, also, is not art, because it will be available to too many people." (108-109).

[16] Jackson Pollock was profiled in the August 8, 1949 issue of *Life* magazine. There, an anonymous commentator alluded to Clement Greenberg when he wrote "Recently a formidably high-brow New York critic hailed the brooding, puzzled-looking man shown above as a major artist of our time and a fine candidate to become 'the greatest American painter of the 20th Century.'" Abstract Expressionism is often supposed to a movement that celebrated what Barnett Newman

Paul McCarthy's *Painter* (1995) as Self-Portrait and Self Loathing

Robert R. Shane

> The triumph over beauty is completed by humor, the malicious pleasure elicited by any successful deprivation. There is laughter because there is nothing to laugh about. Laughter, whether reconciled or terrible, always accompanies the moment when a fear is ended. It indicates a release, whether from physical danger or from the grip of logic. Reconciled laughter resounds with the echo of escape from power; wrong laughter copes with fear by defecting to the agencies which inspire it. It echoes the inescapability of power.
>
> —Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1947)[1]

Painter (1995) was a video performance in which Paul McCarthy ostensibly parodied his father, the art world, and consumer culture. The whole work was made to look like a children's television art show. The main character of the painter, played by McCarthy, was supposed to be teaching his audience on the other side of the television screen, but was instead the one acting like a child. This piece, like so much of McCarthy's work, signaled an incapacity of art to be critical in a consumer society (in contrast to the criticality of the modernist avant-garde). In *Painter* commodity culture was shown not only to have infected McCarthy's sense of self and his family life, but art as well. By parodying specific artists, and collectors and dealers in general, he raised questions with regards to the commercial sale of art in the gallery system. While this work was on the surface a parody of family members and artists, I argue that it was ultimately a cynical parody of himself, his own artistic practice, and his own commercial success. Throughout *Painter* McCarthy projected his internal hostility and self-loathing into his representations of his father, artists and collectors, but then perceived the aggression as coming from

them rather than from himself, a process that psychoanalysts call introjection.[2] In fact, McCarthy's parodies have very little to do with the objects of his parody—such as the abstract expressionist painter Willem de Kooning—and have more to do with himself. Parody usually implies a certain measure of criticality, and its purpose is to offer at the very least the promise of creating a world better than the one being parodied by raising critical consciousness regarding the status quo; but as a narcissistic image of self-loathing, *Painter* acquiesced to the very aspects of art world it set out to critique. This compliance was so troubling, because, as a parody of the art world, the work purported that art is helpless in a consumer society. This was a dangerous denial of art's capacity to offer alternative points of view, new experiences, or to be critical.

Painter (1995)

In *Painter* McCarthy wore a blonde wig styled similar to Willem de Kooning's hair, a giant bulbous nose, painter's gloves enlarged to the size of a cartoon character's hands, and a painter's smock. The performance imitated an art instruction television show for children. It began with McCarthy giving directions into the camera's lens in a patronizing tone as if talking down to a child, though his speech was slurred and at times unintelligible. Most of the performance took place in one room with faux wood paneling, but every once in a while he would step out of the room into a hallway or a bedroom across the hall. As the camera followed, the viewer could see that the painter's studio was part of a cheaply constructed suburban home.

Immature sexuality was a dominant theme in *Painter*. At several points McCarthy painted with paint and condiments on giant canvases. He used brushes as tall as he and other oversized phallic objects pivoted against his crotch. While performing these actions he would make bizarre noises and speak absurd phrases. On several occasions he chanted "Dekooooning" like a howling coyote. At another point while playing with a canvas he kept singing: "If the women could see me now, my boy, pop goes the weasel."

Childish sexual behavior often segued to infantile scatological play. McCarthy gave instructions to the camera on mixing "paint" (mayonnaise and ketchup) while whimpering like a little child. He was surrounded by several puffy paint tubes each taller than him labeled "RED," "BLUE," "BLACK," and "SHIT." He threw the RED tube on a table, cut it down the middle like a surgeon opening a chest cavity, and then poured black paint into it. Later, after squatting over a fake office plant in the bedroom and urinating, he went into the hallway and drove his arm in and out of the SHIT tube for several minutes. A disturbing, sloshing sound could be heard.

One of the most significant moments in the performance (which I analyze in the section below titled "Parody of the Father") was a scene in which McCarthy cut his cartoon hand with a butcher knife. In the hallway he held one finger of his cartoon glove out from under his smock to make it look like a penis and dipped the tip in red paint to simulate the glans. Then he walked back in the studio and fell asleep standing up, snoring loudly. Sleep-walking he sat down at a table and started stabbing his fingers. Waking up and whimpering he began to hack the penis-finger with a butcher knife. Eventually his whimpering gave way to laughter and then fascination with his destruction. He kept chopping the penis-finger repeatedly for several minutes longer until finally he simply pulled off what remained.

The video cut back and forth between the scene described above and two other locations: the painter's art dealer's office and the set of a television talk show. In these scenes the theme of the work extended beyond the painter's own problems to his relationship with others in the art world. In a scene in his art dealer's office, the dealer (played by American performance artist Barbara T. Smith) wore a bulbous nose identical to the one worn by McCarthy. He told her that he had shows in Europe and he threw a temper tantrum while demanding more money. At times he crawled around on the floor like a toddler, and made loud "Bronx cheers" whenever she tried to speak. In a later scene on the set of a fake talk show, two collectors—a woman from Germany and her husband from California—gave a laundry list of the work they owned by El Lizzitsky, Mark Rothko, Mike Kelley (a friend of and frequent collaborator with McCarthy), Gerhard Richter, and Martin Kippenberger. McCarthy sat quietly and listened.

The video ended with the messy painter in the living room of his home accompanied by his dealer. A line of collectors stood outside his door. One of them came in, and the painter got on a table, dropped his pants and bent over. While the painter stared-off looking bored, the collector sniffed his bare anus for about a minute with his bulbous nose. Finally the collector got up. Enthralled with his experience, he smiled to the dealer and said approvingly that it was "Very nice!"

Painter was partially funded by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. When it was shown at the Museum, some paintings from the performance remained on the set while others were hung on the gallery walls.[3]

Parodies of the Father

McCarthy's biological father and father-figures in the art world were parodied in *Painter*, and all were shown to be vulgar products of commodity culture. The associations made between his father and commodities show how deeply personal the problems of consumer culture were for McCarthy, as I will

demonstrate below. He identified with consumer elements and they had come to constitute part of his identity; but then he attempted to expel those elements from his psyche through his visceral performance by mocking them. In his famous account of parody and pastiche, philosopher Frederic Jameson noted that a parodist usually capitalizes on the uniqueness of the individual being parodied.[4] However, the viewer did not learn much about McCarthy's real father; and the parody of de Kooning was overt on the surface—insofar as the wig was recognizable and he was chanting "dekooooning!"—but it did not capture any aspects of the Abstract Expressionist's personal mannerisms or artistic style. McCarthy's work implied that subjects become homogenized in a consumer culture, thus erasing the possibility of either creating or imitating an individual style (as is characteristic Jameson's account of pastiche). However, I will show that in this instance the failure of McCarthy's empathy with his subjects is due more to the fact that the work was ultimately a self-portrait, rather than a true parody of anyone else.

Parody of the Father

A butcher knife and ketchup were two symbols employed by McCarthy to mock his father in *Painter*. The former was used as a substitute for the father's phallus and power; the latter was used for that purpose, but also to demonstrate the intertwining of family life and consumer culture.

McCarthy revealed in an interview that his father was a butcher in a grocery store and that his earliest memories of him in a bloody apron were somewhat traumatic:

> PM: My father was hard working; he worked seven days a week from seven in the morning until seven at night. When he wasn't working at his job he was working at home. He expected me to work around the house.
> JS: What was his occupation?
> PM: Well, I think that's where it gets interesting. (laughs) My father was a butcher. He worked in a grocery store. One of my earliest memories of my father is an image of him in a bloody apron.[5]

McCarthy's work was a way of rescripting the early childhood trauma of seeing his father in a bloody butcher's apron so that he could play the terrifying butcher rather than the scared child. As psychoanalyst Robert Stoller claimed, rescripting trauma is not what Freud called "working-through," rather it is repetition. McCarthy recognized the repetition in his body of work and even went so far as to call it a "kind of solution" to trauma (as opposed to an actual solution).[6]

In *Painter* McCarthy played a butcher who cut up his own fingers,

one of which had been painted to look like a penis. The cutting was a highly ambivalent act. In one respect, McCarthy was castrating his father by chopping his father's hand; but in another respect, by playing his father he was also castrating himself. In this scene of self-mutilation McCarthy had fallen victim to what psychoanalyst W.R.D. Fairbairn would have called his "internal saboteur."[7] The perceived threatening aspects of his father, which he internalized and repressed, resurfaced in an act of self-destruction.

McCarthy parodied his father through the use of ketchup as well. With this symbol one finds the intertwining of family life and consumer culture for McCarthy. Ketchup had appeared throughout McCarthy's oeuvre since the early 1970s. I quote here passages from two interviews in which McCarthy addressed the significance of ketchup in his work:

> There is a correlation to the Campbell soup can. It [ketchup] was something so central to the dinner table. But the fact is my father put ketchup on everything.[8]

> ...in 1973 I started using ketchup in performances. I was interested in the bottle as a phallus with an orifice. The smell. Ketchup as food as blood as paint. Ketchup as an American family icon, processed consumption. I grew up using ketchup on everything; it is an American ritual passed on from father to son. [...] In the performances I did in America, I bought Heinz Ketchup. Then in England in 1983, I did a series of performances and I bought a bottle of Daddies Ketchup. The label has a man's face on it. Here was the commodity patriarch with a face and a body. [...] ...it's a portrait of the quintessential 1950s Dad.[9]

I'd like to analyze three aspects of these quotations.

First there is for McCarthy the association of ketchup with his father who "put it on everything." Ketchup in McCarthy's work became a fetish, a substitute for his father's mature genitals and sexuality.[10] The bottle represented the phallus and the ketchup the fluid it ejaculates. This symbol is deeply embedded in McCarthy's psyche, so much so that he said has dreamt about the sexual potential of ketchup. McCarthy said that his early performance *Karen Ketchup Dream* was based on a dream he had in which he was covering his wife and fellow artist Karen McCarthy with ketchup. He said of this piece: "There was kind of an erotic thing to it."[11] (This was a very violent eroticism considering that he also associated ketchup with blood.) In *Painter* once again the ketchup bottle was used as an ejaculating phallus.

McCarthy's parody of his father was a childish substitute for mature genital sexuality. The sexual nature of the parody was evident not only through the phallic imagery of the glove's penis-finger and the ketchup ejaculations

from the phallic bottle, but in his language as well. He began the performance speaking like one in authority, but later he sang the children's song "Pop goes the weasel" while saying "If the women could see me now, my boy!"

Second, McCarthy drew a correlation in the passages I quoted between ketchup and consumer culture calling ketchup "processed consumption." McCarthy said that his work had a connection to Pop art, and that he felt there was a connection between the ketchup and Andy Warhol's soup cans. Warhol had thought that commodity culture was a homogenizing force in America. In an interview he said:

> Someone said Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government [referring to the Soviet Union in 1963]. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way.
> I think everybody should be a machine.
> I think everybody should like everybody.[12]

The difference between Warhol and McCarthy is that Warhol ironically embraced the homogenization of identity under capitalism, whereas McCarthy has viewed it as a crisis.

The third aspect I'd like to highlight brings the first two together: the world of the father and the world of consumer culture were intertwined in McCarthy's performance. Ketchup is cheap condiment, a cheap consumer product, and part of a ritual of processed consumption that McCarthy called "an American ritual passed on from father to son." The mass produced bottle of Daddies brand ketchup represented the quintessential 1950s Dad, he said. Born in 1945, McCarthy was raised by a 1950s Dad. Ketchup represented his father and he saw his father as just another consumer, just one in the long line of "commodity patriarchs" passing down rituals of consumption.[13] The intimacies of family life in McCarthy's work were portrayed as irrevocably infected by consumer society.[14] Here I believe the pessimism of McCarthy's work echoed the sentiments of philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's view of consumer culture (though there is no evidence to suggest McCarthy was influenced directly by them) more so than Warhol's. As they wrote:

> ...human beings are forced into real conformity. The blessing that the market does not ask about birth is paid for in the exchange society by the fact that the possibilities conferred by birth are molded to fit the production of goods that can be bought on the

> market. Each human being has been endowed with a self of his or her own, different from all the others, so that it could all the more surely be made the same.[15]

McCarthy's work lamented consumer culture's attack on subjectivity as individuals are forced into what Adorno and Horkheimer called "real conformity." The parody of McCarthy's father in *Painter* was simultaneously an attack on consumer culture. He was asserting that family life is contaminated by consumerism, and therefore one's subjectivity first formed in early childhood is likewise contaminated by consumerism.

Parody of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art

Intertwined with the attack on his father was the transference of that aggression to figures from the art world. McCarthy equated his father the butcher with the Abstract Expressionist painter Willem de Kooning. Frequently throughout the performance he howled "dekooooooooning" fetishizing the elder artist's name while also creating an empty parody of his gesture. (McCarthy's painted gestures lacked the sort of mature empathy with the medium displayed by de Kooning and his contemporaries such as Hans Hofmann.[16]) In her analysis of perversion, psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel observed that the pervert needs to tear down the world of the father in order to be able to present his own immature sexuality as an adequate substitute.[17] The destruction and parody of the father with ketchup and the meat cleaver was necessary so that McCarthy could hold giant paint brushes, substitutes for the father's phallus, and paint giant pseudo-Abstract Expressionist paintings.

McCarthy's disregard for Abstract Expressionism (in addition to his parody of de Kooning, Mark Rothko's name was mentioned by the two collectors during the talk show scene) was shared by a number of West coast artists of his generation who felt marginalized from the New York art world[18] (though significantly, as I point out below, *Painter* was made at precisely the moment that he was no longer an outsider to the New York art scene); but I want to assert that the self-destructive form of McCarthy's particular envy of the senior world of artists functioned as what psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion would call a "psychological autoimmunological disorder, an attack by the mind on itself"[19] compelling him, for instance, to chop up his own hand. Abstract Expressionism was arguably the movement with which American art began to dominate the world art scene. At that time the center of the art world moved to New York City. That was the legacy that McCarthy, a young California based American artist, inherited in the following decades. The Abstract Expressionists were the fathers of the art world into which he was born. This marginalization was personal for McCarthy, and at one point in his life said he vowed never to

set foot in Manhattan.[20] (His recognition in New York and subsequent arrival there in the 1990s only occurred after he achieved success in California and Europe.)

Critic Harold Rosenberg called Abstract Expressionism "essentially a religious movement"[21] and described the Abstract Expressionist's canvas "as an arena in which to act...."[22] McCarthy transformed this "sacred" arena into a play pen for infantile activities. The bulbous noses and anus sniffing likened the smell of paint to the smell of feces. (Duchamp, who like McCarthy also began his art career as a painter, used to call painting "olfactory masturbation."[23]) The Abstract Expressionist painter driving his fist and forearm into the paint tube of SHIT was reduced to an infant playing with his feces.

Painter was not the first time McCarthy made fun of Abstract Expressionism. Like the mockery of his father, the parody of these art world father figures was an obsession that McCarthy was unable to work through. In each instance his parody was marked by aggression. In a performance titled *Whipping a Wall and a Window with Paint* (1974), McCarthy irreverently mimicked the action painting of Jackson Pollock as he dipped a piece of canvas or carpet in a five-gallon bucket of dark paint and then hurled it around an empty gallery, brazenly and indiscriminately splashing it on the walls and windows. The work was violent and puerile: he was not painting or dancing, or dripping as Pollock had done, rather, he was a sadist who was "whipping" the gallery.[24] As McCarthy said in an interview (in response to a question about *Whipping a Wall and a Window with Paint*): "The splattering of the paint or the residue of ketchup as in *Bossy Burger* [another video food performance a few years before *Painter*] or other pieces seem to suggest that an act of violence has happened.[25] The act of whipping with paint was something that McCarthy associated in this quotation with ketchup, the symbol of his father. Twenty-one years later (*Painter* was performed when de Kooning was 91, just two years before his death in 1997) the violence of his whipping returned as he transferred his violent mental image of his father to de Kooning.

Curator Roberto Ohrt pointed out that *Painter* not only mocked de Kooning, but also Claes Oldenburg. The gigantic puffy representations of paint tubes—one of which was labeled "SHIT"—were just a few examples of the piece's overall Pop palette.[26] In fact, McCarthy shared in one interview that his original intention was to make fun of Pop. More than a parody of de Kooning himself, the work was intended to parody the celebrity status that arose around art world figures like him:

> I had gone and I bought a black wig, a brown wig, and a blonde wig, and the day of the performance, I put the blonde wig on, and when I put it on I said, "Oh Warhol, oh I'm Warhol." Then I looked in the mirror and went, "Oh no, I'm DeKooning. [...] But the intention of

> that piece is not to be DeKooning; It's about this painter who's a fan of DeKooning and wants to be like DeKooning.[27]

De Kooning had become in the piece an artist celebrity, an image like the figures in Warhol's portraits that other artists wanted to become. However, unlike the slick and fun quality of Pop, McCarthy's work was scatological and grotesque. Behind the Pop veneer of Oldenburg's work was a tube full of excrement.

As with the attack on his biological father, his attack on these father figures of the art world—de Kooning, Oldenburg, and Warhol—is intertwined with an attack on consumer culture. McCarthy's grievance with de Kooning was over the celebrity status he had attained in the art world; and Pop art, such as that of Oldenburg and Warhol, embraced consumerism and celebrity culture. On McCarthy's analysis, art is infected by the same consumerist elements that have infected family life. McCarthy as an artist is heir to the traditions of these elder artists, just as he is heir to the ketchup consuming traditions of his father. Abstract and Expressionism and Pop were the dominant styles during the early formative years of McCarthy's artistic life. The performance was a ritual to expel those elements of art that had formed his artistic identity, but that had become problematic because of their associations with consumer culture.

Perversion and the Art Market

The pop element of *Painter* was significant because it connected the commercial world to the world of the father, and McCarthy reduced both to excrement. The giant brushes acted as fetishes, a defense against the castrating power of the meat cleaver wielding father. However, they were a poor substitute for the mature world of the hardworking grocery store butcher or the world of established museum art. Big and shiny, the SHIT tube idealized the feces to which it was meant to refer. (Conceptual artist Piero Manzoni did a similar thing in 1961 when he canned his feces in shiny metal containers and sold them for their weight in gold.) According to Chasseguet-Smirgel, the pervert must idealize his anality so he can pretend to himself and to others that his pregenital sexuality is equal if not superior to genitality. Nevertheless, as she wrote: "One has only to scratch the surface and the excremental nature of the phallus will reappear under the shiny coating."[28] McCarthy opened the SHIT tube and shoved his arm and fist in and out emptying it of its contents. As with the case of Manzoni's shit cans, McCarthy's tube of shit-paint and his use of cheap condiments as paint raised the question of art's status in a commodity culture. Both artists made an analogy between art and commodity, and then asserted that beneath the surface of art and commodities one only finds

excrement.

McCarthy played a painter who wanted more money from his dealer for his scatological art. The collectors with bulbous noses smelled the painter's anus approvingly. While McCarthy did not make a direct reference to Freud's writings, Freud had once drew a connection between personal instinct and the social desire to collect money. Freud's explanation can help illuminate the analogy McCarthy makes between the sale and collection of art on the one hand and excrement on the other:

> We know that the gold that the devil gives his paramours turns to excrement after his departure, and the devil is certainly nothing else than the personification of the repressed unconscious instinctual life... .The original erotic in defaecation is, as we know, destined to be extinguished in later years. In those years the interest in money makes its appearance as a new interest which had been absent in childhood.[29]

McCarthy's desublimation of the art world revealed money and paint to be two aspects of anal eroticism. The pleasure of painting—playing with its softness and thickness, smelling it, and buying it—was nothing more than infantile love of defecation.

Painter was not the first instance in McCarthy's career in which anal exhibitionism was presented as art. McCarthy displayed his buttocks as art in early video works, such as *Mooning* (1973) in which, as the titled suggests, McCarthy simply dropped his pants in order to moon the camera. I have on other occasions connected the anal exhibitionism of those works, as well as the many birthing scenes performed by McCarthy (such as *Contemporary Cure All* (1979) or *Baby Boy, Baby Magic* (1982)), to the humiliation of being laughed at by his mother when he asked her about his breech birth. Embarrassed to discover later in life that he came out "ass first and bent over"[30] he rescripted the situation so that he had control over it and could humiliate his audience. What was once a humiliating event became a source of pride in *Painter*. In fact the painter even seemed to be blasé about the whole sale as he waited for the collector to finish smelling his anus. Like the feces of Manzoni's shit cans, or the shiny SHIT tube, the artist's buttocks were idealized in *Painter* and presented as a specimen of artistic genius. The potential buyer had exclaimed, "Very nice!"

McCarthy's *Painter* was puerile, as nearly all of his work has been, because he has been psychically stuck in the traumas of childhood, such as the memories of his bloodied father and of his mother laughing at him about his breech birth. In *Painter* (as well as in *Whipping a Wall with Paint*) he made a mess by drawing on walls, something which children often do. McCarthy

ture. *Painter* disturbed the boundaries and rituals constructed by suburban bourgeois culture to keep the abject of its feces and odor at bay. When McCarthy used paint labeled "SHIT" he was defecating on his suburban world as if to eliminate that world from himself.

The house in *Painter* was in disorder. The rooms became messier and messier as the performance progressed. What began as a clean tract house, gradually transformed into the home of one of Jan Steen's moralizing genre scenes in which a household goes awry because bad parents allow imperial infants to run wild. By the end of *Painter*, the house had become a latrine, thoroughly degraded by McCarthy's anal-sadistic performance.[36]

McCarthy was trying to expel the influence of his suburban upbringing by symbolically eliminating it like excrement. However, no matter how hard he tried to expel the effects of his environment they were never completely gone, they still formed a core component of his identity. Robert Mapplethorpe said of suburban Long Island, where he was raised: "I come from suburban America. It was a very safe environment, and it was a good place to come from in that it was a good place to leave."[37] McCarthy, by contrast, never left. The painter was trapped in his house (as are many of the characters in McCarthy's performances such as the mad cook in *Bossy Burger* (1991) or Pinocchio in *Pinocchio Pipenose Householddilema* (1994)). He slept, ate, painted, defecated, and entertained his art dealer and collectors in the same place.

Cynicism and Self-Loathing

Painter (1995) significantly was not created at a time when McCarthy was marginalized, but precisely at the moment when he was becoming part of the mainstream art world. McCarthy's attack on the New York art world at that moment in his career was the height of hypocrisy. The Museum of Modern Art had funded and exhibited *Painter*, and McCarthy was in the biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art the same year. In the two preceding years he had some of his first shows in New York City galleries and museums. These shows included a solo exhibition at Luhring Augustine (after already having been featured in a group show there the previous year), as well as the group exhibition "Identity and Home" at the Museum of Modern Art.[38] Along with his new recognition in New York galleries and museums he was featured in a number of major art publications. 1993 was a year in which McCarthy's work became the subject of reviews and feature articles in *Flash Art*, *New Art Examiner*, *Art in America*, and *The New York Times*.[39] In 1994 McCarthy's *Tomato Head* sculptures were the cover images of *Art Forum* in conjunction with Ralph Rugoff's feature article on McCarthy. The character in *Painter* demanded more money because he "had shows in Europe." In fact, McCarthy for

decades had work in numerous solo and group shows in Europe; the most prestigious was the 1993 Venice Biennale. *Painter* was not an avant-garde, outside attack on the mainstream art world; contrary to, for example, Gustave Courbet's independent erection of the Pavilion of Realism in response to the rejection of several of his paintings from the Salon and Universal Exposition of 1855, McCarthy had been thoroughly canonized into the art world that he was ostensibly criticizing. The work was utterly abject not only because of its entropic degeneration into a scatological mess of food products, but because McCarthy was trying to perform a ritual to exorcise aspects of himself to which he had so long been opposed. He was the one who said at one time that he would never set foot in New York, but pursued a path to have his work showcased at the Museum of Modern Art and Chelsea galleries.

Curator Magnus af Petersens noted that it was difficult to tell whether McCarthy in *Painter* was wearing a smock or a hospital gown.[40] Perhaps this was McCarthy's suggestion that contemporary art—abstract painting, Pop, or otherwise—was suffering from a sickness. I would like to claim that McCarthy himself was the sick patient. In an unconscious act of self-loathing, he ridiculed figures that represented his self. The acts and artwork of the character of the painter looked exactly like those of McCarthy's entire career; the work can hardly be considered a parody of anyone but himself. McCarthy was the one who had always played childishly with butcher meats and condiments while he described his own father as "hardworking" for maintaining a seven-day-a-week work schedule. McCarthy, like his character in *Painter*, was the one who had made a career of playing with food, dropping his pants and scatological performances. The world in this performance was, for him, full of many "bizarre objects" as psychoanalyst W.F. Bion would say, that is, threatening fragments of his own psyche returning to haunt him.[41] The images of family, art and consumer society in *Painter* were McCarthy's introjections, that is, internalized persecutions and inner dangers, which he perceived as originating from the outside world, and that he then expelled into the external representations of the performance and its props.

McCarthy's internal loathing was directed most viciously against his audience. *Painter*, like his early work *Mooning* described above, treated the viewer with contempt. McCarthy has always been the anally obsessed artist, but in *Painter* he accused art dealers and collectors of being anus sniffers. The more a viewer tried to empathize or appreciate his work, the more ridiculous he or she was rendered in his depiction. His claim that the collectors of his work are morons was really an indictment of himself for making the art in the first place. The performance was in effect an unconscious version of Groucho Marx's quip: "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member,"[42] though McCarthy was already a member of the club he was attacking.

I have asserted throughout this article that McCarthy's *Painter* appeared on the surface to be a parody of his father and the art world, but was in fact a parody of himself. I want to return to a reference I made in the introduction to Jameson's comparison of parody and pastiche. Parody is an imitation with a satirical impulse; it uses humor and mimicry in order to be critical. However, McCarthy's *Painter*, like so much of his work, is only critical on the surface, as art historian and critic Donald Kuspit has pointed out.[43] To parody oneself, consciously or not, is to wallow in self-pity and to demand that the viewer indulge in the artist's narcissism. Pastiche, on the other hand, is, according to Jameson, imitation without parody's ulterior motive; and he linked its dominance in contemporary art to the rise of what he called (following Ernest Mandel) late or consumer capitalism. In a consumer culture in which the primacy of the modern individual is waning, the artist is only able to appropriate pre-existing styles. McCarthy's *Painter* was a pastiche of critical art: it mimicked it only as surface copy, but had no underlying opinion that it tried to assert; just as the visceral and often repulsive quality of the work appeared on the surface to be a gesture of expressionist emotion, the blood was in fact merely ketchup, and the whole impulse was artifice.[44] (Jameson also observed what he called the "waning of affect" in the postmodern era, a problem he linked to the rise of consumer culture. This is helpful for addressing the status of affect in McCarthy's work which often mimics expressionist work in its viscerality, but usually lacks any real emotion. McCarthy described the "numbness" of his repetitive actions in his performances as a "sort of solution" to the traumas of a consumer society.[45])

The personal problem that McCarthy revealed in *Painter* is a social problem. His work called into question the capacity of art to be critical in a late capitalist society. This incapacity to be critical is due to the perceived helplessness of the subject within the omnipresent and omniscient power of consumer culture. McCarthy was raised on consumer culture, on the television shows and cartoons that he mimicked in *Painter*, and on the processed condiments with which he played. McCarthy has found it impossible to cultivate a unique or true self in a society where the formation of his identity, as well as those of his parents who raised him, has been coerced by the entertainment industry. At precisely the moment when McCarthy entered the mainstream art world and when his work could have initiated an immanent critique of art under late capitalism, his work succumbed to the very faults it aimed to criticize, and in doing so conveniently ensured his place within that world. McCarthy's *Painter* appeared to be a comical parody, but was in fact apathetic, humorless and reinforced the very institutions and practices it ostensibly critiqued. It was resignation to a belief that in a consumer society one's subjectivity is condemned to reification, which is a self-fulfilling prophecy that ossifies critical thought and thus makes reification possible. *Painter*'s comedy is what Adorno

and Horkheimer (quoted in the epigraph prefacing this article) called "wrong laughter" in that it "copes with fear by defecting to the agencies which inspire it. It echoes the inescapability of power," in this case the power of capitalism to reify anything including art and subjectivity into a commodity. McCarthy used his body in compliance with the late capitalist system that he found intrusive on his sense of self, and by defecting to it he was granted a measure of success within it.

The structure of *Painter* is analogous to that of the culture industry products McCarthy ridiculed. The viewer watched the video passively like a child watching the Saturday morning cartoons on which the painter's costume hands were modeled.[46] While the work may have fouled the sanitized world of Disney, children's programming, or television sitcoms (as correctly pointed out by many critics),[47] it is not actually critical of consumer culture. One does not need to look far within a consumerist landscape—on television, in Hollywood or advertising—to find scatological humor and the cheap thrill of something disgusting and/or sexually suggestive. *Painter* does not shock the viewer into revolt, but rather, it shocks the viewer into complacency: it asserts that art can do no more than hold artist and viewer in the same infantile state as consumer society does. Mooning a camera again and again over decades does not raise critical consciousness on the part of the viewer; rather, it is a slap in the viewer's face, which is not the same as challenging the viewer to think differently about an issue. Perhaps mooning is shocking to an elementary school child the first time he or she is mooned, but even then it usually elicits immature laughter; mooning is hardly a transgression in any meaningful sense. In McCarthy's oeuvre, its shock is like that of a tabloid headline, a mere titillation to sucker the reader to consume a cheap product that offers nothing in return. It falsely asserts that art cannot offer an alternative view or any meaningful critical insight; this political claim that political action is futile is merely a means to make possible the work's seamless entrance into—and commercial success within—the late capitalist system that it pretends to critique.

Notes

[1] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Philosophical Fragments* [1944/47], ed., Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans., Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 2002), 112.

[2] Michael St. Claire has given this summary of the classical definition of introjection formulated by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein: "Introjection, [an] important and primitive mechanism that is present and available to the very young infant, is the mental phantasy by which the infant takes into himself something that he perceives in the outside world. Thus, any danger or deprivation from the outside world enters and becomes an inner danger. Frustrating objects and sources of anxiety, even though external to the infant, become internal persecutors of the

achieve in New York or Paris. As Lari Pittman put it, this group of L.A. artists is unified by their sense of 'non-apology.'" See Michael Duncan, "LA: The Dark Side" [review of "LAX" exhibition at Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna], *Art in America* 81/3 (March 1993): 40-43.

[19] Margaret J. Black and Stephen A. Mitchell describing the work of Wilfred Bion, in *Freud and Beyond*, (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 103.

[20] Paul McCarthy, "Interview by Grady Turner," *Flash Art* 34/217 (March/April 2001): 89.

[21] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," in *The Tradition of the New*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1960), 31.

[22] Rosenberg, 25.

[23] Quoted in Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* [1984], trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), 33-34.

Painter Philip Guston similarly called paint "colored dirt," though he did not reject painting as did Duchamp and McCarthy. (Philip Guston, quoted by Morton Feldman, *The New York Times*, February 2, 1964 cited in Dore Ashton, *A Critical Study of Philip Guston* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 2.)

[24] See also Shane, "Santa's Fecal Gift: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Paul McCarthy's Santa's Chocolate Shop," pp. 77-78 for a discussion of this piece with respect to McCarthy's *Santa's Chocolate Shop* (1997).

[25] McCarthy, "Interview by Stiles," 8.

[26] Roberto Ohrt, "A Zombie from the Alphabet," in *Paul McCarthy: Brain Box Dream Box* [exh. cat. Van Abeemuseum Eindhoven], ed. Eva Meyer-Hermann (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2004), 142.

[27] McCarthy, "Interview by Jeremy Sigler," facsimile of original manuscript.

[28] Chassuguet-Smirgel, 91.

[29] Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Erotism" [1908], in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 9 (London: 1959), 174-175.

[30] McCarthy, "Interview by Linda Montano" (undated), in *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties: Sex, Food, Money/Fame, Ritual Death*, ed., Linda Montano (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California, 2000), 97. See also Shane, "Santa's Fecal Gift: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Paul McCarthy's Santa's Chocolate Shop," pp. 98-100, and Chapter 2 of Shane, *Commodity and Abjection: A Psycho-Social Investigation of Pop Imagery in the Artwork of Paul McCarthy*..

[31] Ulrike Groos, *Paul McCarthy, Videos: 1970-1997*, Yilmaz Dziewior ed., (Cologne: Walther König, 2003), 146.

[32] Adorno and Horkkeimer, 28.

[33] McCarthy, "Interview by Montano," 97.

[34] Lisa Philips explained that McCarthy expressively performs with his body and liquid mediums; but his work also contains elements of pop art in so far as his "food palette" includes hamburgers, hot dogs, condiments, chocolate all of which are "emblematic of American family life...." Phillips, "Paul McCarthy's Theater of the Body," introduction to *Paul McCarthy* (New York: New Museum, 2000), 5.

[35] Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, trans. Aubier Montaigne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 144.

One striking aspect of the set of McCarthy's *Bossy Burger* (1991), which was redisplayed at McCarthy's retrospective at the New Museum in 1999, was its odor of spoiled milk and food. Considering the widespread scatological imagery throughout McCarthy's oeuvre, one expected that the odor would be that of feces.

[36] This household degradation occurred two years later in McCarthy's *Santa's Chocolate Shop*. In a two-story plywood house cans of chocolate syrup were poured on the performers from one floor to another. The scene was a scatological disaster. See Shane, "Santa's Fecal Gift: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Paul McCarthy's Santa's Chocolate Shop," pp. 89-90.

[37] Robert Mapplethorpe, cited in the "Biography" from The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc. (2007). Accessed online: http://www.mapplethorpe.org/biography.html

[38] For example, 1995: "Bruce Nauman, Mike Kelley, Franz West, and Paul McCarthy," David Zwirner Gallery; 1994: "Dirty," John Good Gallery, "Altered," Two-person show, Rudolf Schwarzkolger and Paul McCarthy, Austrian Cultural Institute, New York; 1993: "Drawing the Line Against AIDS," Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, "I am the Enunciator," Thread Waxing Space.

[39] See bibliography in *Paul McCarthy* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 153.

[40] Magnus af Petersens, *Paul McCarthy Head Shop / Shop Head. Works 1966-2006* [exh. cat.] (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2006), 21.

[41] See W.R. Bion's work on psychotic personalities: "[in the paranoid-schizoid] phase the psychotic splits his objects... In the patient's phantasy the expelled particles of ego lead an independent and uncontrolled existence... In consequence the patient feels himself to be surrounded by bizarre objects..." W.R. Bion, "Differentiation of the psychotic from the non-psychotic personalities," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 37, (1957): 268.

[42] Groucho Marx on the American CBS television show *What's My Line?* April 23, 1967. See also: Marx, *The Groucho Letters: Letters to and from Groucho Marx* [1967], (New York: Da Capo, 1994), 8.

[43] See Donald Kuspit, "In the Anal Universe: the Para-Art of Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy," *New Art Examiner* 27/2 (October 1999): 24-27, 62-63.

[44] See McCarthy, "There's a Big Difference between Blood and Ketchup" Interview by Marc Selwyn, *Flash Art* 26/170 (May/June 1993): 63-64.

[45] McCarthy, "Interview by Stiles," 21.

[46] For an analysis of the role of video and television with respect to McCarthy's audience see Chapter 1 "Video as Cultural Signifier and Cultural Critique in *Sailor's Meat/Sailor's Delight* and *Tubbing* (1975)" and Chapter 4: "The Abject Collapse of the Animate and the Inanimate in *Pinocchio Pipenose Householddilemma* (1994)" of Shane, *Commodity and Abjection: A Psycho-Social Investigation of Pop Imagery in the Artwork of Paul McCarthy*.

[47] See Rugoff; Philips; and Holbert.

Aesthetic Transcendence and Transformation

Donald Kuspit

What I have to say is hardly new, but I hope that the way I say it brings out its necessity, reminding us that the exposing of necessity—here the existential inescapability of aesthetic experience—brings with it the sense of revelation which is the core of the durably new. Let me begin with several quotations, which may not seem complementary, but which converge on a common theme, which is my theme: the idea that aesthetic experience is a species of religious experience, that they are implicated in each other, more pointedly, that aesthetic experience is the foundational core of religious experience, even as religious experience is a deepening and extension of aesthetic experience, and as such the fullest realization of its psychic potential, its climactic expression and intensification and as such the experiential limit of what Mondrian called "man's drive toward intensification."[1]

Aesthetic experience "alters" nature, as Mondrian says, that is, alters man's perceptual relationship to natural objects, because it alters consciousness, and with that man's relationship to his own nature. As Mondrian says, "the one thing that counts in art is to reflect aesthetic *emotion*: to the extent that we feel the purity of color more intensely, we are able to express color more purely....once we have begun to see in a more consciously aesthetic way, the task becomes to reflect clearly, that is, determinately, our aesthetic emotion. Then we can break *completely* with optical vision."[2] That complete break is a conversion experience, a fundamental alteration of consciousness.

And that conversion experience involves the resolution of what the post-Kleinean psychoanalyst Donald Meltzer calls the "aesthetic conflict." In Mondrian's terms, it is the conflict between optical vision and aesthetic vision: "aesthetic vision is something other than ordinary vision,"[3] he writes, and optical vision is ordinary vision. "To have aesthetic experiences we must first

This lecture was the keynote address at the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Division of the American Society of Aesthetics in 2009.

expose ourselves to ravishment by the external formal qualities of the object," Meltzer writes.[4] This occurs in ordinary optical experience at its most intense. It is the kind of experience that Mondrian speaks of when he describes "the power of the first intuitive emotion [in] naturalistic painters' studies and sketches," which is why they are often expressively "stronger" and more sensuously "beautiful than their paintings."[5] But "then," Meltzer writes, "we must grapple with our doubts and suspicions about its internal qualities," indicating, as he argues, that "the tragic element in the aesthetic experience resides, not in the transience"—as Freud thought—"but in the enigmatic quality of the object."[6] To have aesthetic experience requires not only great capacity for and tolerance of intensity, but great capacity for and tolerance of contradiction—for Meltzer, between outer appearance and inner reality, external and internal qualities—without being overwhelmed by anxiety.

It requires what Keats called "negative capability," that is, "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."[7] The most aesthetically rewarding modern art seems fraught with negative capability, and also contradiction, as the object relational psychoanalyst Michael Balint argues. That is, modern art demonstrates that it is possible to hold opposing ideas simultaneously without being torn apart, even deliberately and playfully cultivate their opposition until they almost drive one mad, although, as Balint convincingly argues—convincing at least from a psychoanalytic point of view—modern art tends toward anal sadistic regression, that is, destructively messes with and messes up objects so that they lose their wholeness and unity of presence, as Balint also argues.

Now in religious experience—the ultimate aesthetic experience—sensuous ravishment by the external formal qualities of the object and doubts and suspicions about its internal qualities paradoxically converge in a sense of the numinous character of the object. In the intimate relational experience of numinosity—which, following Rudolf Otto, generates feelings of awe, majesty, and urgency[8]—the external and internal qualities of the object inform one another. The more sensuously ravishing the external object becomes in experience, the more inherently mysterious it seems to be, and vice versa. Achieving the maximum of optical power, as Mondrian might say, the object becomes ontologically enigmatic, so to speak, which makes sensuous experience of it all the more intense, even consummately intense, which makes the enigmatic object emotionally provocative, that is, arouse what Mondrian calls an "aesthetic emotion." Similarly, experienced as impenetrably enigmatic, the ontologically enigmatic object becomes optically potent, that is, aesthetically pure. Doubt and suspicion become awe and urgency, and the object as a whole comes to seem majestic.

Unless this dialectical conversion occurs, to use Clement Greenberg's term, there is no transformation—perhaps transfiguration is a better word—of

ordinary external objects into extraordinary aesthetic objects. That is, there is no transcendence of the profane world of everyday sensuous and emotional experience—no leave-taking of ordinariness—for the sacred world of aesthetic experience, with its aesthetic emotions and sensuously pure perceptions. To extend a thought of Harold Rosenberg's, it is a world in which anything—or everything—suddenly seems miraculously given, numinously charged, acquires auratic presence, according it momentary immortality, which however illusory makes it memorable, indicating that it has had a lasting if unconscious transformative impact on the psyche.

More directly to my psychodynamic point, extraordinary aesthetic objects become valued, inalienable parts of the self, because their aura of awe, majesty, and urgency gives them intrinsic value. They function as selfobjects, to use the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut's term, objects which are as necessary to one's existence as oxygen, as Kohut famously said. In contrast, external objects make no aesthetic and existential difference—dare one say which have not been aesthetically differentiated so that their external formal qualities ravish us—which is why they are experienced indifferently, and thus remain ordinary. They aren't particularly important to the self however important they may be in everyday life.

I am saying, in somewhat different terms, what Mondrian said when he declared that "the abstract is *the inward that has become determinate or the most deeply interiorized externality.*"[9] To change my psychoanalytic language yet again, good internal objects are completely aestheticized external objects—objects experienced as numinous, that is, awesome, majestic, and urgent all at once. These so-called non-objective objects have what Mondrian called abstract reality, which makes them uncannily concrete. To use still different psychoanalytic language, they are what Winnicott calls subjective objects rather than consensually validated objects. Nonetheless, they have great social effect, and may have as much, even more existential consequence than objects acknowledged in common—commonplace objects, as it were—at least from the point of view of how one lives one's life and what one expects from life. For they—aesthetically pure and numinously intense objects, to reiterate—have aesthetic agency in one's life, consciously as well as unconsciously. They have the power to shape the self's external appearance as well as internal quality, that is, give one's social and emotional life aesthetic purpose, and with that intrinsic value. The self becomes aesthetically demanding, that is, evaluates objects in terms of how well they measure up to its aesthetic criteria and expectations. If they don't—if they seem unlikely to afford an aesthetic emotion—if they don't satisfy one's sensibility, that is, one's feeling for the aesthetic significance of things—they become beside the point of one's life. Objects must be aesthetically nourishing, which gives them exceptional value, and leads us to revere and respect them. We respond to them with

our whole being, and even find it impossible to live without them. Out-of-the-ordinary, we mourn their loss or destruction because they have become inalienable parts of ourselves. Objects that have no aesthetic value for us—that seem all too ordinary for our good—are relegated to secondary status as everyday food for routine thought and daily feeling.

I am saying that the self acquires taste, and even arguing that to be a self one must have taste—the power of discrimination and judgment—and use it to distinguish—ideally with spontaneous insight—between tasteful and tasteless objects. The self with taste organizes experience so that it becomes as aesthetically satisfying as possible under the social circumstances. This assumes that one has a deep, ingrained need for aesthetic experience—Meltzer convincingly argues it is evident from the start of life, especially in one's relationship to one's mother, a so-called primary object, and in fact is the medium through which they playfully relate—and that it operates throughout life, unconsciously and/or consciously. The aesthetically unsatisfying or tasteless has less significance in one's life, however much it may be an evil necessity, than the aesthetically satisfying or tasteful, which is more easily metabolized, and thus more life- and health-giving. I am even prepared to argue that aesthetic experience is necessary to remain young and fresh at heart and in mind, as well as a constantly good influence on social life.

I have already used too many different ideas from not easily reconcilable arenas of thought to make one hopefully fundamental point about aesthetic experience, but I want to emphasize that I am venturing into territory where, as Otto put it in the foreword to the first English edition (1923) of his book *The Idea of the Holy*, "the feeling...remains where the concept fails," making the non-rational feeling all the more difficult to analyze because there are no rational concepts adequate to it. Along the way I hope to show Derrida's misconception of what he calls "immediate presence" or "originary perception"—his terms for what I would call aesthetic immediacy and perception of the numinosity of the original or primary aesthetic object. In *De la grammatologie* Derrida writes: "Through this sequence of supplements there emerges a law: that of an endless linked series, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing that they defer: the impression of the thing itself, of immediate presence, or originary perception. Immediacy is derived. Everything begins with the intermediary."[10] I will argue that aesthetic immediacy—related to what Whitehead calls presentational immediacy—is not derived from supplementary mediations, and involves numinous originary perception, that is, a religious experience—and I don't exaggerate in using the word "religious"—of a primary or existentially necessary and thus original object.

I think Derrida misuses Freud's concept of the substitution of one object for another, from which Derrida derives his idea of supplementary me-

diations—an endless chain of supplements which Jonathan Culler calls "generalized substitution." I also think Derrida misuses Freud's concept of the deferment of instinctive satisfaction, from which Derrida derives his idea of deferred—infinitely?—meaning. For Freud, substitution involves unconscious recurrence to an original or primary object, and is a way of maintaining an internal relationship with it, that is, of staying in psychic touch with it and even under its power and control, indicating that it is always numinously immediate and present, and also behaviorally influential however cognitively obscure and inaccessible. One never gives up the original or primary object, as Freud emphasizes, but re-experiences and re-possesses it through the substitution, which then acquires the inner character of the original or primary object, becoming its new external form. It is responded to as such, and is experienced as deeply satisfying, because it is no longer alien and distant. Thus the substitution is related to in the same instinctive way as the primary or original object. It may be its intermediary in theory, but it is not its intermediary in psychic practice. As Melanie Klein might say, the primary or original object is always numinously present in unconscious phantasy, both as a sensuous and emotional presence. Or, as Balint writes, "as already described by Freud, all sublimations, and especially the form of sublimation called art, are a kind of deception, are underhand ways of getting back to real personal objects."[11] The point is that the personal primary or original object remains as awesome, majestic, urgent as ever, if in enigmatic numinous internal form, not to say uncannily sublime and emotionally intense form. It is dominating however enigmatic, indeed, all the more dominating because it is enigmatic, that is, more intensely experienced and vivid in phantasy than it ever may have been in reality.

I am now going to bombard you with a sequence of quotations not to overwhelm with you with the ideas of their authors but to show that I have allies however different my elaboration of the ideas, and my compounding—some might say conflating—of them. First, two psychoanalysts, Erik Erikson and Erich Fromm. Erikson writes: "I submit that [the] first and dimmest affirmation of the...polarity of 'I' and 'Other' is basic to a human being's ritual and esthetic needs for a pervasive quality which we call the *numinous*: the aura of a hallowed presence. The numinous assures us, ever again, of separateness transcended and yet also of distinctiveness confirmed, and thus of the very basis of a sense of 'I.' Religion and art are the institutions with the strongest traditional claim on the cultivation of numinosity, as can be discerned in the details of rituals by which the numinous is shared with a congregation of other 'I"s—all now sharing one all-embracing 'I Am'."[12] It is interesting to read this in conjunction with Coleridge's description of "primary imagination" as "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[13]

Describing what he calls the existential need for transcendence, Fromm

writes, in a statement that can be related to Erikson's, that transcendence involves "a need to transcend one's self-centered, narcissistic, isolated position to one of being related to others, to openness to the world, escaping the hell of self-centeredness and thus self-imprisonment." It "concerns man's situation as a *creature*, and his need to transcend this very state of the passive creature."[14] It has nothing to do with the belief in transcendent beings, such as angels and devils, although, as Fromm writes, "to destroy life is as transcendent as to create it." It is interesting to read this in conjunction with the psychiatrist Silvano Arieti's assertion that "it is one of the aims of man to increase his capacity for choice and to decrease determinism in every way," thereby creating a "margin of freedom" in human life.[15] Aesthetic experience functions as such a margin of freedom, suggesting that aesthetic transcendence can be understood as freedom from biological and social determinisms. The same point is made by the psychoanalyst Viktor Frankl, who argues that the refusal "to be subjugated and blindly obedient to the constraints imposed by the biological factor (race), the sociological factor (class), or the psychological factor (characterological type)," is the profoundest expression of the human spirit.[16] Aesthetic experience refuses these constraints and limitations, as Frankl also calls them, which in part is what Kant meant by calling it disinterested. To my mind this also means becoming sufficiently conscious of the unconscious to oppose what one psychoanalyst called its tyranny.

Arieti and Frankl imply that Freud was wrong in calling art substitute gratification or sublimated instinct, and comparing what he called its aesthetic premium to foreplay, which I suppose can be artistic, that is, involve what has been called the art of love as distinct from the sexual act. The aesthetic satisfaction that art affords—as distinct from the aesthetic unsatisfactoriness of what Allan Kaprow called "postart," which is "anti-aesthetic" by definition since it is concerned to blur the boundary and difference between art and life—is not a premium or supplement but a creative end in itself. That is, the basic purpose of art is to generate aesthetic experience—the experience of beauty, if you please, the Keatsian realization that "beauty is truth, and truth beauty," the "disinterested affection" for "beauty for its own sake," as the philosopher-poet William Gass writes, in a world in which the beauty of nature is "adventitious and accidental," and a society in which artists tend to put "on a saving, scientific, religious, political mask to disguise [their] failure" as artists, that is, to "win...beauty's prize."[17] For Winnicott the creative apperception of beauty—conventionally called aesthetic experience—is the sign of primary creativity. It makes life worth living, as he says, because it makes one feel more alive and real, and thus true to oneself, than everyday social life does, in which compliance makes the self slowly but surely feel false to itself, or, as I would say, as banal and valueless as society feels when one realizes one is unable to change it for the better, and thus feels helpless and empty.

Both Clive Bell and Mondrian emphasize the connection of art and religion, or, as I want to say, aesthetic and religious experience and emotion. Bell writes: "Art and religion are not professions: they are not occupations for which men can be paid. The artist and the saint do what they have to do, not to make a living, but in obedience to some mysterious necessity. They do not produce to live, they live to produce."[18] Mondrian writes: "Subjectivization of the universal—the work of art—can express the consciousness of an age either in its relationship *to the universal*, or in its relationship to *the individual*. In the first case art is *truly religious*, in the second, *profane*. A high degree of the universal in the consciousness of an age, even if it is spontaneous intuition, can elevate its art above the commonplace; but *truly religious art* already transcends it by its very nature....Such an art, like religion, is united with life at the same time as it transcends (ordinary) life."[19] It is interesting to read them in conjunction with Kandinsky's assertion that art "belongs...to the spiritual life...in which it is one of the most powerful agents."[20] And especially interesting to read them in conjunction with William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. There he distinguishes between the religion of the once-born and the religion of the twice-born, a structural distinction that seems to hold for the varieties of aesthetic experience.

> In the religion of the once-born the world is a sort of rectilinear or one-storied affair, whose accounts are kept in one denomination, whose parts have just the values they appear to have, and of which the simple algebraic sum of pluses and minuses will give the total worth. Happiness and religious peace consist in living on the plus side of the account. In the religion of the twice-born, on the other hand, the world is a double-storied mystery. Peace cannot be reached by the simple addition of pluses and elimination of minuses from life. Natural good is not simply insufficient in amount and transient, there lurks a falsity in its very being. Cancelled as it all is by death if not by earlier enemies, it gives no final balance, and can never be the thing intended for our lasting worship. It keeps us from our real good, rather; and renunciation and despair of it are our first step in the direction of the truth. There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other.[21]

James's distinction between the natural and spiritual lives corresponds in principle to Mondrian's distinction between profane and truly religious art, between ordinary vision and aesthetic vision, between what he calls "*the old* [naturalistic] *art*" which "*is an art of children*" and "*the New Plastic* [which] *is for adults*,"[22] in part because it despairs of and renounces nature; and Kandinsky's distinction between an art grounded on exterior necessity, and

thus tending toward the realistic, which is spiritually impure, and an art grounded on interior necessity, thus tending toward the non-objective or abstract and spiritual purity.

Two more quotations that I think are relevant to my psychodynamic interpretation of aesthetic experience. Ananda Coomaraswamy writes of samvega or aesthetic shock as follows: "It will not...surprise us to find that it is not only in connection with natural objects (such as the dewdrop) or events (such as death) but also in connection with works of art, and in fact whenever or wherever perception (aisthesis) leads to a serious experience, that we are really shaken."[23] Let's add to this Stan Brakage's suggestion that "the Vision of the saint and the artist [is] an increased ability to see—vision," which includes what mankind derogatorily labels "hallucination...for that which doesn't appear to be readily usable," along with "dream visions, day-dreams or night-dreams," and also "the abstractions which move so dynamically when closed eyelids are pressed are actually perceived."[24] We are really shaken—shocked to the core of our being—when we have a serious experience of seeing, a so-called visionary experience, which is aesthetic experience at its purest, that is, most numinous.

The creative resolution of the aesthetic conflict, that is, the integration of our sensuously ravishing experience of the external reality of an object and our imaginative heuristic attempt to apprehend and comprehend its internal reality, in which, after severe testing by the doubt and suspicion that inevitably arise as second thoughts about the validity of our sensuous ravishment brings with it the sense that external reality is always creatively colored, or, as Winnicott says, creativity "refers to a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality" rather than to this or that "successful or acclaimed creation."[25] (Doubt and suspicion arise in the course of sobering up after sensuous intoxication with the object's external reality. Sobering doubt and suspicion question whether sensuously absorbing experience in externality, total acceptance of it at face value, adhesive identification with the object's appearance, initiates us into its mysterious depth, thus affording insight into its internal reality. The shocking revelation that it has intrinsic as well as extrinsic value brings with it the feeling that its exhilarating surface is true to its elusive depths, that its exciting surface is not merely skin-deep but the subtle symptom of its existential significance, that its superficial appearance is the unexpected clue to its true being, however difficult it may be to trace the intricate connection between its external and internal reality.)

In other words, the created object is secondary to what one might call the creative attitude—an attitude which, as Winnicott says, becomes activated, as I would say, in what Winnicott calls the "creative apperception [that] more than anything else...makes the individual feel that life is worth living"—and, I would add, an apperception that can make any object whatsoever sensu-

ously intoxicating, imaginatively significant, and existentially valuable when creatively apperceived, which makes it into an aesthetic object or rather an aesthetic experience. Thus the still lives of Cotan, Cézanne and Morandi, among other artists, transform ordinary boring objects into extraordinary aesthetic experiences, giving them existential not simply everyday significance, just as many other artists have transformed human bodies, faces, landscapes, and man-made environments into aesthetically-existentially meaningful experiences.

The point is not the object but its creative transformation—not its substitutions, as Freud says, or its supplementary mediations, as Derrida says, but its transformation by creative consciousness, or, if one wants, its change in perceptual and existential status, involving a sort of total reconceptionization of it, as it were, or recharacterization, requalification, re-experiencing and finally recreation of it, as I prefer to say. The work of creative apperception, or creative work—on the model of Freud's dream work and Fairbairn's art work—involves working it through (which may extend the psychoanalytic language perhaps beyond where it should go) so that it seems given as though for the first time, that is, radically original because its being originates in creative apperception. Creative apperception changes it utterly, changes its external qualities as well as internal qualities. This is why the most aesthetically convincing works of art never look like the models that are their nominal starting point or creative catalysts, and that they nominally represent, but are experienced as having more intrinsic and thus inspirational value. (I include the representation of geometrical forms and ostensibly spontaneous gestures as well as objects, landscapes, and human beings. However empirically interesting, they only matter if they serve the aspiration to the aesthetic.)

For Winnicott creative apperception is an expression or manifestation of primary or originary creativity, which is why aesthetic experience is not a sexual premium, as Freud says, which is also the way Darwin regarded the peacock's colorful feathers, but a primary life experience, affording a feeling of being fully alive—a consummate sense of joie de vivre—and, crucially, reinforces a sense of being a self rather than a victim of life, an energizing conviction of selfhood rather than melancholy submission to the circumstances in which one happens to live. Aesthetic experience involves a sort of active happiness at being in contrast to what Freud called normal unhappiness, for him the consequence of repression, more broadly of the compromises we must make with fate. These compromise formations—the psychoanalyst Charles Brenner believes that every experience is a compromise formation, that is, it involves a compromise between the conflicting demands of the id, the ego, the superego, and external reality—involve a sort of passive resistance to the inescapable determinisms which Arieti, Frankl, and Fromm think can be transcended, which doesn't mean to deny them but to create a margin of freedom

around them, in effect aesthetically sublating them, as I would argue.

The aesthetic brings with it a new consciousness of self—a new consciousness of its agency, its realization that it can make choices or diffentiations, which I think is an important moment in self-realization, even what the humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow calls a "peak experience" of selfhood. "We are again and again rewarded for good Becoming by transient states of absolute Being, by peak-experiences," Maslow writes.[26] Aesthetic and religious experiences are the alpha and omega of peak experiences, and there is a continuum of peak experiences between them—what one might calls "petites perceptions" of peak experience. The self can make judicious determinations of preferred experiences, so-called differentiated judgments of taste. They are not just a category of judgment pertinent to art but operational everywhere in life. Taste is fundamental to all judgment, which is always an act of differentiation, involving differentiating between good and bad experiences of art and life. We must be connoisseurs of both if we are to feel fully alive and be truly human.

Fate gives one no choice—everything is pre-determined—but taste gives one choice, allows one to make a difference, which brings with it consciousness of oneself as a self-regulating or as the psychoanalysts say autonomous agent. Among other things, psychoanalysis empowers one as an agent, so that one can outwit fate, implying that one does not have to capitulate to it, resign oneself to whatever it has in store for you, always including suffering, sickness, and death. This is why I, along with certain British object relational psychoanalysts, think that psychoanalytic experience and aesthetic experience have much in common, and why I align art and psychoanalysis as allies against the common enemy of fate, operating in whatever quarter of life. It is also why I think the best approach to art—which means the approach that helps us best appreciate and understand its human value, which for me is inseparable from its aesthetic value—is psychoanalytic. One never forgets fate—it's in one's unconscious—but it does not have the final word about the aliveness of the self.

Having an aesthetic experience indicates that one is "living creatively" rather than "uncreatively," "two alternatives...that can be very sharply contrasted," as Winnicott says. In aesthetic experience one has moved out of the mode of compliance, as he calls it. In "a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance"—rather than a creative and with that original relationship, in which the world has aesthetic freshness and immediacy—"the world and its details [are] recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility," Winnicott says, "and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living." Compliance sometimes involves the sense of being "caught up in...a machine"—a cog in a social machine, as it were, that is, living mechanically—

and thus no longer being human, which involves feeling organically alive and, however unconsciously, part of organic nature, which is why one responds differently to organic and inorganic things, a differentiation which perhaps underlies taste.

Thus the sense of futility underlying the feeling of ennui which Baudelaire—I mention him because he is perhaps the first self-recognized modernist, that is, avant-gardist—attempted to escape by way of spleen, but never quite did, for spleen does not transcend and transform ennui but intensifies it until it becomes an incurable sickness. I have increasingly come to think of so-called avant-garde art, with its épater le bourgeois attitude and shock of the new, as the artist's bitter attempt to jolt himself or herself and secondarily the audience to life—to snap the world out of the deadening boredom he or she projects into it out of despair, making the world insufferably banal and life a horror, as Baudelaire said it was. Bitter spleen is unfortunately not creatively apperceptive and vitalizing but creatively stupid and insidiously debilitating.

The bitter attitude to reality—I have come to think that Picasso's Analytic Cubist portraits epitomize it, led on by his remark that they are destructive caricatures—is more subversive and destructive of the self than of the world it supposedly subverts and transgresses, to use the official legitimating lingo of avant-garde purpose. Avant-gardism is not as critically undermining of ordinary perception and everyday attitudes as it thinks it is, which is why Picasso turned to his so-called Ingres or Neo-Classical style, in unconscious recognition of Cubism's inadequacy as creative apperception and, even more deeply unconscious, to repair the damage done to external reality, art, and himself by his vitriolic spleen. Picasso's Analytic Cubist works are clearly the products of the paranoid-schizoid position while the Neo-Classical works are the products of the depressive position, to use Klein's famous distinction.

The shock of the new is not aesthetic shock, but the shock of the perverse, involving, as the psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel writes, the destructive blurring of boundaries, including the boundary between art (aesthetic vision and aesthetic emotion) and life (ordinary vision and everyday emotion) in postart, as noted. As Chasseguet-Smirgel writes, disrespect for and finally obliteration of "boundary or barrier...and, consequently, of all differences," reconstitutes "Chaos,"[27] and as such is anti-creative, a sort of undoing of creativity, which begins with the creation of boundaries. The shock of the new cannot help but wear off because chaos is finally futile and boring. Newness quickly becomes compliance, all the more so because, as Chasseguet-Smirgel writes, "people praise what is new without worrying whether it is beautiful, good, or true."[28] This helps to explain why avant-gardism has become compulsively repetitive, a mindless status quo in which one movement rapidly replaces another, each announcing that its predecessor is dead, dated,

shallow, and obsolete—far behind the times—while preaching the same gospel of subversion and transgression—under the rubric of innovation, it should be noted—which of course includes the subversion and transgression of its predecessor.

Avant-garde art undoubtedly rewards notice, not because it is beautiful—as Barnett Newman said, "the impulse of modern art was [the] desire to destroy beauty," which he thought of as "sentimental and artificial," unlike the "important truths" he thought his art expressed—but because of its perverse bitterness, which reveals the important psychic truth of destructiveness, or if, one wishes, the death drive. This is perhaps why it cannot sustain prolonged looking—it is hard to continue to stare at death, at the chaotic ruins of art, art that has become futile and bitter because it has become completely "abstract, intellectual," as Newman said it should be, or anti-aesthetic and conceptual, as postartists say. Its virtue is that it compels one to acknowledge one's own death, the chaotic ruin and eventual dematerialization of one's own body. It generally breeds a sense of futility and with that of lifelessness, what Winnicott calls the "death within," which no doubt one must become conscious of if one is to live, but it doesn't help one live so that one can purge it. I think this inner death is evident in the peculiar listlessness and inertness of Newman's pseudo-sublime paintings, however sublime his writings may be.

Of course theorycrats—I owe the term to my wife—believe that theory can breed intellectual life into any dead thing, intellectualizing art replacing and ousting aesthetic experience of it, but intellectual life—intellectual life without aesthetic emotion—is not the whole story of creative living. As Winnicott writes, "living creatively is a healthy state, and...compliance is a sick basis for life," and there is something compliant and sick in theorizing endlessly and de-aestheticizing experience, as the Minimalist artist Robert Morris did when he officially de-aestheticized his Minimalist work—correctly, it seems, because it has no aesthetic value, arouses no aesthetic emotion. If Morris's work is as intellectual and theoretical as it is supposed to be—as his highly intellectual theoretical writings, designed to justify and legitimate it, suggest it is (they are not manifestos in the usual sense)—then his work can be said to illustrate the de-intensifying and de-immediatizing effect that theory produces. Intellectuals tend to believe that theory is superior, and thus preferable, to felt experience, which is perhaps why Derrida thinks there is no such phenomenon as first hand, immediate experience—no such phenomenon as originary perception—that is not derived from some conceptual supplement, suggesting that everything we experience is secondhand, that is, experienced through the medium of concepts. This suggests that we are only experiencing our concepts, that is, unconsciously presuppose that they are the truth of experience not to say of being, thus completing a narcissistic, not to say solipsistic circle. It is one in which feeling is denied and thinking exaggerated,

which is an extreme version of what T. S. Eliot famously called the dissociation of sensibility that afflicts modern life. It may be that poetic language affords an originary perception of language, giving it immediacy, but in the end it still remains language, that is, a chain of generalized substitutions however spontaneous it seems.

There is nothing that can substitute for original experience, however inchoate it may seem because it is difficult to conceptualize and objectify, even impossible to do so because of its radically subjective numinous character. The numinous character of originary perception is foundational for the self, for without it the world of objects seems untrustworthy and even deceptive to it, that is, we remain suspicious of the world and doubt its value, making it less meaningful than it would be if it was informed, however subliminally, by numinous experience. Aesthetic experience is an originary numinous perception, and the model for all such original, immediate, creative experiences of being. However rare they seem to be, we crave them—have a deep existential need for them. Such experiences are spontaneous experiences, and like all spontaneous experiences have an integrative function, as Fromm says. The rationalization or theorization of spontaneous aesthetic experience—one cannot deliberately set out to have one, or coax one into happening by looking at some favorite object, including object of art—inevitably shortchanges its spontaneity, perhaps because theorizing it involves what might be called linguistic experience, which tends to be compulsive and repetitive, that is, driven by already given language and a matter of language and convincing as language—so-called compelling language. Language can give one an aesthetic experience, but that doesn't mean that aesthetic experience is a matter of language—which is why it has sometimes been regarded as infantile, as Adorno does in one passage, in line with the Latin meaning of "infant," one unable to speak, which reminds us that aesthetic experience is at its most intense in infancy and childhood, as Wordsworth thought as he mourned their loss—although it may be the case that a poem is compelled by language and convincing as language.

But language in general may have more to do with death than life, for it can deaden the feeling for life, however spontaneously alive it may seem when first encountered. There is always something stale and secondhand about language, sometimes that undermines the freshness and feeling and firsthand experience it claims to mediate. Language is the graveyard of experience, even the aesthetic and religious experience it attempts to mediate. It is a necessary medium, but less effective in conveying and arousing aesthetic and religious experience than the visual medium. Infantile communication is nonverbal, ineffable, immediate, and highly effective, as Winnicott suggests in observing that the first mirror is the mother's smile, a remark he made in criticism of Lacan's mirror phase, which is less fundamental to the infant's sense of feeling alive and truly being than the mother's mirroring of the infant's smile

and vice versa, that is, the reciprocity and simultaneity of their smiles. Part of that smile is the twinkle in the mother's eye, which is the core of her spontaneous, absorbed, tender, loving glance at the infant. As Winnicott suggests, such an exchange of smiles cannot be put into words, however metaphorically convincing the words, for the smile is too spontaneously original to be put into words, suggesting that the words one uses to do so seem to force a pattern of relational meaning on it rather than to evoke its ineffable intrinsic meaning: the peculiarly Delphic character of a smile, and the Gordian knot of hermetic intimacy the smile of a mother and infant can form, the smile with which each discovers, acknowledges, and imagines the originality of the other's existence, as though the smile had created the other. The smile can only be visually exhibited and admired, as in Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503-05 and the smiles of the Virgin and St. Anne in his picture of them with the Christ Child and the Infant St. John, c. 1498. There are no words that are as comforting, enjoyable, comprehensible, and serious as a spontaneous smile. One responds with an empathic smile, which stops the moment one starts writing about it, that is, finds verbal substitutes, intermediaries, correlates for it, as though it lacked substance and significance without its supplementary linguistic conceptualizations. They in fact subtract from rather than add to its presence, and finally trivialize it.

I suggest that Derrida could not tolerate the ineffable originality of a spontaneous smile—could not tolerate ineffability in general, certainly not the ineffability of immediacy, with its aura of unexpectedness and unfamiliarity, that is, uncanniness. It is impossible to verbally mediate the intense impact of the visually immediate, bringing with it the esthetic sense of bearing witness to an original presence—a sense that an object perceived in esthetic immediacy has spontaneously generated itself—without undermining it, for every verbal mediation of the esthetically immediate intellectualizes its visual uncanniness away, and with that consciousness of its originality. Losing creative immediacy, the spontaneous smile is unable to do the relational work of establishing existential intimacy and unconscious communication, which have profound transformative effect on both the smiling subject and the object smiled at, for the mutuality they establish makes them interchangeable, or, as Winnicott says, cross-identify. The manufactured Hollywood smile at nobody in particular—a narcissistic smile asking the anonymous other to mirror its grandiose conviction that it is the fairest smile of all, the singular expression of a perfect being—is the depersonalized cultural alternative.

More to the point of this paper, Derrida could not tolerate numinous feeling, for it is too primitive to be given linguistic form. Every attempt to name the feeling confirms its namelessness. Balint writes: "perhaps the fact that we have no words for these [primitive] states is a kind of avoidance magic; what cannot be described by words cannot change, must remain the same for ever.

This is the case with God's name in Hebrew, of which only the consonants and not the vowels are known."[29] Aesthetic immediacy is alive with the nameless numinosity of the original object, confirming its creative power. The mother's numinous smile is the aura of her ineffable originality, that is, her mysterious power to create the goodness that is life. The finest artist emulates the mother by creating works of living art, works that are art because they are numinously intense, and smile back at their creator to confirm their common goodness. Every supplementary mediation of originary perception is bad art, for the credibility of the mediation ironically depends on the extent it denies the numinous freshness of the object envisioned in originary perception. The supplement is less a mediation than a blindfold. Supplementary mediation is in bad faith with immediate presence, that is, it is a way of neutralizing its esthetic numinosity and undermining its transformative effect, dissuading rather than persuading us of the intrinsic value of perceptual presence. Is it absurd to say that there is a certain relationship between Plato's view of artistic imitation—it produces the impression of a thing by deferring it, as it were—and Derrida's view of supplementary mediation, at least to the extent that imitation and mediation are both intermediaries that create the illusion of immediate presence? A supplementary mediation or imitation is a failed objectification of an originary perception, for it does not so much creatively color the object as strip it of all color, devitalizing it into an artifact of thought. In other words, a supplementary mediation negates and disavows the object that has become numinously immediate in the originary perception supposedly derived from the mediation. To regard supplementary imitation—let's go with that word—as prior to the object it mediates but never allows to arise in perception—certainly not enough to make a strong impression—or, to put this another way, to give supplementary mediation the power to determine immediate presence or originary perception, that is, Winnicott's creative apperception, which is invariably esthetic and vitalizing, is to be visually indifferent or impaired, or rather to be so emotionally inhibited that one is incapable of numinous feeling. The pleasure of words is nothing compared to the pleasure of wordless perception at its most esthetically acute and sensitive.

It is worth noting, in this context, that the esthetic smile is the antidote to annihilative anxiety, that is, the life-poisoning anxiety that is "*the experience of the threat of imminent non-being*," as Rollo May puts it.[30] The existence-expanding smile transforms existence-choking anxiety into numinous experience of the original object by containing threatening anxiety in the smile's reverie. The paradise of the smile expresses and conveys this numinous experience of the revered original object to it, and it reciprocates with a numinous smile of its own—the subtly reverent smile we see in Leonardo's pictures. It makes one feel the originality of one's being, that is, restores the feeling of being creatively alive lost in the unsmiling world. Winnicott seems to suggest

that the smile mothers one's sense of being more than the good breast—precedes the good breast as a source of psychic nourishment—a view that is implicitly a criticism of Melanie Klein's. The numinous aura around the original object gives it esthetic and religious resonance and character—confirms that it is hallowed, to use Erikson's word. Objects that are not hallowed by numinosity—objects that we do not relate to with the esthetic and religious intensity necessary to experience and enjoy their being, that is, become enchanted by and grateful for their existence—are beside the point of serious life, however much they may be an unavoidable part of our lives.

I have come to think that art has been overintellectualized—overconceptualized, overtheorized—including by me, and thus not seriously seen and experienced, although I think I seriously see it, if I don't always seriously experience it—have an aesthetic shock or visionary experience when I see it, or find it emotionally convincing and relevant to my existence—but I blame that on the fact that however seriously I see it, it does not respond in kind, that is, much of it seems seriously unserious these unhealthy anti-esthetic days. I don't see much art to smile at, or much art that smiles back at me—that blesses me with its aura, brings me into it, for there is not much inwardness in it. Or much art that engages the human smile. I am suggesting that there is not much smiling art these days—art worth the aesthetic trouble, art that hallows what it addresses, art that affords a peak experience, art that affords a sense of creatively and fully being. Theorizing is often consciousness's way of compensating for one's unconscious boredom with the defective art one seriously sees, one's bitter disappointment with its lack of aesthetic serious and existential consequence and urgency, however otherwise serious and socially urgent or at least topical it claims to be. At its worst, compliance to theory becomes compensation for perceptual inadequacy, that is, the inability to experience objects esthetically. Theory becomes a defense against the psychotic inability to have aesthetic experience and pleasure. One can invest any art with one's seriousness but it may still remain existentially unserious and esthetically inconsequential. Today "art is sick," as a Kiefer work announces, like a handwriting on the wall, and its sickness—which means its badness—sometimes seems to be terminal. The days when Nietzsche said that art was a seduction to life, suggesting that it nourished life and involved a love of life, seem over, which I think is the point that social commentary conceptual art, which uses ideas and information as facile decoration on social misery, unwittingly makes. Such art is the last gasp of the facile irreverence of supposedly avant-garde art.

In other words, to theorize about an art is not necessarily to be critical of the quality of consciousness and feeling informing it, which is what it means to take it seriously—as a serious existential matter, a matter of esthetic life and death, facilitative of consciousness, autonomy, and possibility, as only a mar-

gin of freedom can be, or else a perceptual status quo in which consciousness dead-ends and there are no esthetic possibilities promising the transcendence of autonomy. I suggest that aesthetically experiencing an art is the best way of being critical of it. There is no more serious way of critically engaging an art than to transcend and transform it with one's own creative apperception of it. This involves challenging and testing its creative apperception of the world, that is, the creative criticism of the world implicit in its attempt to esthetically transcend and transform life. That is also the way critical consciousness, using the differentiating power of taste, conceived as a means of achieving esthetic mindfulness, challenges and tests art's staying power and value for existence, perhaps with its own.

Notes

[1] Piet Mondrian, "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality" [1919-20], *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, ed. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (New York: Da Capo, 1993), 101.

[2] Mondrian, 100.

[3] Mondrian, 100.

[4] Donald Meltzer, *The Apprehension of Beauty: The Role of Aesthetic Conflict in Development, Art and Violence* (Old Ballechin, Strath Tay, Scotland: Clunie Press, 1988), 157.

[5] Mondrian, 100.

[6] Meltzer, 157.

[7] Quoted in Nicky Glover, *Psychoanalytic Aesthetics* (London: Karnac, 2009), 112.

[8] See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), chapter 4, 12-14, titled "Mysterium Tremendum," for an analysis of its elements: "awefulness," "overpoweringness" or "majestas," and "energy" or "urgency," 12-24.

[9] Mondrian, 101.

[10] Quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 105.

[11] Michael Balint, *Thrills and Regressions* (London: Maresfield Library, 1987), 115.

[12] Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York and London: Norton, 1997), 45.

[13] I. A. Richards, *The Portable Coleridge* (New York: Viking, 1950), 516.

[14] Quoted in Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm: The Courage to Be Human* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 62-63.

[15] Silvano Arieti, *The Will to Be Human* (New York: Quadrangle, 1972), 69.

[16] Viktor E, Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy* (New York: Bantam, 1967), 17.

[17] William H. Gass, "The Baby or the Botticelli," *Finding a Form* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 291-92.

[18] Quoted in Charles Harrison, "Abstraction," in *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press,

1993), 221.

[19] Mondrian, "The New Plastic in Painting" [1917], 42.

[20] Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Spiritual in Art" [1912; 2nd ed.], in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, eds. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 131.

[21] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902] (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 163

[22] Mondrian, "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality," 105

[23] Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Samvega: Aesthetic Shock," *Selected Papers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), I, 182.

[24] Stan Brakhage, "From Metaphors on Vision," *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press and Anthology Film Archives, 1978), 120.

[25] D. W. Winnicott, "Creativity and Its Origins," *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Tavistock and Methuen, 1982), 65. All subsequent quotations from Winnicott are from this article.

[26] Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton and London: Van Nostrand, 1968; 2nd ed.), 154.

[27] Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (London: Free Association Books, 1985), 11.

[28] Chasseguet-Smirgel, 22.

[29] Michael Balint, *Thrills and Regressions* (London: Marefield Library, 1987), 80.

[30] Rollo May, "Contributions of Existential Psychotherapy," *Existence*, eds. Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger (Northvale, NJ and London: Jason Aronson, 1994), 50.

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