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The Tragic Hero: Harold Rosenberg's Reading of Marx's Drama of History

Hee-Young Kim

> The dramatic problem of the twentieth century is that of the relation between collective identities active on the stage of history and the self of the individual as a more or less willing component of a mass "I." [1]
>
> Harold Rosenberg

Since Harold Rosenberg defined art as action in "The American Action Painters," the meaning of "action" has been interpreted as the physical gesture of the artist's action or as a political call to action. Taking the meaning of the physical act of painting with the idea of the canvas as "an arena in which to act" where the artist could pursue his autonomous creation, the misconception has been that Rosenberg contributed to consolidating the autonomy of art. In this paper, I argue that Rosenberg's "action" is of a philosophical nature, relating to the artist's unending search for self. I intend to prove that "action" is philosophical, instead of physical or political, by investigating his early work that addresses the tragic human condition.

This paper responds to Fred Orton's article "Action, Revolution and Painting," which relates Rosenberg's concept of action to an impetus for social revolution.[2] Orton's study provides a contextualizing inquiry into the political implication of the "action painting." During the 1930s and 1940s, Rosenberg associated himself with left-wing magazines, such as *Art Front* and *Partisan Review*. Orton focuses on this association, in addition to the revolutionary implications embedded in the word "action" and Marx's influence on Rosenberg, to redress a "lazy existential-humanist reading" of Rosenberg's work. By articulating Rosenberg's resistance to the established tradition, Orton argues that the action painter was associated with the proletariat.

However, one must consider that although Rosenberg employed Marx's social analysis as a substantial framework for his criticism, he disagreed with Marx's idea of the abstract collective identity of the proletariat. While Marxist views shaped his ideas, Rosenberg was also influenced by the social, cultural, and political changes taking place in his time. Building on the ideas shaped by both Marx and the current climate, Rosenberg developed his own unique perspective. By the time Rosenberg coined the term "action painting" in 1952, he had formed his individualist perspective to address the act of painting and the identity of the artist.

Rosenberg experienced and understood Marxism as a period phenomenon. Like other New York intellectuals, he was involved in Marxism in the mid 1930s, a time when young American intellectuals faced the despair generated by the Great Depression. In this climate, Marx's revolutionary vision provided the best answer. New York intellectuals believed that Marxism would bring order out of chaos and provide a unifying philosophy to organize radicalism. In particular, they held that the cosmopolitan values in Marxism would offer an optimistic view that embraced intellectual diversity.[3] Rosenberg referred to those who had grown up through the 1920s and 1930s as the American "Marxist" generation. Whether Marxist or anti-Marxist, he stated, "without Marxism this generation is not only dull—it is *nothing*, it does not exist."[4] Yet Rosenberg experienced it as a stranger because he was "too young to be solidly anchored 'in the twenties' and when the new tide rose [he] was swamped like the rest."[5] While being "swamped" with Marx's vision, Rosenberg was also able to revise, or "Americanize," Marxism through John Dewey's pragmatism. Dewey's unifying outlook, which emphasized the interaction of the individual and society, provided Rosenberg with better practical strategies leading to social reform than Marx's utopian vision of revolution. Rosenberg was drawn to Dewey's advocacy of art as "lived" experience and made use of the philosopher's views about the social configuration of the individual.[6] By the 1940s, when the political utopian vision of social revolution proved to be futile and its collective ideology was suspect, Rosenberg embraced existentialism and formulated his individualist perspective of the concepts of action and the actor-painter.

Even after the 1940s, when Marx's philosophy had lost its appeal among many intellectuals, Rosenberg had no doubt that Marx's ideas were useful: "I continued to see in Marx's writings a grand scaffold on which current political, social and cultural phenomena appear to interact in a significant way."[7] Despite the attraction of Marx's scientific analysis of social structure, Rosenberg opposed the Hegelian determinism in Marx and discredited the abstract collectivity of the proletariat that Marx regarded as the agent of revolution. Rather, finding in Marx "a new image of the drama of the individual and of the mass,"[8] Rosenberg investigated the tragic condition of human beings in modern soci-

ety.

The constant journey of the individual seeking his "non-performable self" is a recurrent theme in Rosenberg's early work. He focused on the theme of "the identity of an actor, individual or collective, sham or genuine, forming itself through acts."[9] According to Rosenberg, this is the meaning of life: as people develop directional feeling, they are dynamically going somewhere without knowing exactly where. Such energy informed action painting. "Character Change and the Drama" (1932) initiated his discussion[10] that "art is a recreation of the self."[11] Taking examples from law, *Hamlet*, Dostoevski, the Old Testament, and mythology, Rosenberg addressed the transformation of the individual through actions.

Drawing on the legal definition of identity, Rosenberg pointed out that the force of an impersonal system of law separated the individual from the self: "The law visualizes the individual as a kind of actor with a role whom the court has located in the situational system of the legal code."[12] The law can deal with identities "only by willfully converting persons with histories into emblems of unified actions of a given order."[13] The law does not recognize a person but applies its judgments at the end of a series of acts as identity. While differentiating social law from drama, Rosenberg associated the legal character with the character in the drama. Whereas the character "descends" onto a stage to play his part, the individual, a human being, dwells in a specific part of the world and interacts with his surroundings. Countering an eternal role and a fixed situation of identity, Rosenberg insisted upon the sovereign power of the individual. Using Hamlet as an example, he addressed the individual's capacity to remake himself. Hamlet was a tragic hero who kept arguing, analyzing himself, and delaying action by replacing it with speech.[14] Having a choice of discarding or conforming to a fixed identity, Hamlet resisted the identity given to him. Rosenberg focused on this willful rebellion: "Change (and escape from the plot) can be accomplished through one means alone, the dissolution of identity and the reappearance of the individual in a 'reborn' state."[15] Instead of conforming to given rules, the individual should maintain sovereign power to transform himself. The continuous personal revolt transforms the individual and would be conducive to social change.

In "Note on Class Conflict in Literature" (1933), Rosenberg analyzed the theoretical flaw in Marx's collective ideology of class and asserted his interest in a particular human situation.[16] Class struggle, Rosenberg explained, was "the attempt to affirm one large abstract Identity, fixed by a common central Fact, over another."[17] This supra-individual concept, to which all individual members conform, was detrimental to the search for selfhood. The individual's experience in reality consists of particular acts and cannot be negated by a general idea of class. Rosenberg maintained that the inevitable human despair of dealing with identity is the human irony. Even heroes who

reach the top of material and intellectual power and are exempt from class struggle are unable to evade their fate. They still need to face their identity.[18] He elaborates on his critique of Marx's theory of class by associating it with a drama in which characters perform their roles. For Marx, tragedy happens when the proletariat fails to complete its required role because revolution depends on the collective actor's ability and willingness to perform the role. But tragedy for Rosenberg is the discrepancy between the imposed role and the true self. Marx's "drama of history," in Rosenberg's terms, ended in a fantasy based on a nonexistent identity of collective actor, the proletariat.[19] In Marx's view of history, Rosenberg perceived "a new image of the drama of the individual and of the mass."[20]

During the 1940s, Rosenberg adopted existentialism, which contributed to his views shifting away from Marx's views. Probing the conflict between collective identity and the individual, Rosenberg discussed tragic heroes such as Oedipus and Hamlet. As he explained in "The Riddle of Oedipus" (1946),[21] the central theme of Greek tragedy is the struggle of the individual to conceal himself: "He denies himself not in order to hide, but because his self *is* hidden."[22] In order to underline the individual's relation to a particular situation, Rosenberg differentiated between the "philosophy of knowledge" and the "philosophy of identity." On the one hand, the philosopher of knowledge suppresses the self for the sake of the universal and considers all people to be objects to be transformed into perfect humans. On the other hand, the philosopher of identity conceals the self "as a token that he cannot speak for himself." Having solved the riddle of the Sphinx by generalization, Oedipus faced the riddle of his identity. Ironically, tragedy arose at the moment when he disclosed his identity. Rosenberg explained the self-disclosure as the act of decision making to explore the hidden self. This act of becoming subjective could be ended only by death, so at any moment in life, the individual's identity has still to be attained. Opposed to employing a universal law, Rosenberg maintained that the tragic estrangement of the self could not be explained by the abstract entity of collective identity. In exploring the hidden self, Rosenberg claimed the individual's subjective act as essential. "This mixture of desire for a role and the fear of being trapped in a role constitutes the peculiar malady out of which arises modern action philosophy, with its dream of revolutionizing the metaphysical condition of man."[23] Rosenberg disapproved of the given system that suppressed the self and forced the individual to be shaped following a model of the ideal human.

The separation between the actor and the role is elaborated in "The Stages: A Geography of Human Action," which provides an existentialist analysis of Marx's concept of history.[24] Instead of employing a psychological analysis, Rosenberg made a structural analysis of the conflicting situation of an actor by examining Hamlet's case. He contrasted Marx's deterministic per-

spective with the open-ended situation of reality. For Marx, the progress of the present has been in the inevitable grip of history. When a man faced a critical moment to make a decision, his act took place "in circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past." Thus, dead heroes had been conjured up to accompany all revolutions and therefore history becomes "a nightmare on the brain of the living."[25]

Countering Marx's view of the grip of history, Rosenberg paid attention to Hamlet's response to the revelation of the real situation. Hamlet suspended his act when he found out about a new situation waiting offstage, his dead father. With this discovery, he embraced the two poles of the concrete situation that now included what was being played and what has been played. Hamlet faced the real situation, which was an unresolved event, open at both ends. Rosenberg focused on the paradoxical act of Hamlet, which was not only heroic but also tragic. It was a willful movement toward the hidden fact. Instead of playing the part set up for him and becoming a hypothetical self, Hamlet began to act to reveal the reality and his real self. Although the disclosure of the irony of human existence would not resolve the dilemma of man as individual and as community figure, Rosenberg explained the conflicting situation of an individual by employing both Marx's structural analysis and the existentialist emphasis on human subjectivity.

Focusing on the individual's contingency with regard to the historical situation, Rosenberg elaborated on his analysis of inner conflict in "The Resurrected Romans" (1948).[26] Marx explained that the bourgeois revolution failed because the bourgeois made the present a myth. In the course of transcending themselves as Romans, the bourgeois failed to confront present reality. Thus, Marx replaced the bourgeois with the proletariat, a newborn class without myth. The members of the proletariat, according to Marx, could make a direct commitment to social revolution because they would not repeat old events. They would step forth "in their own guise *and in their own time*."[27] While agreeing with Marx in analyzing the failure of bourgeois revolution, Rosenberg disapproved of the determinist view of history: "History did not allow human beings to pursue their own ends. They were thrown into roles prepared for them in advance. Beginning in a situation which they had not created, they were transformed by a 'plot' that operated according to certain rules."[28] The hero in the drama of history is the proletariat, whose ability to complete the role could secure the success of plot. Yet Marx did not clarify the ambiguity of the relation between the acts of the individual hero and the acts of the social class.[29] Countering Marx's collective view, Rosenberg explained the concrete situation of modern society in which the individual had to perform a free act of decision-making responding to the unknown. He instead referred to Sartre's claim of free choice, which was based on the "policy of resistance." Sartre demanded that people refuse to commit themselves "to a historical *who*

that was to introduce this something new into the drama."[30]

Yet Rosenberg found the proletariat relevant to an aspect of modern man, in particular, to the American. In "The Pathos of the Proletariat" (1949), he explained that the proletariat was a protagonist of the modern world because of its lack of tradition.[31] The new hero who emerged in the technological era, coming from the same source as the factory, had no "father."[32] The myth-less proletariat could make a direct connection with reality and thereby could step forth in his time. The proletariat is the hero of Marx's drama of history, whose success depends upon his ability to complete the role given by his time. This "pastlessness" is what Rosenberg connects with the proletariat and the American. Both had been alienated from the "accumulation of culture in the Old World."[33]

> Many of the attributes of the proletariat as the potential embodiment of the spirit of the modern are, inescapably, attributes of the American, unquestionably the best available mode of the new-fangled.... Free of traditional restraints, the American stakes everything on acting in his own interests.[34]

The proletariat and the American, however, differ in their relation to the past. The American does not entirely dismiss his past, his European origins, whereas Marx demanded a complete break from the past and the creation of a new history. The American converts the past to a tool and thereby transforms Marx's vision of a society into a place where the present dominates the past.[35] Rosenberg called into question Marx's plot of history. For Marx, history is the rise, struggle, and decline of such separated non-human entities as the proletariat.[36] Rosenberg maintained that class struggle failed to explain the reality of the modern world because abstract types arose from a myth of the glorious past.

Rosenberg explained such abstract collectives as the proletariat illusory. Although the proletariat's labor was central to the transforming process of modern industry, its acts were bound to the machine and deprived of humanity. Thus, the proletariat was alienated from its actions, an estrangement that represented "the internal flaw of the modern, its original sin."[37] Contrary to the action of the proletariat, the action of the American was "a natural response to need or desire."[38] In order to redeem humanity, Rosenberg argued, the proletariat needed to "Americanize" itself, or "overcome the void of [its] past by making a new self through [its] actions."[39] In his effort to resolve the tragic estrangement of the individual from himself, Rosenberg referred to Marx's concept of alienation. Marx proposed the artist as the man of the future because "the artist is the only figure in this society who is able *not to be alienated*, because he works directly with the materials of his own experience

and transforms them."[40] By alienation, Marx meant "the condition not of the artist but of the common man in industrial society." The worker was "alienated in his work" by being thrown into the "fetish-world" of the market.[41]

When the individual artist was cut off from a collective community and scattered around in the "wilderness" of society, how could he survive? Instead of attempting to find a comforting shelter, Rosenberg demanded that the artist take on reality: "For the present, avant-gardes and ideologies are dead, and the only force for the new in art is the individual in his erratic communion with other individuals."[42] Rosenberg's quest for the identity of the individual led him to his concept of the "artist-actor."[43] The "personal revolts" of American artists acted against the values given by society. "What they think in common is represented only by what they do separately."[44] Elaborating on the metaphor of drama, Rosenberg addressed the artist as a tragic hero who experienced the unending conflict between being an actor on the stage of modern history of art and being a self who strove to escape from the plot. He considered the aesthetic values an imposed plot. "The taste bureaucracies of Modern art" bound one work to another based on surface resemblance and produced another mode in twentieth-century "picture making."[45] He disapproved of the dominance of the aesthetic as a fatal restraint on living artists: "Our art-historical esthetes are the deadly enemies of every living artist."[46] The art object, for Rosenberg, was no longer evidence of progress in style, but evidence of the existence of the artist: "At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act.... What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event."[47] He renounced the traditional aesthetic references as supplementary, or irrelevant to the act of painting. Confronting predominant aesthetic values, Rosenberg maintained that the new painting should be approached with "a vocabulary of action" instead of aesthetic references. Rosenberg's notion of action, however, was never intended to link the artist's creative act to political action. In differentiating revolution in art from that in politics, Rosenberg believed that the artist's action did not aim at social reform. His view on art reflects the cultural and political landscape of the postwar era, when American intellectuals gave up any hope for an active socialist movement and replaced political issues with cultural ones. Rosenberg called for the artist's resistance to any kind of system, political or aesthetic, that would restrict the freedom of creative act. The artist's resistance indicates his involvement in what he confronts, rather than a separation.

Rosenberg elaborated the difference between revolution in art and revolution in politics in "Revolution and the Idea of Beauty" (1953).[48] Whereas revolution in politics set out a unitary path to a new stage by destroying the unwanted past, revolution in art did not intend to overthrow tradition but to reveal what already was destroyed. Revolutionary art, Rosenberg stated, was

a "contradiction," that is, "art in being against art."[49] Negating tradition would lead to confusion and anarchy but revolution in art would embrace all contradictions and absurdities. His utopian view indicates that art would serve to resolve oppositions and ruptures. For this role, Rosenberg paid attention to the artist's independence and stressed his or her "personal revolts" resisting any logic of an external development, even revolutionary ideas. He warned against "the logic of history" that would direct the political revolutionist's decision "for the sake of the needs of the time"[50] because the revolution may deprive the artist of personality.

Rosenberg addressed action as personal revolt in "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion" (1962).[51] The struggle of the American action painters should be understood in the context of the "crisis" in postwar American society.

> To forget the crisis, individual, social, esthetic, that brought Action painting into being, or to bury it out of sight (it cannot really be forgotten), is to distort fantastically the reality of postwar American art. This distortion is being practiced daily by all who have an interest in "normalizing" vanguard, so that they may enjoy its fruits in comfort.[52]

The crisis-content of action painting had been considered as "historically inconsequential and gratuitously subversive of esthetic and human values."[53] Rosenberg defended action painting as being against both political and aesthetic ideological assaults. During the 1930s, when art and politics were tied together, the educator of the masses had to take on the characteristic of the anonymity of the masses. Despite this "enticing" view, Rosenberg explained, anonymity cannot grasp the condition of modern society. He also disapproved of the formalist aesthetic in which the artist came to disappear in its historicism and theories. Confronting these assaults against action painting, Rosenberg explained action painting as an attempt to transfer the crisis of society and of art into the artist's self.[54] Thus, the canvas, the "arena in which to act," was a remedy for depersonalizing tendencies:

> Only the blank canvas offered the opportunity for a doing that would not be seized upon in mid-motion by the depersonalizing machine of capitalist society, or by the depersonalizing machine of the world-wide opposition to that society. The American painter discovered a new function for art as the action that belonged to himself.[55]

Action painting was the means of confronting the problematic nature of modern individuality. As Rosenberg claimed, it intended to restore a metaphysical

point to art.[56] It was a result of "the adulterated mixture of the artist's life" that thereby broke down every distinction between art and life. The collapse of art into life did not mean a loss. Rather, especially to the American vanguard painter, the end of art opened up a new possibility. For Rosenberg, the act of painting was a "gesture of liberation from Value—political, esthetic, moral."[57] This refusal of value manifested the new relation of American painters to history. Compared to the French artists who found themselves in the middle of the battleground of history, the new American artists were occupied by "private Dark Nights."[58] The individual artist should constantly resist a priori value and any type of institutionalized power that would prevent the individual artist from being himself. What was involved in the new action painting was the human experience.

The revolution against the given, in Rosenberg's words, re-entered America in the form of personal revolts. Hegel had theorized European vanguard art in terms of a new reality.[59] The personal revolt, for Rosenberg, meant the transformation of the artist: "A painting has to do with self-creation or self-definition or self-transcendence."[60] The ongoing process of creation was that of the artist's self-creation, which differed from self-expression that accepted the ego as it was. The constant dialogue between the artist and the canvas was extended to the artist's "imaginative transactions" with the environment. This transaction would lead to a realm of open creative process and eventually served to re-make the artist.[61] In his emphasis on the subjective act, Rosenberg defined art as "an attempt to overcome the individual's loss of identity by concentrating on the act of creation and self-creation as the exclusive content of painting."[62]

In "The Avant-Garde" (1969), Rosenberg articulated his concept of art as self-creation:

> To the avant-gardist, remaking the maker is the primary art act.... The artist himself is the ultimate "work," the object of a continuing creative activity of which the paintings or poems are notes or sketches. Through him art and life are joined in a radical re-creation of forms.[63]

Rosenberg's approach recalls Baudelaire. The "fatal consequence of the duality of man," according to Baudelaire, was a mixed blessing for the artist because it was "the incomparable privilege of being able to be at once himself and someone else."[64] While stating that irony was a tragic flaw of the modern artist, Baudelaire described himself as the true representative of irony.[65] He even satirized himself as Hamlet and maintained that doubt naturally accompanied the character of modern life.[66] As Dore Ashton agrees, this ironical estrangement is a necessary condition of the modern artist.[67] In characterizing

self-displacement as "a recurrent experience of the avant-gardes," Rosenberg also drew on Baudelaire's notion of a voyage to "the bottom of the Unknown to find the new."[68] Referring to Rimbaud's slogan "I is another," Rosenberg explained the condition of the artist's relationship to himself as well as to his audience.[69] The artist was a civilized savage, and his work communicates with the savage "other," that is, the repressed, undeveloped, or unconscious self, in each member of his public.[70]

Rosenberg interpreted avant-garde as a challenge to the Enlightenment tradition. He doubted the possibility of an evaluation of art based on a system, which was based on absolute order embedded in reason. Logic could hardly capture the ever-changing conditions of modern life, and it failed to appreciate the transitory quality of modern art.[71] To survive the "empire of reason," Rosenberg looked to Baudelaire's emphasis on emotions:

> All forms of beauty, like all possible phenomena, contain an element of the eternal and an element of transitory—of the absolute and of the particular. The particular element in each manifestation comes from the emotions: and just as we have our own particular emotions, so we have our own beauty.[72]

Rosenberg esteemed "freshness," along with lightness, sketchiness, and ambiguity. These qualities captured vanguard sensibilities for the cruelty and tragedy of modern life. He claimed that Impressionism was the first avant-garde art in that it preferred "a taste for novelty" over respect for permanent values.[73] The sketchiness of Impressionist work challenged a highly sophisticated aesthetic culture "in favor of ephemeral passages animated by mood and feeling."[74] The transitory qualities preferred by the avant-garde reflected the flight into the future, where objects and events kept disappearing at the moment they were seized. Thus, avant-garde art represented phases of modern life, and its quality was to be judged by the synthesis of the phases, and by the tensions between the new and the old.

The avant-garde's main concern was not form but potentiality, which released possibilities inherent even in the work of the past: "It resurrects energies imprisoned in the formats of outlived conventions, ideologies, and etiquettes."[75] For example, Rosenberg explained Marcel Duchamp's excessive gestures as "adequate to an experimental study of a personality disengaged from the normal contingencies of life."[76] In favor of transformational force, Rosenberg paid no attention to formal distortion.

> Art must discover its form in the actuality of the artist's life. Art becomes a Way by which to avoid a Way. De Kooning discards all social roles in order to start with himself as he is, and all definitions

> of art in order to start with art as it might appear through him. By their mutual indetermination, art and the artist support each other's openness to the multiplicity of experience.[77]

The avant-garde is the dynamic relation between the artist and society. Therefore, the lack of an active subjectivity would lead to a failure of the avant-garde. This failure would frustrate the artist in confronting totalitarian control, particularly by the mass media, of the mode of creation. Denouncing the ideological strategies of the avant-garde, political or aesthetic, Rosenberg placed a new emphasis on the artist and proposed a new concept of art, one that was equivalent to a way of living. Facing the dominance of scientific and objective standards that dehumanized art, he redeemed the artist as the agent of creation. Rosenberg believed in the artist's creative act as a primary force in surviving an unpredictable modern situation: "To exist, individuality must be *acted.* Art, from which emerges style, is the training ground of individual doing."[78]

In describing the new art, Rosenberg coined the term "*modern* modern art" and emphasized the changed mode of expression.[79] From Dada anti-art to electronic spectacles and mixed media, *modern* modern art arose out of the experience of the failure of the utopian Modernist project. With the collapse of cultural continuity, nothing could be predicted based on historical perspective. Out of the debris of collapsed forms, the *modern* modern artist picked among fragments of cultural heritage and put them together to create a new meaning. The act of the action painters was an effort to put together fragments in an original way and to observe what kind of image could be created out of the bits and pieces "piled up" in their minds. For Rosenberg, the action painter was an "archeologist," one who dug into himself and attempted to "project himself into the present, to shake off a past that has become a mental harness."[80] Citing David Jones, Rosenberg explained the *modern* modern artist's work: "There are no disciplines, only vestiges of disciplines; no forms, only vestiges of forms."[81] In a continuously disintegrating society, the artist can create only "parts." Rosenberg referred to the "transformal" art of action painting to describe the kind of art that was consistent with the present formless state of our culture.[82]

While maintaining that American action painting was an attitude and that the act of painting had become primary to action painters, Rosenberg did not clarify the ambiguous nature of the created art object. He referred again to Marx's notion of the liberation of work, which put creation above the object, whether artifact or commodity. Marx's critique of commodity anticipated the modern emphasis on the creative acts of humans. The act of painting presumably aimed at constituting a self, or transforming the individual. This act, however, was repeated on canvas and eventually released to the market. Re-

garding this result, Rosenberg pointed out that action painting did not escape "the law of the fetishism of commodities"[83] and reasserted his concept of art as events. Thus, he regarded Pop art and happenings as a logical conclusion to action painting. Pop art shared action painting's lack of respect for the integrity of existing art forms. Happenings pushed the idea of action painting to the degree that it severed the act from the object created.[84] Paintings and sculptures were events.

Taking the artist out of the system of history, Rosenberg refused to bind together individual artists who have different interests. History for Rosenberg was not the "organic" context but the constant displacement of contexts.[85] Artists had survived through art history, but not through the art they created. Since no one can stay in history forever, anyone who was conscious of being in it made every effort to lengthen his or her stay. Rosenberg held that entering history would be "violence" because the artist would sacrifice life to win a place in history.[86] To this problem of self-suppression, Rosenberg demanded that the American artist resist any predetermined values, including those of history. Therefore, the real triumph of American action painters would reside in their resistance, in which they became tragic heroes. In their struggle to deal with the discrepancy between the role of an actor on the stage of modern history and their true selves, they strove to escape from the plot through the act of creation.

Notes

1 Harold Rosenberg, "The Riddle of Oedipus," in *Act and the Actor: Making the Self* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 64-65. First published as "Notes on Identity: With Special Reference to the Mixed Philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard," in *View* 6 (May 1946): 7-30.

2 Fred Orton, "Action, Revolution and Painting," *Oxford Art Journal* 14/2 (1991): 3-17.

3 Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 50.

4 Harold Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 250 (Rosenberg's emphasis). Originally published in *Midstream* 3 (1957): 15-24.

5 Ibid.

6 According to Ashton, some New York painters frequently discussed Dewey's ideas, which advocated experience as art. Dore Ashton, "A Straggler's View of Gorky," in *Arshile Gorky: The Breakthrough Years*, edited by Michael Auping (New York: Rizzoli, 1995), 47.

7 Harold Rosenberg, "Notes and Acknowledgments," in *Act and the Actor: Making*

the Self (New York and Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1970), 206.

8 Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness,"250-51.

9 Harold Rosenberg, "Preface," *Act and the Actor: Making the Self* (New York and Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1970), xxi.

10 Harold Rosenberg, "Character Change and the Drama," in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 135-53, revised from the original version published in *Symposium* 3 (July 1932): 348-69. This essay has been assessed as Rosenberg's crucial piece, which is, according to Lionel Abel, "comparable in force and suggestiveness to the best pieces of the German literary critic Walter Benjamin." Rosenberg himself described this essay as religious. See Lionel Abel, "Harold Rosenberg," *Art News* 77 (September 1978): 77.

11 Harold Rosenberg, interview by Dorothy Seckler interview, 8 July 1968, typescripts from tape recording, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 47.

12 Ibid., 136.

13 Ibid., 138.

14 Rosenberg wrote two more essays in the 1940s that refer to the character of *Hamlet*, "Notes on Identity: With Special Reference to the Mixed Philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard," *View* 6 (May1946), 7-8, 10, 24, 28-30, and "The States: Geography of Human Action," *Possibilities,* no. 1 (winter 1947/8): 47-65. These two essays convey clearly existential overtones in addressing Hamlet's inner struggle.

15 Rosenberg, "Character Change and the Drama," 152-53.

16 Harold Rosenberg, "Note on Class Conflict in Literature," *New Act* 1 (January 1933): 3-10. *The New Act* was an experimental literary review issued between January 1933 and May 1934, in which Rosenberg was involved as editor.

17 Ibid., 5.

18 Ibid., 8.

19 Harold Rosenberg, "Notes and Acknowledgments." *Act and the Actor: Making the Self.* (New York and Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1970), 206.

20 Rosenberg, "Death in the Wilderness," 250-51

21 Harold Rosenberg, "The Riddle of Oedipus," in *Act and the Actor: Making the Self* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970): 58-73. First appeared as "Notes on Identity: With Special Reference to the Mixed Philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard," *View* 6 (May 1946), 7-8, 10, 24, 28-30.

22 Ibid., 68. (Rosenberg's emphasis).

23 Ibid., 69.

24 Harold Rosenberg, "The Stages: A Geography of Human Action," *Possibilities* 1 (Winter 1947/1948): 47-65.

25 Ibid., 53.

26 Harold Rosenberg, "The Resurrected Romans," *Kenyon Review* 10 (Autumn 1948): 606-20. Reprinted in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1959): 154-77.

27 Ibid., 167. (Rosenberg's emphasis.)

28 Ibid., 154-55.

29 Ibid., 159.
30 Ibid., 173 (Rosenberg's emphasis).
31 Harold Rosenberg, "The Pathos of the Proletariat," in *Act and the Actor: Making the Self* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 14-57. Originally published in *Kenyon Review* 11 (autumn 1949): 595-629.
32 Ibid., 24.
33 Ibid., 27.
34 Ibid., 29.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 16.
37 Ibid., 31.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 32.
40 Ibid. (Rosenberg's emphasis).
41 Harold Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds: Has the Avant-Garde Its Own Mass Culture?" *Commentary* 6 (September 1948), 244.
42 Harold Rosenberg, "Collective, Ideological, Combative," in *The Avant-Garde, Art News Annual* 34, edited by Thomas Hess and John Ashbery (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), 77.
43 Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51 (December 1952): 22-23, 48-50.
44 Ibid., 22.
45 Ibid., 50.
46 Harold Rosenberg, "On Cave Art, Church Art, Ethnic Art, and Art," in *The Case of the Baffled Radical* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 203-4. Rosenberg had a discussion with Philip Guston in 1974 at the New York Studio School.
47 Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," 22.
48 Harold Rosenberg, "Revolution and the Concept of Beauty," in *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 74-83.
49 Ibid., 83.
50 Ibid., 78.
51 Harold Rosenberg, "Action Painting: A Decade of Distortion," *Art News* 61 (December 1962): 42-44, 62-63. This essay defends his notion of action painting while confronting the criticism that followed publication of his 1952 essay "The American Action Painters."
52 Ibid., 44.
53 Ibid., 62.
54 Ibid., 63.
55 Ibid., 42.
56 Ibid., 43.
57 Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," 23.
58 Ibid., 48.
59 Ibid.
60 Harold Rosenberg, "Some Points about Action Painting," in *Action Painting* (Dallas: Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts, 1958), 4.

61 Marjorie Welish, "Harold Rosenberg: Transforming the Earth," *Art Criticism* 2, no. 1 (1985): 20-26.

62 Harold Rosenberg, "Virtuosos of Boredom," in *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 121.

63 Harold Rosenberg, "The Avant-Garde," in *Quality: Its Image in the Arts*, edited by Louis Kronenberger (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 423.

64 Charles Baudelaire, "Les foules" in *Le Spleen de Paris*, quoted in Dore Ashton, "Baudelaire, Irremediable Modern," in Jeffrey Coven, *Baudelaire's Voyages: The Poet and His Painters* (Boston, New York, Toronto, and London: Bulfinch Press, 1993), 19.

65 According to Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire's old mentor, Baudelaire involuntarily doubled himself and became his own spy. Gautier mentioned it in his introduction to the first volume of Baudelaire's collected work after Baudelaire's death in 1867. Ashton, "Baudelaire, Irremediable Modern,"18.

66 Ashton, "Baudelaire, Irremediable Modern," 20.

67 Ibid., 19.

68 Rosenberg, "The Avant-Garde," 431-32.

69 Ibid., 432.

70 Ibid., 437-38.

71 Ibid., 426.

72 Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life," in *Art in Paris 1845-1862*, translated by Jonathan Mayne (Greenwich, Conn.: Phaidon Publishers, 1965), 117.

73 Rosenberg, "The Avant-Garde," 424.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., 423

76 Ibid.

77 Harold Rosenberg, "De Kooning: 'Painting Is a Way,'" in *The Anxious Object* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 111-12.

78 Harold Rosenberg, "Metaphysical Feeling in Modern Art," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (winter 1975): 232 (Rosenberg's emphasis).

79 Harold Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting," in *Artworks and Packages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 213-28.

80 Ibid., 216.

81 Ibid. Rosenberg cited David Jones who provided the general model for *modern* modern art: "A series of fragments, fragmented bits, chance scraps, really, of records of things, vestiges of sorts and kinds of *disciplinae*, that have come my way by this channel or that influence."

82 Ibid., 217.

83 Ibid., 224.

84 Ibid., 223-24.

85 Harold Rosenberg, "Themes," in *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 199-220.

86 Ibid., 212-13.

De Kooning's *Asheville* and Zelda's Immolation

Martin Ries

"Perhaps I am more of a novelist than a poet."
Willem de Kooning

"What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event."
Harold Rosenberg

One of the important experiments in American art education began in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1933. Black Mountain College was conceived at a critical moment in history; its founding occurred concurrent with ominous events abroad: Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, and the Nazi terror of book-burnings, street beatings, political arrests of communists, homosexuals, Jews, and others, and incinerations in concentration camps. The Nazis closed the famous Bauhaus, the innovative school of art, architecture, and design. Josef Albers came to Black Mountain College as director, bringing his Bauhaus experience to encourage artistic cross-fertilization. By the time the College closed in 1957 it had attracted a venerable Who's Who of the avant-garde, including Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Buckminster Fuller, Eric Bentley, Robert Motherwell, Paul Taylor, Alfred Kazin, and many others. Willem de Kooning taught there in 1948.[1]

In the late 1930s and early 1940s Abstract and Cubist art were formalist structures that did not necessarily embody transcendent, universal themes. Inspired by the Freudian method of free association, the Surrealists put great emphasis on the instinctual and invented "psychic automatism" to breed buried images unavailable to the conscious mind. The goal of forward-looking American artists (Jacob Kainen called them "the alert artists") was to synthesize the modern movements into an entirely new pictorial style; what interested them about Surrealism was its processes, its attitudes toward creativity and the unconscious, and its emphasis on content as opposed to form. A few of the Surrealist artists "painted responses to the political and historical events

of the period ... their style[s] seemed relatively unchanged. Picasso's *Guernica* more successfully captured the Americans' imagination as a direct response to disaster..."[2]

The Europeans had shown the way; yet the avant-garde American artists had to work desperately to break away from the influence of the School of Paris and especially from that Olympian, Pablo Picasso. Like the Collective Unconscious or the dreams of childhood, Picasso's images and icons kept creeping in while the Abstract Expressionists used both Surrealism and Abstraction to break the Spaniard's stranglehold. Discussing art in the 1930s and 1940s, Jackson Pollock complained, "Damn that Picasso, just when I think I've gotten somewhere I discover that bastard got there first;" Arshile Gorky mourned that they were "defeated" by Picasso; while de Kooning said, "Picasso is the man to beat."

De Kooning drew on the School of Paris (Pollock called him a "French" painter); his "apparent aim is a synthesis of tradition and modernism that would grant him more flexibility within the confines of the Late Cubist canon of design," stated Clement Greenberg; "... there is perhaps even more Luciferian pride behind de Kooning's ambition than there is behind Picasso's."[3] Thomas B. Hess wrote, "He will do drawings on transparent paper, scatter them one on top of the other, study the composition drawing that appears on top, make a drawing from this, reverse it, tear it in half, and put it on top of still another drawing. Often the search is for a shape to start off a painting..."[4] Harold Rosenberg, who upheld the idea of "high art" in defiance of mass culture, applied existential relationships between artists and the world: "The vision of transcending the arts ... rests upon one crucial question: What makes one an artist?"[5] He did not see abstraction as a projection of individual emotions so much as a reflection of overall psychic need. Abstract art in its final analysis, he asserted, was transcendental.

De Kooning admired Cubism for its emphasis on structure;[6] yet *Asheville*, (1948, Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.) its surface sensuality dominating compositional logic, is both linear and painterly as well as structural. The need for the ordered geometric background structure of Cubism did not begin to disappear from de Kooning's work until he increased his gestural activity, probably under Jackson Pollock's influence, by loosening shapes and allowing the paint to run in such paintings as *Light in August* (1947, Museum of Contemporary Art, Teheran). The use of the sign painter's liner brush[7] allowed him to get the precipitate look of a quick expressionist sketch; each stroke is integrated with every other stroke that shift ceaselessly as forms merge with background as well as with other forms to mold a single consolidated surface. Allan Stone described the forms as opening up and flowing into the background, "creating fluidity and movement which can be termed 'liquification of cubism.'"[8]

The push toward a new expression in *Asheville* is beyond literal legibility.[9] Nevertheless Charles F. Stuckey says the sulfuric color scheme of ocher, red, black and white "evoke flames, smoke and ashes"; [10] he reads a large dark "eye" to the right as looking like a "cigarette burn in cloth"; he also sees "torn and displaced legs, elbows, and torso", body parts[11] scattered like martyr's attributes, as well as "lips cracked to expose teeth", and finds a "darkened left side of a mouth that seems to curl forward to suggest the way paper curls when it burns" (there are a plethora of gnashing teeth in Picasso's *Weeping Women* ["postscripts" to *Guernica*, summer,1937]). However, Stuckey also finds these conflagration similes in the frantic brushstroke of de Kooning's *Light in August* as they refer to the fire episode in William Faulkner's *Light in August*, a novel the painter especially liked. The titles of several of de Kooning's black and white paintings at this time: *Dark Pond, Night Square*, together with *Black Friday* (the darker name for "Good Friday," the day of the Crucifixion) and *Light in August*, are "drawn from the Bible, Aeschylus, and William Faulkner."[12]

The title of *Light in August* is derived from the novel of the same name by Faulkner. Heir of the Symbolists, he was little appreciated until Malcolm Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* was published in 1946. F. Scott Fitzgerald suffered a similar fate: when he died in 1940 none of his books was in print, "The revival - or, better, the apotheosis - of [*The Great*] *Gatsby* began after the author's death .... That was in 1941. It took another five years for a new generation to rediscover it."[13] De Kooning, a "fervent reader," [14] may have been part of that generation and read about "the macabre valley of ashes presided over by the eyes on a billboard" in *Gatsby.*

F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda embodied the "flaming youth"[15] in the 1920s before she suffered a mental breakdown. Zelda was confined to mental institutions throughout the 1930s and 1940s until her tragic death in March of 1948 when fire destroyed the Highland Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, where she was a patient. De Kooning may have read about Zelda's death in the *New York Times* of March 12, 1948: "Flames quickly engulfed the four-story central building of the Highland Hospital for Nervous Diseases. ... Mrs. F. Scott Fitzgerald, widow of the author and a victim of the hospital fire, had been ill for some years and went to the Highland Hospital three months ago..."

Assuming de Kooning read of the tragic fire at Highland Hospital, he probably would have recalled the devastating fire in Gorky's studio, Gorky's *Charred Beloved* of 1946, and *Agony* of 1947 (Gorky committed suicide while de Kooning was working on *Asheville*), as well as the flames in Picasso's *Guernica* and related studies. Stalin's scorched earth policy, the fire-storms of England, Germany, and Japan during the war, as well as the frequent conflagrations in New York City, may have also occurred to him.

De Kooning's penchant for the soot and detritus of the city is the reverse of Marcel Proust's "golden morning brightness of a Parisian sidewalk." Edwin Denby, poet and friend in the 1930s and 1940s, recalled the artist's attraction to minute details encountered in his environment: "I remember walking at night in Chelsea with Bill ... and his pointing out to me on the pavement the dispersed compositions - spots and cracks and bits of wrappers and reflection of neon-light..."[16] Indeed, Rosalind Krauss similarly has commented on Picasso's turning the dross of collage into art[17] as he shaped "these bits and pieces into an organized montage."[18] In Apollinaire's *Zone*, written just as Picasso was embarking on collage, the poet praised what the artist saw in the streets: "The inscription on the sign boards and the walls ... You read the handbills, catalogs, posters that sing out loud and clear ..."[19]

De Kooning often began several pictures with related images; *Asheville*[20] and *Abstraction* (1949/50, Thyssen-Bornemisza collection, Madrid) have much in common. The floor line in the ashen-hued *Abstraction*, leading in from the bottom right corner, creates a "nook" on the right side (and a resting place for a dark skull - an unusually non-abstract and specific image for the artist at that time) which "houses" a ladder, window, and door, as well as the torso, leg, and rectangular structure at bottom left. The vibrant yellows, blues, and fuchsias are dispersed by black strokes within modified white areas. There is a Picassoid hoof-form in the upper left corner, a house structure in the upper right (the same double-bar as in *Asheville,* a visual abutment which undoubtedly corresponds to the window edge in *Guernica* and related sketches), as well as several rectangular window and door shapes and a ladder from *Minotauromachia*. Is the ladder a fireman's attempt at rescue? A metaphor for escape? A passage from one plane to another? A time-honored symbol of ascension and the primitive idea that one climbs the ladder of one's forebears (however Olympian) as with Jacob's Ladder?

In *Asheville* de Kooning depicts a book of charred matches (left) which he seems to have used from his earlier *Still Life with Matches* (c.1942, collection Mr. & Mrs. Stephen D. Paine), very much as Thomas Hess described his working methods. This detail is topped by a blackened circle that probably was originally a thumbtack (top left) to keep fragments of drawings in position as the artist worked. A second folded matchbook is at the top just below the "thumbtack." Are the shapes references to squares, rectangles, openings, windows, doors, and other apertures? Are they meant to appear burnt and damaged? Geometric shapes, imbued with implied order, are inserted in an effort to stabilize the picture, but keep getting lost in de Kooning's shuffle of shapes. Certainly the series of rectangles on the left of *Asheville* includes a "spent book of matches" (Stuckey); they are also similar to the ladder in the Thyssen-Bornemisza *Abstraction*, both of which may have been prompted by the ladder in Picasso's *Minotauromachia*, and/or the many body parts and

ladders in Joan Miró's and Paul Klee's as well as many Surrealist works where the Jacob-like ladder leads upwards to a fusion of tangible and intangible, a transcending union of different levels, to "higher realities."

Indeed, below the spent safety matches at bottom is a form very much like the leg of the dying horse in *Composition Study for Guernica (11)* (1 May 1937, Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid) comparable to the form in the lower left of *Asheville*, both in similar areas of both paintings, not to mention two very Picassoid horse's hoofs, bottom center (also bottom center in *Guernica)*. The foot of the Rushing Woman in *Guernica* is comparable to the shape in the lower right corner of *Asheville* (they are in similar areas of both paintings); the right-angled rectangles in the upper right corner of *Asheville* are like the right-angled edges of the window of the burning house in *Guernica* (they are in similar areas of both paintings). Picasso's *Guernica* and Minotaur images could be seen in the late '30s and early '40s, and were often reproduced in *Cahiers d'Art* and *Minotaure* magazines. *Guernica* was exhibited at the Valentin Gallery in 1939, and an extensive Picasso exhibition was held at the Museum of Modern Art in the same year. De Kooning was undoubtedly familiar with the first important book on *Guernica*[21] with its related studies and photographs of the mural in progress. If *Asheville* is turned upside-down, the matchbooks relate to the more recognizable rectangles, apertures, and ladder of the Thyssen-Bornemisza *Abstraction* as well as Picasso's many ladders. The Olympian Picasso continued to possess his progeny.

Specific forms in *Painting* (1950, David Geffen collection, Los Angeles) such as those in the upper right are identical to the forms in *Little Attic* (c.1949, former collection, Dr. Israel Rosen). The imagery in these two works, both the same size, presumably derived from a single drawing and then migrated from one painting to another.[22] These "specific forms" are similar to the progression of rectangular forms on the left side of *Asheville*. Other forms in *Painting*, such as ladders and gaping mouths, are repeated throughout the compositions of this period (the heart shape on the right in *Little Attic* is reminiscent of the shape of testicles in much of Picasso's depictions of bulls. Both organs relate to man's emotional life, and bind psyche and soma). De Kooning often used window-like rectangles (usually delineated with black paint) in his early work to organize the background and relate the composition to the edges of his canvas. With no directional trajectories, the tension of the window shapes make enclosure dynamic rather than ambiguous. An aperture for penetration into space, a window often symbolizes the eye* of the artist opened for revelation, one can look in as well as out[23] into larger vistas, or greater consciousness.

* After death, the eyes of the deceased are closed; this gesture symbolically shuts the "window of the soul."

De Kooning was probably familiar with Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, (N.Y., 1947) where he attributes to colors certain universal meanings: "Black is something burnt out, the ashes of a funeral pyre ... The silence of black is the silence of death ..." Completed shortly after the artist's black and white period, *Asheville* combines color as well as black and white, but none dominates. Generally, color isn't abstract in the sense that it involves nuances of mood, while black and white is more abstract because it relates less to nature. However, we're often disconcerted by color schemes with values of equal importance when there is no dominant hue.

Space is a pre-condition of all that exists, its appearance is emptiness, and therefore can contain everything; or as de Kooning explained, space contains "billions and billions of hunks of matter ... floating around in darkness according to a great design of nothingness."[24] De Kooning's picture plane, to which any shape or image could be attached, is not dissimilar to the relativistic unified field theory that tries to integrate into one comprehensive idea the many clashing bits of data and complex uncertainty of randomness that is modern physics. In the manner of Levi-Strauss's *bricoleur*, the handyman, tinkerer, or inventor of myths, memory accumulates appealing images and materials that can then be reshaped and used over and over again.

Many of the abstract shapes in *Asheville* look like fragments from previous works, a kind of visual promiscuity, or what Sally Yard called "willful pentimenti."[25] Although there are many unrecognized and suggestive abstract forms in the painting, they pass before us almost without our recognizing them, like fleeting images in a dream. Yet *Asheville*, with its loopy liner brush lines and sooty colors, is certainly one of de Kooning's most regal works. As Rudolf Arnheim explained, in reference to Picasso: "The creative process has systolic and diastolic stages. The artist condenses his material, eliminating unessentials, or paints an abundance of shapes and ideas, recklessly crowding the concept. Rather than grow consistently like a plant, the work often fluctuates between antagonistic operations."[26]

Or, as Harold Rosenberg said, abstract art in its final analysis is transcendental.

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Notes

[1] Martin B Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1988), p.283: The artist and Buckminster Fuller became "great friends, really extraordinary friends," said Fuller. "I used to have to go to Asheville to get things for my structures, for my classes...and Bill de Kooning used to like to ride along with me and talk philosophy. Bill is a very, very wonderful thinker."

S. Naifeh and G.W. Smith, *Jackson Pollock: American Saga*, (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1989), p.710. De Kooning and Rosenberg shared a thoughtful if not deep philosophical streak; when asked if he would rather be a "half-assed philosopher or a great painter, de Kooning replied, "Let me think about that."

[2] Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.28.

[3] Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p.213.

[4] Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p.47.

[5] Harold Rosenberg, *The De-definition of Art*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), p.13.

[6] Willem de Kooning, "What Abstract Art Means to Me," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin 18,* Spring 1951, p.7; reprinted in Hess, p. 146. De Kooning also described Cubism as "a poetic frame ... where an artist could practice his intuition;" in Hess, p. 146.

[7] *Willem de Kooning: Tracing the Figure*, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), p. 158. Elaine de Kooning's brother, Conrad Fried, remembered that de Kooning made his own brushes with extra-long floppy hairs designed to make "fast," whiplash lines.

[8] Allan Stone, *Willem de Kooning: Liquefying Cubism*, (New York: Allan Stone Gallery catalog, 1994), p. iii.

[9] Willem de Kooning: "I feel certain parts you ought to leave up to the world" in "The Renaissance and Order", *trans/formation 1*, 1951; quoted in Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p.141; and in Robert Goodnough, ed., *Artists' Sessions at Studio 35,* (New York: 1950), p.16.

[10] Charles F. Stuckey, "Bill de Kooning and Joe Christmas," *Art in America*, 68/3 (March 1980): 78.

[11] *Willem de Kooning: Tracing the Figure*, p. 164, n. 1: "I nevertheless believe that nearly all of de Kooning's "abstractions" either began with a reference to the human figure or incorporated figural elements along the way."

[12] Sally Yard, "The Angel and the *demoiselle* - Willem de Kooning's *Black Friday*," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 50/ 2 (1991): 15.

[13] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,(New York: Charles Scribner, 1992), p.xviii: *The Great Gatsby* "led the Fitzgerald rediscovery and restoration of 1945-50..." Fitzgerald wrote of "...the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes ... commensurate with their capacity to wonder." as well as the "...sporting

life at Asheville..." (p. 23).

[14] Thomas B. Hess, *Willem de Kooning Drawings*, (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972), p.17. "A fervent if highly critical reader of Dostoevski, Faulkner, Kierkegaard..."

In de Kooning's interview with Ann Bowen Parsons, 11 October 1967, p.3: "I like to read, ... I've been trying to read *Finnegans Wake* again. I've always loved the Russian writers. I never needed Freud because I had Dostoevsky." [Ann Bowen Parsons Collection of Interviews on Art, 1967-68, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.]

Harold Rosenberg, *De Kooning*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973), p.47: "When I read *The Brothers Karamazov*"; p.50: "Do you remember, in the beginning of *Moby Dick*?"

Stuckey, p.71: "according to close friends, de Kooning enjoys moderately heavy reading, in particular Cervantes, Stein, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Faulkner."

Judith Wolfe, *Willem de Kooning: Works from 1951-1981*, (East Hampton, NY: Guild Hall Museum, 1981), p.9: "Elaine de Kooning recalls her husband saying that, in his first idea of her, he had thought of her as one of the girls on bicycles off in the distance in Proust's *Within a Budding Grove*."

Paul Cummings, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1983), p.11: "De Kooning had read Walt Whitman..."

Harry Gaugh, D*e Kooning*, (New York: Abbeville Press, N.Y., 1983), p.8: "...read Dostoevski, Marcel Proust, Henry James, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner..."

Sally Yard, "The Angel and the *demoiselle* - Willem de Kooning's *Black Friday," Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 50/2 (1991): 9. "he read [Kierkegaard] intently."

Willem de Kooning: Paintings, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1994), p.51: "He read Gertrude Stein and Wittgenstein."

Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene V. Thaw (eds.), *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), vol. 4, p.192: Jackson Pollock owned a copy of *The Great Gatsby*, as well as several other Fitzgerald books.

[15] John Tytell, *Passionate Lives*, (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1991), .p.77. Fitzgerald said Zelda had "a more intense flame at its highest than ever I had." p.78. Zelda compared herself to a mythical salamander that thought it could live in fire without being burned.

[16] Elaine de Kooning, "Edwin Denby Remembered – Part 1," *Ballet Review 12*, spring 1984, p. 30; also, Edwin Denby, *Willem de Kooning*, (New York: Hanuman Books, 1988), p.46.

[17] Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), p. 72, quoting David Cottongton's "turning the dross of the vernacular into the gold of art" in *Picasso & Braque: A Symposium*, ed., Lynn Zelevansky, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), p. 69.

[18] Krauss, p. 42.

[19] Krauss, p. 72-73.

[20] The painting is inscribed as *Ashville* [*sic*] on the back of the panel, with the emphasis on "Ash." Charles Moore Brock, unpublished Master's Thesis, "Describing Chaos: Willem de Kooning's Collage Painting *Asheville* and its Relationship to Traditions of Description and Illusionism in Western Art," 1993, University of Maryland, p.8.

[21] Juan Larrea, *Guernica: Pablo Picasso*, (New York: Curt Valentin, N.Y., 1947).

[22] Hess, p. 47-51.

[23] Carla Gottlieb, T*he Window in Art: a Study of Window Symbolism in Western Painting*, (Pleasantville, NY: Abaris Books, 1981).

[24] De Kooning, p. 7; reprinted in Hess, p. 146.

[25] Sally Yard, *Willem de Kooning: The First Twenty-Six Years in New York - 1927-1952* (New York: Garland, 1986), p. 57.

[26] Rudolf Arnheim, *Picasso's Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p.56.

The Crisis of the Object I

Gevork Hartoonian

> "We belong to the future. We must put ourselves into it, each one at his situation. We must not plant ourselves against the new and attempt to retain a beautiful world, one that must perish. Nor must we try to build, with creative fantasy, a new one that claims to be immune to the ravages of becoming. We have to formulate the recent. But that we can only do if we say yes to it; yet with incompatible heart we have to retain our awareness of all that is destructive and inhuman in it. Our time is given to us as a soil on which we stand, as a task that we have to master."
>
> Romano Guardini

Opening

These words of Romano Guardini have not lost their allure even today at the dawn of this new century.[1] Like many other thinkers of his time, Guardini addresses the sensitive issue of cultural heritage and the ways its foundation should be shaken and readjusted according to the demands of the "recent." Contemporary history is full of instances of architects' attempts to rethink architecture in the context of socio-cultural and technical imperatives of modernity. From the 1914 debates of the Werkbund concerning architecture of *Sachlihkeit,* to Peter Eisenman's advocacy for the "Futility of the Object," architecture is relentlessly reformulating itself according to formal and contextual factors. It is the intention of this essay to discuss the theoretical issues pertinent to the crisis of the object in the discourse of modernism, and to pursue the subject's implications for current architecture. Of interest is the shift from construction to surface, a subject central to the advocates of the international style architecture, but also the return of the theme of surface in the light of current interest in media technologies.[2]

The essay's title recalls Andre Breton's text "The Crisis of the Object" published in 1932.[3] Against the early modernists' intention to transform artifacts according to the vicissitudes of technology, Breton and other surrealists presented a project of reconstitution of the object that in one way or

another would problematize the total and smooth transformation of the traditional object into the "new." Their project also differed from the romanticist nostalgic yearning for craftsmanship and the desire to defuse the drive of mechanization that shook the ethics and morality of the guild system. The weight of antinomies of modernity did indeed haunt architectural tendencies permeating both the Bauhaus school, and the work of architects like Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos, to mention two figures whose view of the crisis of the object remained peripheral to the experience of the Bauhaus.

To begin with, one should reflect on the following question: what is special to the surrealists' strategies? Consider this: the functional rationality of the Bauhaus, Jean Baudrillard notes, "gives birth to an irrational or fantasy counter discourse which circulates between the poles of kitsch and surrealism."[4] While the Secessionists opted for a sense of dematerialization depicted in Gustave Klimt's paintings, for example, Surrealism invoked the repressed, or the outmoded, rejecting any easy synthesis between aesthetics and utility. They also rebuffed the Bauhaus's socio-political project, and the intention to reconcile technology with the craft of building. Surrealists did attempt, however, to internalize the nihilism of technology, its devaluation of the metaphysics, into the artwork. The traditional object was defamiliarized by techniques such as deviation of the object from its assigned role, decontextualization, and injection of dream images into a given object. The result was what Walter Benjamin coined "wish-images."[5] Although these techniques had no direct bearing on architecture, the discussion here concerns the work of architects which, contrary to the international style architecture, sticked to design strategies that were similar to the work of surrealists and would not allow architecture to be reduced to the mirror image of the machine.

Benjamin's affinity with Surrealism goes beyond the essay where he maintains an ambivalent position toward their work. Nevertheless, he did try to locate the traces of the nihilism of modernity in surrealism. The lessons he drew from their work were instrumental for his own discourse on the early culture of modernity and the "arcades project." Recent attention to Benjamin, especially his ideas concerning the impact of technology on culture, demands rewriting the implications of the crisis of the object for the present architecture. The project's importance has to do with the early modernist infatuation with the machine, but also current use of electronic technologies to the point that, it's not the image of machine anymore but the very *technique* itself that determines the processes of design and perhaps the final form.

The proliferation of computer technologies has shifted the interest of architects from the tectonic of the final product to the surface. For many, the early modernists' concern for the impact of industrial building techniques on architecture is not a formative theme anymore. This line of thinking is supported by the belief that the building industry, especially in America, has been

unable to introduce new building materials and techniques, thus the impossibility of changing the "image" of architecture beyond that of modernism. From this point of view, the use of glass, steel, and even new synthetic materials in the architecture of the last two decades have not pushed the tectonic thinking beyond what the Dom-ino frame has to offer.[6] Modifying existing techniques, the building industry, however, is slowly accommodating its products and techniques to the architects' esteem for virtual images.

A brief examination of the most published architectural work supports the claim that, for some, the architectural form has less to do with construction, let alone the latter's poetic articulation. What is accountable today is an aesthetic form whose animated body can be associated with Benjamin's idea of phantasmagoria, or what Karl Marx coined as commodity fetishism.[7] This development undermines the object's umbilical cord with the craft of building. Others have gone further claiming that even a Baudrillardian concern for simulacra is not a critical issue anymore.[8] Still, some are less interested in considering concepts such as model, type, or the machine relevant to contemporary practise. This line of thinking has been pushed to its extreme by theoreticians and architects like Bernard Gache, for example, who believes that "the design of the object is no longer subordinated to mechanical geometry; it is the machine that is directly integrated into the technology of a synthetical image."[9] If this is the case, then, one can assume that today it is the computer-generated form rather than the thematic of the disciplinary history, i.e., the culture of building that informs the index of architectural object.

And yet, the infiltration of computer technology into the various spheres of production and consumption has left its mark on architectural education too. Paperless, or virtual design studio, practised at many schools of architecture, offers a way of seeing and conceptualizing architecture that is nothing more than a series of truncated perspectives comparable to those of video games. It is an ideal picture of the denial of site and the forces of gravity, no bottom or top, and no more frontality and part to whole relations either. Challenging the basics of the classical vision of the object, telecommunication technologies offer a vista through which "play" performs a critical role. Computer- aided design also provides a level of formal exploration unavailable to the traditional techniques of draftsmanship. Explosion of the object has ended in a truncated spatial labyrinth that ironically sustains the very basics of the perspectival regime, the Cartesian grid system. Virtual architecture gets around the "thingness" of architecture reducing the latter to a cinematic experience. Accommodation of architecture to the nihilism of technology has opened a new chapter in the book of the crisis of architecture written since the Renaissance. However, the current rush to internalize technology into every facet of culture is not immune to the ideology of a post-modernism that has to sell its architectural vision as an index of progress. The question to ask is of the

following nature: whether the present esteem for technology has learned its lessons from the modernist's discourse on the Zeitgeist. Equally important is to ask whether the modernists' theorization aiming at a uniform response to the spirit of the time has not eliminated the possibility of linguistic difference. Any attempt to answer these questions necessitates, in the first place, an understanding of the historicity of the crisis of the object.

In Search of Objectivity

Most European architects, in one way or another, participated in the debate for the New Objectivity, i.e., *Neue Sachlichkeit*.[10] The early modernists sought to dress both the interior space and the exterior body of architecture with a garment that was cut according to the aesthetics of abstraction; a plain form devoid of any ornamentation.[11] Le Corbusier even purposed a new vision of the city that has to rise above the ashes of the old one. Others, like Monderian and the de Stjil group, saw the time ripe to integrate architecture with painting and the city. Central to understanding these artists and architects is the idea of total design, one implication of which was to make homologies between private and public spaces. Another was to see the project of modernity embodying ideas and visions that framed ensembles unaccessible to the horizons experienced in the traditional life-world. One might go further and suggest that, even the dichotomy between interior and exterior spaces that Loos conceived, and his belief that only tombs and monuments deserve the name architecture, were indeed his way of endorsing the nihilism of technology, and the need for a different concept of objectivity.

Looking from the vantage point of current theoretical discussions, one might mark the decade of the 30s as the time when the idea of *Zeitgeist* became central to the orthodox discourse of modern architecture. The date is important for many reasons including the publication of a handful of critical texts, but also for the event of the international style exhibition held at MoMA. Noteworthy is the fact that Breton published his essay on the crisis of the object around the same time.[12] In contrast to the message delivered by the MoMA's exhibition, Breton's text addressed a host of important issues including the idea of the liquidation of traditional object, the end of aura, and the antinomy between autonomy and imbrications. To understand the historicity of Breton's position, and the gist of the mentioned texts, this essay wishes to discuss Benjamin's idea of the "wish-images" first, and then to analyse some modern architects' positions concerning the idea of the crisis of the object.

Written in 1935, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" discusses the impact of technology on human perception, a subject already touched by Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl, and a number of other German scholars.[13] Presenting the case of montage in film, Benjamin articulated the idea of wish-images in conjunction with the loss of aura; that is, the

magical and ritualistic origin of the work of art where space and time are intermingled, and a harmony between the desire of the subject and the skills of the hand prevail. On another occasion, Benjamin describes the idea of aura in the following words: "in a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or resemblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be. While resting on a summer's noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour becomes part of their appearance—that is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains."[14] Juxtaposing impressions such as, "the unique appearance or resemblance of distance," and "resting on a summer's noon," Benjamin presents the idea of wish-images in analogy to the awakening moments when a distinction between dream and reality is difficult to make. The wish-images are indeed analogous to intoxicated objects with no task except radicalizing the moment of awakening. This was a project where, according to Benjamin, surrealists came short of its full realization, and thus, their work remained in the state of intoxication. One might speculate that the idea of wish-images also concerns a state of mind that is purged from historicism: "In the dream in which every epoch sees in images the epoch which is to succeed it," the latter, according to Benjamin, "appears coupled with elements of prehistory - that is to say of a classless society."[15] Distancing himself from historicism, and discussing architecture in reference to the work's tactile and optical dimensions, Benjamin's position both benefits and departs from the discursive horizon of art-history.

Wölfflin, for one, had already formulated the autonomous character of art, postulating a formalistic understanding of style. Wolfflin marked the years around 1800 as the beginning of a linear mode of vision, which "comes to serve a new objectivity."[16] Interestingly enough, such a perception of architectural object would soon find its architectonic language in the "international style:" a steel frame structure whose white cladded surface is punctuated according to the aesthetics of the horizontal window. Discussing architecture towards the end of his essay, Benjamin, instead, neither advocated the universalization of art and architecture, nor did he subtract formalism from historical context. His position recalls Riegl's formal-contextual approach.[17] In rejecting formalism, Benjamin had this to say about the theoretical orientation of the collected essays published by Viennese art-historians:

> ...such study is not concerned with objects of pleasure, with formal problems, ... Rather, this sort of studious work considers the formal incorporation of the given world by the artist, not a selection but rather always an advance into a field of knowledge which did not 'exist' prior to the moment of this formal conquer.... We should never be interested in 'problems of form' as such, as if a

> form ever came into existence for the sake of the stimulus it would produce.[18]

While Wölfflin saw the formal properties of art from the point of view of a non-engaged beholder, Riegl, instead, underlined the viewer's importance for the internal unity of painting, presenting it as a "necessity" for the evolution of art from haptic (volumetric) to optic (spatial).[19] Riegl was also interested in the autonomous nature of the work of art. He was less concerned for the subjective process of creation, or the materialistic interest in matter-of-factness. *Kunstwollen*, artistic volition, was for Riegl a gestalt of continuous flow of thought making a reciprocal dialogue with socio-technological transformations.[20] Riegl's importance for Benjamin, however, has to do with the former's argument that stylistic changes are motivated by the transformations taking place in the perceptual world. When Benjamin made his famous statement that, "During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence," the major historical examples he provides are from the late Roman art-industry whose birth, according to Riegl, coincided with a sense of perception that differed from the classical. Obviously Benjamin had read Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry*. Nevertheless, this did not stop him criticizing Riegl for excluding the social sources of the alleged new perception.[21]

The second import of Riegl for Benjamin has to do with what Michael Steinberg calls Riegl's "principle of externality;" that is, the lived cultural context of a work, and the experience of the viewer.[22] Benjamin believed that the mechanical reproduction of art would change one's perception of the object. In modern times, according to him, one appropriates objects not directly but through technological means. Technology rips the work out of its local context and interrupts the smooth flow of tradition. While lamenting the authenticity of art, Benjamin appropriated technology's attack on tradition, turning it into an analytical tool for cultural studies. In the arcades project, Benjamin presents monuments, commodities, and the body as symbolic images. These cultural products speak neither for matter-of-factness, nor for the spirit of time. Benjamin read the material manifestation of the nineteenth century culture as a dream-image that contained the repressed or the unfulfilled utopias of the past.[23]

Benjamin's work on historical material alludes to a shift from individual to collective experience of a past that is not necessarily embedded in the high art. It rather rests in anonymous works and in the detail.[24] Similar to the interest of both Gottfried Semper and Riegl in applied arts and ornament, Benjamin underlined the importance of the principle of montage as a means to "build up the large constructions out of the smallest, precisely fashioned structural elements. Indeed to detect the crystal of the total event in the analysis of

the small, individual moment."[25] While the high art solidifies autonomy, the "insignificant", so to speak, is apprehended through recollection and involuntary memory of the collective experience. For Benjamin the point was not to reiterate those moments of the bygone past, but to underline their function for the intelligibility of the work of art and to comprehend their redemptive power in the light of "recent." Riegl too, according to Margaret Inversen, believed that "in order for a particular work of art to have meaning, it must be couched in something comparable to a public language."[26] Nevertheless, it was Benjamin's critical appropriation of "intelligibility" that led him to criticize Riegl as noted before. To see the most archaic in the latest technologies, as Benjamin suggests, unfolds a strategic position that questions the linear idea of progress without dismissing the radical potentialities of the new. What makes Benjamin relevant to the main subject of this essay, however, is his interpretation of the role technique plays in modern art. Equally important is his method, deliberating a strategy of criticism unavailable for most critics and historians writing before the post war era.

Many scholars have pointed out the fact that Benjamin's reflection on nineteenth century architecture was borrowed from Sigfried Giedion.[27] In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin does indeed refer to many names, including Karl Boetticher, Adolf Behn, and Giedion. He also wrote about many buildings including H. Labrouste's Bibliotheque Nationale and Gere de Nord. This last building, according to Giedion, is important because in it "techniques of wood construction were simply transposed to iron."[28] Giedion's observation provided Benjamin the means to criticize the nineteenth century's excessive indulgence with masquerade. Nevertheless, more often than not, Benjamin would reverse Giedion's position based on his own critical vision. This reversal is explicit in the most mentioned statement of Giedion where he says, "in the nineteenth century construction plays the role of the subconscious." For Giedion, the subconscious would become the actual material of modern architecture expressed in the buildings erected around 1850. Benjamin challenged and reversed Giedion's linear vision of progress. According to Benjamin one should rather "recognize today's life, today's forms, in the life and in the apparently secondary, lost forms of that epoch."[29] Benjamin's discussion of the intelligibility of the work of art can be extended to contemporary debates on the high and low arts and to Robert Venturi's excursion into Las Vegas, searching the architecture of mass culture. Nevertheless, questions such as "a public language" and its index, or the policies by which one can frame the horizon of the public, are complex issues out of the scope of this essay. Elsewhere, I have discussed the intelligibility of post-modern architecture in terms of "anonymity" (difference) and "communication" (identity).[30] The intelligibility of architecture is part of the experience of the collective body that involves the linguistic potentialities of architecture.

However, "the Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is essential to understanding the crisis of the object in modernity. Towards the end of the essay Benjamin reflects on architecture, though without providing a detailed discussion of the impact of technology on architecture. Benjamin's belief that buildings are appropriated by habit and tactile experience addresses the complexities involved in the idea of the crisis of the object. For Benjamin architecture provides a model of reception comparable to film where "the distracted mass absorbs the work of art." This aspect of film "is most obvious with regard to buildings. Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art, the reception of which is consummated by a collective in a state of distraction."[31] If the distraction Benjamin eludes to is caused by the everyday experience of the metropolis, then paradoxically, architecture stands outside of such an experience, and yet, it has no choice but to internalize some aspects of that very experience. One might claim that architecture is the art of construction of the conditions of life: The integrity of architecture with life is so intense that one cannot separate it from the habits developed through collective experiences. On this subject, Sandor Radnoti has this to say: "Every transformation, every reform of aesthetics is accompanied by a paradigm shift.... Even more than drama, Benjamin links more closely with the social mission and effect of collective art than all other arts. Even the collective, social possibilities which find expression in a technical culture are manifested with striking transparency in the technical foundations of architecture."[32] Such a complex picture of architecture's relation to ideology is the crux of current theoretical debates and is expressed through discussions concerning the relevance of themes such as ornament, construction, and cladding. The theoretical ground of the modernists' appropriation of these themes will be discussed next.

The Lessons of the Machine

Among other architects, Le Corbusier's work not only addresses the crisis of the object, but also presents a complex approach to that historical malady. The scope of his vision could be measured by the general direction modern architecture took around the 30s. Le Corbusier's four texts, *Towards a New Architecture*, *Urbanism*, *Painting*, and finally, *The Decorative Art of Today*, map a contemporary vision of the totality of the modern life-world. The last book is a milestone in criticism of the traditional state of object. Central to understanding Le Corbusier is the text titled "the Lesson of the Machine" where he outlines the vicissitudes of what in Germany of 1924 was coined *Neue Sachlichkeit*. What is involved in this discussion is the dialectics of modernity and tradition, formulated by Le Corbusier, but also his difference from that of Loos, an architect who worked toward a different understanding of the dichotomy between modernity and tradition.

Dwelling on themes such as purity and economy, Le Corbusier pre-

sents a specific vision of the new objectivity. Le Corbusier is insightful in demonstrating architecture's utilization of aesthetic and perceptual potentialities of machine products. Projecting "calculation" and "geometry" into the fabric of the machine, Le Corbusier endows the machine with organic qualities associable with the body. To him the machine is not an extension of the arm, nor does it recall the Surrealists' image of the object where the technique of montage is instrumental in grafting the machine into the body. According to Hal Foster, "In the pre-modern instance the machine is thought to mimic the organic movements of the human (or animal) body that is its model; the machine remains a tool, suited to the craftsman and subservient to him. In the modern instance, however, the machine becomes the model, and the body is disciplined to its specifications, ..."[33] For Le Corbusier, the machine represents a mirror image of some total of human factors which in return has to change the subject. According to him, "Man has drawn himself up like a giant, he has forged himself a tool. He no longer works with his hands. His spirit gives the orders. He has delegated to the machine the work of his clumsy and unskilful hands. Freed, his spirit works freely."[34]

In *Towards a New Architecture*, the reader is reminded of the spirit of time and its task in guiding the eye to see and build in the image of machine. Dwelling on the idea of *piloti* and *promenade architecturale*, his early villas testify to the loss of aura through a series of transgressions: In the Villa Savoye, for example, the classical congruity between the facade and the plan is undermined, and the one-to-one correspondence between the mass and the volume is questioned. Moreover, the *promenade architecturale* empties the internal body of the mass, generating a spatiality that is unprecedented in the conventional experience of the body and architecture. Entering the Villa, one is drawn into the building from below along a vertical axis rather than through a path perpendicular to the face of the building. In each turn of the ramp the body is driven away from "frontality," a concept dear to the classical perception of the object.[35] This said, it is necessary to underline the fact that, Le Corbusier's vision dismissed Benjamin's ambivalent approach to technology, tradition, and his dialectical realization in the wish-images.

As early as 1968, Manfredo Tafuri approached Le Corbusier through Benjamin though via Bertold Brecht's writings. In *Dreigroschenprozess*, Brecht speaks of the nihilism of technology claiming that, the concept of art should accommodate itself to the process of commodification. Tafuri convincingly argues that Le Corbusier's language evolved out of the strict acceptance of a Brechtian prophecy according to which, if art does not modify itself according to the nihilism of technology, the latter "will destroy its past to such an extent that, in the event of the old concept being taken up again—why not?—this will no longer suggest the thing that it used to designate."[36] Accommodation of architecture to technology is one thing; its reduction to the image of machine

is another. Tafuri's recourse to Benjamin, nevertheless, intends to undermine the fallacies of historicism (linear progress).[37] It also raises the following question: to what extent should architecture open itself to technology? Before presenting a schematic picture of various responses to this question, the discussion should turn to Benjamin's ambivalent position on technology and thus his difference from Le Corbusier.[38]

Benjamin identifies wish-images with many aspects of the nineteenth century culture including the decorative architecture of arcades where the glass and iron construction are masked in the illusionary exterior spaces of the panorama; but also in the structures of the world expositions; and in the bourgeois interiors.[39] Benjamin does not encourage architects to follow these examples. He rather hoped that in the process of awakening, these wish-images (or dream images) would release their latent utopia potentialities for a revolutionary cause. As discussed previously, Benjamin had read Giedion's argument that one can detect the basic features of today's architecture in buildings erected around the 1850s.[40] Giedion's observation encouraged Benjamin to see contemporary forms out of the life of, so to speak, secondary and forgotten forms of the past.[41] Benjamin was also aware of Le Corbusier's ideas and was sympathetic to avant-garde's trust on technology.[42] Moreover, he believed that one should not get obsessed with the intoxication induced by technology; one should rather utilize the anticipatory elements of technology and to invigorate the unfulfilled dream of the past. Putting the question of social revolution aside (although the subject is touched in the last chapter of Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*), the alleged potentialities of the past functioned, for Benjamin, as a strategic position to rebuff the total accommodation of architecture to the cycle of production and consumption and to secure architecture's reduction to the image of machine, or its absorption into the *Zeitgeist*. The difficulty of such a position, then and now, might be phrased in the following words: how to adopt historicism and yet maintain a critical edge against the project of modernity? In this line of inquiry, Loos' architecture and his ideas on ornament seem to resonate with Benjamin's idea of the wish-images. In various designs, Loos brings together the architectonic experience of vernacular, modern, and even the classical traditions, presenting a work that is not uniform but hybrid. Further more, Loos' criticism of the Bauhaus' blind reliance on technology, and the school's theoretical shortcoming to make a distinction between the object de art and a utilitarian object, disclose the gap separating Loos from the avant-garde. This is not to say that there is no place for tradition in Le Corbusier's architecture: It is rather the level of abstraction involved in his early work that is at question. Loos's simultaneous esteem for tradition and modernity presents an architectonic articulation of the wish-images in which technology does not reduce the object to its mirror image; it rather assists in saving the claim of the past, i.e., the culture of

building, by the technique of montage.

The impact of technology on art and architecture is a complex issue. Mechanization and industrial production posed problems for artistic activity that had no precedent in the work carried out through the guild system. The history of the Werkbund School in Germany, the decorative arts in France, and the arts and crafts movement in England demonstrate the range of issues involved with the phenomenon of the crisis of the object. To sustain a reasonable trade balance around the turn of the last century, each of these nations had to have an answer for the following questions: how to reorganize a system of apprenticeship appropriate to the new educational institutions? Or, how to accommodate design skills developed in the old guilds with the needs and technical skills imposed by the industrial production system? More importantly, how "to resolve the conflict of interest between artists and manufacturers?"[43] And yet, if one broadens his/her scope of industrialization beyond the romanticists and their legitimate concern for dehumanization created by mechanization, then, the relationship between style and production is another issue that should be attributed to the socio-technical difficulties caused by the abolition of guilds.[44] The various groups involved in the production of industrial commodities had no choice but to collaborate with each other within the newly established institutions.

Nancy Troy notes that, around 1900, the French artists and designers found themselves competing with the cheap products of manufacturers that not only limited the artists' access to the available markets, but because of the mechanically reproduced objects (dressed-up in old styles) it eventually induced a new generation of designers who knew nothing of the *metier*.[45] Besides, the logic of machine production and the manufacturer's competition with the artists' endeavour for copyright, were another development central to the dissolution of the *métier*. On the other hand, the new educational institutions faced the task of transforming the design knowledge acquired through the guilds to the industrial designers. This transformation, ironically, produced designers who "were not fine artists, not craftsmen, and that it thereby contributed to the decline of the *métier*."[46] According to Troy, the early conflict between French artists and manufacturers divided designers into two camps: the *constructeurs* who emphasized the *metier*, and were interested in construction process and the skills needed to handle a particular material. The other group, known as *coloristes*, "focused, instead, on the presentation of ensembles of objects in which their painterly interest was reflected in the dominant role played by bright, strident colors."[47] Disengagement with the tectonic aspects of material and construction was indeed consequential for the direction the early modern design would take.

Consider the word "ensemble," for example: it designated a shift from the objecthood to the object's bathing in a scenic space. In search for the new

objectivity, the early modern designers were interested in the aesthetic and functional link between objects such as chair, table, carpet, but also the ambiance generated by particular arrangement of these products. Also important was the relation of an ensemble to its subject matter; how a collector's room, for example, should look. This, so to speak, scenic vision undermined the integrity of an object with its *metier*, the core theme of *constructeurs's* discourse. Another implication of this development had to do with the permeation of visuality different than the one commanding an artisan's relation to the object. Within the framework of an ensemble, the object loses its tectonic quest and becomes part of an atmosphere that in its totality can be associated with the picturesque qualities of a canvas. Somewhat similar to a painter, the designer, from now on, would be concerned with the image of things brought together for a particular purpose. These issues surrounded the decorative artists of France, and as Troy claims, Le Corbusier, at least until 1911, enjoyed collaborating with the *coloristes*.

One might arguethat the thematic differences between *constructeurs* and *coloristes* became central for Le Corbusier's future work. This is a plausible charge if one recalls the important role the Purist painting played for Le Corbusier's architecture[48] and his work's mutation from atectonic to the tectonic: from the Villa Savoye to the Weak-end House.[49] Another dimension of Troy's observation can be associated with the present socio-technical transformation induced by telecommunication technologies. Computer-generated forms defy *métier* and put emphasis on the surface and the exhibition value of the object. The situation prompts a host of issues : the crisis of the object that now should be discussed in the light of closer analysis of the early modern architecture, and Le Corbusier's ideas in particular.

By 1924 Le Corbusier had moved away from his early interest in Decorative Arts. The temporal distance from the First World War gave Le Corbusier the opportunity to see Germany's achievement in technology, and the latter's impact in transforming artefacts, beyond nationalistic prejudice. If in *Etiude sur le mouvment d' art decoratif en Allemagne*, written as early as 1911, Le Corbusier could not appreciate the true cause of the Werkbund, in putting the economic competition running between France and Germany behind, he was now able to present a point of view that the Art Nouveau did not have the historical chance to attend. Mention should also be made of Le Corbusier's acquaintance with August Perret (during the architect's short visit to Paris in 1911) from whom he learned the structural potentialities of the concrete frame construction system. More importantly is Loos' essay "Ornament and Crime," first published in 1910, which later appeared in Le Corbusier's *l'Esprit Nouveaue.* In addition, mention should also be made of Loos' distinction between the object d' art and a utilitarian object, a subject central to his criticism of the Secessionists and the Bauhaus School. These ideas had critical bearing on Le

Corbusier's post-war design, and the import of technology in his discourse.

Le Corbusier's critique of the decorative arts draws extensively from Loos, specially the latter's belief that the new style must avoid any decorative elements, and that, in dissociating itself from the historical styles, modern art can make an authentic dialogue with tradition. For Le Corbusier, instead, tradition sustains its continuity through what he called "mechanical selection" : an abstract concept designating the enduring laws of making, but also the primary needs and the logic of economic selection. Logic, economy, and mathematics were foundational for craftwork, so it is today for machine products, Le Corbusier claimed. His was a theoretical position to please the disenchanted artists who had turned their backs against industrial technology. Le Corbusier's position also pumped fresh air into the humanist discourse, its reliance on universal concepts and abstract principles.

One consequence of Le Corbusier's belief that the laws of making remain the same throughout manual and mechanical production systems, was the idea of "object-type;" a neutral structure that can be moulded with the aesthetic needs of the machine. Object-type "is envisioned to condense natural needs and actions into the streamlined tools of single functions in actuality."[50] In fact, Le Corbusier's response to the crisis of the object was to retreat into the formal logic and abstract and geometrical properties of manual making. His early work articulates the formal characteristics of the object-type, exploring its implications for painting and architecture. In 1914 he presented the idea of Dom-ino system and the five points of architecture, theorizing the distinction between underlying structure of architecture—the logical economy of a form— and its ephemeral and outward dressing. "If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the houses and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view," Le Corbusier claimed, "we shall arrive at the 'House-Machine,' the mass-produced house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful."[51] Two conclusions should be made out of this statement: Firstly, that the values of an object are nothing but mere surface additions; an idea that made Le Corbusier believe that, independent of their symbolic connotations, the essence of manual production can sustain a new life through machine products. Secondly, in making analogies between the serviceability of a house and a typewriter, for example, Le Corbusier did unfold an aesthetic vision, necessitating a mechanistic fusion between form and function, somewhat similar to those operating in the machine products such as aeroplanes and liners.

What is missing in the idea of mechanical selection and the object-type is the auratic authenticity of the work discussed by Benjamin. How the object's transformation from a useful cultural product into a commodity, for example, affects the aesthetic and constructive aspects of architecture. Ac-

cording to Hal Foster: "Almost all machinist modernisms fix fetishistically on the machine as object or image; rarely do they position it in the social process. Even the surrealist critique is often (mis) directed at the machine as such rather than at its capitalist deployment."[52] And yet another question to ask: what would be the life of the object in a world saturated by commodity production? Fredric J. Schwartz is right to hold the Bauhaus (machinist modernists) responsible for ignoring the important issues such as distribution, exchange, and consumption play in the realization of the new objectivity. According to him, "the modernity of the Fagus-Werk exceeds its construction and needs to be considered apart from it. As compelling and seemingly self-evident a notion as it is, the technologized modernity that emerged as the cornerstone of design discourse in the 1920s cannot explain its own prehistory."[53] Insulating architecture with the image of machine, Le Corbusier did indeed miss the opportunity to see the socio-economic and cultural scars caused by the project of modernity. Like other machinist modernists, Le Corbusier too prescribed a perception of the object that is not inflicted by the loss of aura.[54]

It is important at this moment to discuss the difference between Loos and Le Corbusier in reference to the dichotomy of tradition and civilization (technology?). Le Corbusier's object-type was an attempt to reduce tradition to the logos of making and thus dismissing the tactile and tectonic dimension of the culture of building. The aesthetic and formal aspects of tradition are not separate from the technical knowhow; together, they rather constitute the auratic dimension of architecture, i.e., the unity of the place and the thing that in the age of mechanical reproduction is shaken by the forces of commodification. Against the late nineteenth century historicism, Le Corbusier proposed the thematic of an architectural discourse, the framework of which was supported by the Dom-ino system, itself a concrete result of the process of mechanical selection. There is a sense of deconstruction and reconstruction in Le Corbusier's thought that should be underlined here: At one level, and in order to reach the everlasting nucleus of making (the object-type), he sweeps away all stylistic clothing of architecture. At another level, he epitomizes the continuity of logos from manual to machine technology through the Dom-ino frame, the surface of which is clothed by the aesthetics of the *Zeitgeist*, the white-wash-image. In doing so, Le Corbusier disengages himself from the criticality of the "distance" which puts architecture in conflict with the spirit of modernization. When this is established then an argument can be advanced to underline the formativeness of the concept of distance for architecture that in more ways than one might be associable with Benjamin's idea of wish-images.

Interestingly enough, by the 30s, architects and theoreticians were discussing the possibility of maintaining a distance from the *Zeitgeist*. Among others, mention should be made of Siegfried Kracauer who knew both Benjamin and Loos. Kracauer's assertion that "Capitalism does not rationalize too

much but too little," motivated Theodor Adorno to say that the principle of spirit "is not meant to be absorbed into the reproduction of life and which by creating awareness of what exists outlines, negatively, a possible Other."[55] In this context, "distance" can be seen as an appropriate conceptual tool to gauge the early modern architects' approach to a *metier* that was at the brink of total assimilation to the world of technology. Beside Kracauer, a small circle of architects, instead, used the idea of "spirit" to "protect the "spirit" from its own self-idolization." Noteworthy is the position of Frank L. Wright, Alvar Aalto, and even Mies van der Rohe, on tradition.[56] For these architects, in order to avoid the fallacies of both romanticists' and futurists' views of the crisis of the object, the choice was to "hand over" tradition to the process of secularization. A process of destruction, indeed, by which "The object is reactivated when the qualities of distance and uniqueness are removed from it; it becomes something different, which needs to no longer be experienced in terms of presence and absence."[57] The point was not to destroy the culture of building literally, but to evoke its architectonic elements in the recent; that is, to articulate the tectonic of column and wall, for example, in spite of, or because of the mythologies attributed to the classical language of architecture. Equally important is the use of traditional materials without sentimental indulgence with tactile sensibilities available to pre-modern periods . And finally, the importance of making dialogue with technical and aesthetic potentialities of the *Zeitgeist*, and yet to create heterotopias rather coherent unities, or total work of art.[58] In what follows, a brief discussion of several examples from modern architecture is expected to provide an alternative perspective on technology than that of the international style architecture.

Contrary to the abstract and homogeneous white architecture of the international style, the following architects juxtaposed different tactile sensibilities defying the concept of the New. Consider Wright's the Lloyd House in Libertyville Illinois where a peculiar treatment and placement of the wood and brick attest to Wright's concern for the tectonic: the brick is used for the load bearing walls, and the wood covers balconies and overhangs. His work does not stand for fragmentation and visual sensibilities borrowed from modern painting, suggested by Vincent Scully;[59] they rather present tectonic constructs expressing the dialogue between heaviness and lightness, verticality and horizontality; one inspired by the forces of gravity, the other conceived suspending the forces of gravity. Consider also the Colonnades of the Florida College where the column enjoys an "excess" that can be associated with what Semper coined "structural-symbolic."[60]

The concept of "excess" is also present in numerous works of Aalto. The columns in the Villa Mairea and Finlandia Hall allude to the tactile and tectonic experiences of both vernacular and classical traditions.[61] In juxtaposing different tactile sensibilities, Aalto's architecture subscribes to the tec-

tonic relationship between cladding and the structure. The wood cladding of the overhang volume of the upper floor of the "House and Studio," Munkkiniemi, looks as if the building wants to suspend the forces of gravity. This sentiment is also evoked by the curvilinear form of the Baker House, and in the texture of brickwork of the Experimental House. Here the woven brickwork evokes patterns derived from patchwork and quilt. Speaking of Aalto's perplexity in handling of the skin and structure relationship, Kenneth Frampton observes that, "in Aalto's work, the tectonic dimension rises and falls. It assumes many guises, at different instances in different periods of his work and remains throughout as revealing as it is concealing, passing dialectically, as it were, from the concealment of the skin to the exposure of the structure and vice versa."[62] Aalto's complex interplay of skin and structure opens spatiality whose index teases oppositions such as modern/pre-modern, and abstract/textual.

The recourse to tradition reaches a critical point in Mies' architecture. Elsewhere I have discussed the architect's approach to the culture of building; the strategy of re-thinking the tectonic of column and wall beyond the pre-modern appropriation of these two elements.[63] And yet, his latest work sustains an image of primitivism suggested in Laugier's discourse on hut. Mies' articulation of the column to the beam and their position to the glass enclosure in the 50X50 House, and in the New National Gallery problematize the tectonic image of the hut beyond the latter's visual semantics. This aspect of Mies' architecture has not been fully addressed. Equally misunderstood is his idea of *beinahe nichts*, or "almost nothing," as if, somewhat like rationalists, Mies wanted to reduce architecture merely into building techniques.[64] "Almost nothing" avoids formalism and expressionism for a tectonic whose ontology rests in the primeval hut. His latest architecture neither bestows "monumentalization of technique," nor intends articulating pure artistic statements on steel and glass.[65] Debunking formal and expressionistic aspects of form and technique, Mies allows the collective unconsciousness (in Benjaminian use of the term) of the culture of building to speak through available building technologies and programmatic needs.

There are other instances in Mies' architecture where the ontology of construction alludes to the culture of building in a less ambiguous manner. Consider the Barcelona Pavilion where the abstract handling of the mass and the plan simultaneously is charged with two themes central to the culture of building: The base in Pavilion, and more so in the New National Gallery, but also in the Crown Hall, prepares the site to receive the structural frame. Here Mies represents what Semper had discussed in terms of the tectonic of the earth-work and the frame-work. And yet, most pictures taken from the last two buildings focus on the freestanding frame to support the early historians' enthusiasm for a functional-rationalist architecture. One might speculate that Mies was aware of the tradition of served/service spaces, but at the same time,

he wanted to avoid resolving their difference in abstract forms or in the redundancies of the form follows function. In the Crown Hall, for example, almost all service spaces are allocated to the lower level, preparing the ground for the frame-work to represent the civic dimension (cosmopolitan?) of architecture. Again, in Barcelona Pavilion, the chromium steel columns and the polished green Tinian marble walls, not only give a new twist to the tectonic tradition of column and wall, but the tactile qualities of these elements are expected to revitalize the dialogue between the culture of stone and steel, so to speak, advanced by Otto Wagner.[66] Embracing the latest techniques of building fully, Mies did indeed insert a distance between architecture and the spirit of time. Fritz Neumeyer's assessment is convincing: "Mies penetrated beyond the irrelevant temporal into the immanent—into the sphere of the 'specifically architectonic' (Westheim) that, both intrinsic and modern, created a new metaphor for epochal form giving."[67]

Finally, convinced of the idea that the style of the present is self-evident and needs no "design," Loos too probed what is intrinsic to architecture. In a 1919 article titled "Architecture," he expressed his dislike of the fashion-like architecture in the following words: "Ah, what is that? A false note in the harmony. Like an unwelcome scream. In the centre, beneath the peasants' homes which were created not by them but by God, stands a villa. Is it a product of a good or bad architect? I do not know. I only know that peace, tranquillity and beauty are no more."[68] Recalling the bygone peace, Loos' design is informed by assembly of selective tactile sensibilities, the memory of which is in sharp contrast to the spirit of modernization. Ironically, it was the technique of montage, the latest technique of modernity, which gave him the chance to assess tradition differently. To make this point clear it is essential to compare a *poshe* section drawing of the Villa Tzara's with that of the Villa Savoye. In the former, the position of rooms (solid) is decided in its reciprocal relation to a labyrinthine space, the *Raumplan*: a system of spatial displacement that is similar to the sectional organization of a classical building does not trigger the vertical volume. In the Villa Savoye, instead, the vertical section lays the groundwork for the *promenade architecturale* where a free-floating space displaces the conventional layering of the solid over the void. The ramp in Villa Savoye disintegrates the Platonic corporeality of the building. Here, dematerialization of volume is expressed in the hollow space that hovers from the *piloti* to the roof garden. In Le Corbusier's section, the object has lost its field of reference; its vertical and horizontal datum, as well as the multiplicity of languages experienced in the metropolis. It is the perceptual dimension of technology that underpins Le Corbusier's vision. In Loos, montage makes the culture of building to speak anew. Perhaps Loos knew that once liberated from its aura, the object has no choice but to cultivate the protein idea of the crisis itself.[69] Neitherreconciliation of architecture with technology, and thus facili-

tating expressive freedom of the subject, nor reduction of architecture to the image of machine, or for that matter to the image-laden world of electronic technologies, is the case today. To follow Loos, architecture should evolve through the dialectics of the culture of building and the energies released by the object's departure from that very tradition. A process of transgression, indeed, the architectonic implications, need to be explored in the work of the historical avant-garde.

Notes

1. According to Fritz Neumeyer, Mies van der Rohe was influenced by Romano Guardini's thought in general, and his ambivalent approach to technology, in particular. Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless Word* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991). "Thus Guardini called for something with which Mies was in profound agreement: another, new, but not unilateral modernism in which subjective forces were restrained by objective limits, but, in which, conversely, the potentially threatening objective powers inherent in technology were subordinated to the subject, to man and his life." Neumeyer, Ibid., p. 201. The dichotomy between the will of technology and the state of cultural products, and architecture as well, is a valid point of view for discussing current architecture while telecommunication technologies are influencing every facet of our daily experience.
2. The importance of "Surface" in the present architecture is discussed in Gevork Hartoonian, "Surface: a-tectonic of roofing and wrapping," forthcoming *Architectural Theory Review*.
3. See Haim N. Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arber: University Microfilms International, 1979).
4. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans., Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), 185-203.
5. Walter Benjamin, Paris- the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," *Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1985). In the dreams in which every epoch sees in images the epoch which is to succeed it, the latter appears coupled with elements of prehistory—that is to say of a classless society." p.158. Also see Susan Buck-Morrs, "Mythic Nature, Wish Image," in *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp.110-158.
6. For a discussion of the history of frame-structure see Colin Rowe, *Mathematics of Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1989), pp. 89-118 .
7. "A Commodity is therefore a mysterious thing simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour." Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York:International Publishers, 1967),pp.35-93. For Marx fetish is a subjectified object, the return of the familiar in a different gaze. A confusion that for Marx recalls "the misty realm of religion" where "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own." Ibid., p.165.

8 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotex(e), Inc., 1983).

9 Bernard Gache makes a distinction between craftsmanship and mechanical production based on the meaning of "contract" in each period. The change from an understanding of contract based on custom and norm to the maximization of utility has come to an end by computer. Here, "the primary image is no longer the image of the object but the image of the set of constraints at the intersection of which the image is created. This object no longer reproduces a model of imitation, but actualizes a model of simulation." Gache, *Earth Moves*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 87-94, 96.

10 In various disciplines the world *Neue Sachlichkeit* is interpreted and applied differently. G. F. Hartlub coined the general connotation of the term during an exhibition in Mannheim in 1923. Most participants inclined to formal objectivity and minimal ornamentation. See Fritz Schmalenbach, "The term *Neue Sachlichkeit*," *Art Bulletin* 22/3, (1940): 165. According to Harry Francis Mallgrave, Richard Streiter introduced the word Sachlichkeit to architectural discourse, and later Hermann Mathesius reinterpreted it in the context of the 1914 Bauhaus debate on norm and innovation in architectural style. See Mallgrave, "From Realism to *Sachlichkeit*: The Polemics of Architectural Modernity in the 1890s," in ed., Harry F. Mallgrave, *Otto Wagner*, (Santamonica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities," 1993), pp. 281-322. While realism in architecture compromises with *Sachlichkeit* in the first decades of the last century, in painting and literature, some scholars have discussed the two terms from a political point of view. See Weiland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit and the German Realism of the Twenties* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1979), pp. 7-32. Recently, Fredric J. Schwartz has looked at the subject from a fresh point of view. His main thesis is that, by aligning architecture with technology, the Bauhaus of Walter Gropius came short of touching the other side of production, that is, exchange and consumption. Schwartz sees the theoretical discourse of the Werkbund as the first step towards formation of a mass culture that debunks the idea of style motivated by historical forms or craft- oriented techniques. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Most recently Detlef Martins has contextualized the 20's discourse in German architecture in his introduction to Walter Curt Behrendt, *The Victory of the New Building Style*, trans. H. F. Mallgrave (Los Angeles: the Getty Research Institute, 2000).

11 For a full discussion of the implication of fashion and dressing for modern architecture see, Mark Wigely, *White Walls, Designer Dresses* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995).

12 Discussing the impact of information technology and "image" for art and art history, Hal Foster asks "if there is a relation between visual culture and electronic information, how can it be thought outside of anxious affirmation or romantic revolution?" Foster, "The Archeive Without Museum," *October*, 77, (Summer 1996): 108. Following Michel Foucault's argument that an archieval analysis can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework, Foster sees the historicality of a discursive shift from style for

visual in the following texts all written in the 30s: Andre Malraux, "The Museum Without Walls," begun 1935, Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1935, Martin Heidegger, "The World Picture," 1938, Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 1939, and of course the exhibition of the international style held at MoMA in the 1930s

13 The nineteenth century is famous for its positivism and knowledge of history. In Germanic countries, however, the importance of aesthetic for art and architecture as well as the way we appreciate and enjoy form and space, molded technology with perception, empathy, and style. See Harry F. Mallgrave's introduction to *Empathy, Form, and Space* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994). Beside Heinrich Wolfflin and Alois Reigle, we are reminded of Adolf Behne's influence on Walter Benjamin. Arnd Bohm argues for Benjamin's debt to Behne's "*Das reproduktive Zeitalter*" in the Kustwerk-Essay. Among other affinities between these two authors, Bohm underlines the "lingering romanticism," attribution of will and purpose to technology and the latter's impact on art work and perception. Arnd Bohm, "Artful Reproduction: Benjamin's Appropriation of Adolf Behne's "*Das reproduktive Zeitalter*" in the Kustwerk-Essay, pp. 146-155. On H. Wolfflin and A. Riegle see below.

14 Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street* (London: New Left Books, 1979), p.250.

15 Walter Benjamin, "Paris- The Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Charles Baudelaire a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 159.

16 Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Principles of Art History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1950). For implication of this aspect of Wolfflin thoughts on Sachlichkeit, see Gevork Hartoonian, *Ontology of Construction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapter two.

17 On Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Reigl's place in Walter Benjamin see, Michael P. Steinberg, "The Collector as Allegorist: Goods, Gods, and the Objects of History," in ed. M. P. Steinberg, *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 88-118.

18 Walter Benjamin, "Rigorous Study of Art," *October*, 47, (winter 1988), pp. 84-90. In translating Benjamin's essay, Thomas Y. Levin reminds us that Benjamin borrowed his title from Hans Seldmayr's lead piece in a book of essays by a art historian from Vienna, published in 1931. See also Christopher S. Wood, ed. *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), specially part one and two.

19 Alois Riegl, "The Dutch Group Portrait," *October*, 74, (Fall 1995), pp. 3-35. Analyzing Rembrandt's "the Anatomy Lessons of Dr. Tulp," Riegl argued that "the picture accordingly contains a double unity through subordination: first, between Tulp and the seven surgeons, all of whom subordinate themselves to him as the lecturer, and, second, between the crowning surgeon and the beholder, the latter subordinated to the former and indirectly through him to Tulp in turn." Such a perception of the beholder and painting remains, according to Rigel, "remains closely dependent upon the works of his direct predecessors.... and one becomes convinced that Rembrandt, too, was primarily merely an executor

of the artistic volition of his people and his time."

20 According to Margaret Iversen, "For Riegl, different stylistic types, understood as expression of a varying Kunstwollen, are read as different ideals of perception or as different ways of regarding the mind's relationship to its objects and of organizing the material of perception." Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 8.

21 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York, Schoken Books, 1973), p. 222.

22 Michael P. Steinberg, "The Collector as Allegorist: Goods, Gods, and the Objects of History," in ed. M. P. Steinberg, *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 109.

23 Here I am benefiting from Sigrid Weigel's association between a Benjaminian understanding of image and Sigmund Freud's description of the language of the unconsciousness in terms of dream images. See Weigel, *Body-and Image-Space: Re-reading Walter Benjamin* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

24 This attention to the marginal was for Walter Benjamin the result of a major methodological discovery laid down by Alois Riegl. According to Benjamin, Rigel's study of *Late Roman Art Industry*, "broke with the theory of 'periods of decline,' and recognized in what had previously been called 'regression into barbarism' a new experience of space, a new artistic volition [*kunstwollen*]." Quoted in Thomas Y. Levin, " Walter Benjamin and the Theory of Art History," October 47, winter 1988, p. 80. This lengthy attention I have given to Riegle and Benjamin has also to do with my interest in Gottfried Semper who also broke away from the classical wisdom of architecture and suggested seeing the origin of monuments in marginal works like the stage setting for carnivals and skills developed in industries such as textile, carpentry, ceramics, and masonry. See Gevork Hartoonian, *Ontology of Construction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On Semper the controversial dialogue between him and Riegl see Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper, Architect of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

25 Walter Benjamin, "N [Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," in ed. Gary Smith, *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 48.

26 Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 13.

27 For the correspondence between Walter Benjamin and Sigfried Giedion see Sokratis Geogiadis's introduction to Sigfried Giedion, *Building France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*, trans. J. D. Berry (Santa Monica: The Center for the History of Art and Humanities, 1995).

28 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: the Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), p. 154.

29 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades*, p. 458.

30 Gevork Hartoonian, *Modernity and its Other: A Post-Script to Contemporary Architecture* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1997), p. 96.

31 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art....," p.239.

32 Sandor Randoti, "Benjamin's Dialectic of Art and Society," in ed. Gary Smith,

Benjamin, p. 142.

33 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 129.

34 Le Corbusier,*The Decorative Art of Today*, Trans. James I. Dunnett, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), p. 106.

35 I have discussed these issues in *Modernity and its Other*, (1997), pp. 53-80, and in "The Limelight of the House Machine," *The Journal of Architecture*.

36 Quoted in Manfredo Tafuri, "Modern Architecture and the Eclipse of History," in *Theories and History of Architecture*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), p. 45.

37 On historicism see Alan Colquhoun, "Three Kinds of Historicism," in *Modernity and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1989), pp. 3-20.

38 At least until 1967, Manfredo Tafuri believed that there were no better lessons on the subject than Le Corbusier, because it comes from one who has accepted, without late-romantic second thoughts, the dissolving of the traditional function of history, of the artistic object, of the concept itself of art, recovering, from a radically new starting point, the values of memory, of history,..." Tafuri, "Modern Architecture and the Eclipse of History,"in *Theories*, Ibid, p.64. Current architectural discourse on the dichotomy between tradition and technology has maintained a rather broader scope than Tafuri's. On the place of tradition in Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Adolf Loos see, for example, Anderson *Assemblage*, Michael Hays, "Critical Architecture," *Perspecta*, no.21, 1984, pp.14-24. For my position see Gevork Hartoonian, *Ontology of Construction: On the Nihilism of Technology in Theories of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

39 John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, Ithica: Cornell University Press,1993, p.285).

40 Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete*, trans. J. Duncan Berry, (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995).

41 Walter Benjamin, "Re The Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," in Benjamin, ed. Gary Smith (The University of Chicago Press, 1983).

42 Benjamin wrote that to encompass both Breton and Le Corbusier "would mean drawing the spirit of present-day France like a bow and shooting knowledge to the heart of the moment." See Gary Smith, *Benjamin*, 1983, Ibid. p.46.

43 Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) p.52.

44 For a concise discussion of this subject in German Werkbund see Fredric J. Schwartz, *Werkbund: Design Theory & Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 1996), "Individuality," pp. 151-163. See also Walter Curt Behrendt, 2000, Ibid.

45 The Societe des Artistes Decorateurs was established in March 1901 not simply to organize annual exhibitions focusing on ensembles of decorative art but also to defend the rights of decorative artists." Nancy Troy, 1991, p.53.

46 Troy, 1991, p.55.

47 Troy, 1991, p.67.

48 (reference) *Oppositions* and Troy

49 Kenneth Frampton, "Reflections on the Opposition of Architecture and Building," in ed. James Gwan *A Continuity Experiment* (The Architectural Press, 1975), pp. 107-113. This is a terrific piece among early writings of Frampton which he reads into Le Corbusier's work a Heideggerian understanding of space that is interwoven with the life-world.

50 Katherine Fraser Fischer, A Nature Morte, 1927," *Oppositions*, no.15/16, Winter/Spring 1979, p.162.

51 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p.210. In a passage of *La Peinture moderne'*, Le Corbusier painted the differences between Purism and Cubism in their choice of objects. Purism draw their choices preferably from among those that serve the most direct human uses; those which are like the extensions of man's limbs, and thus of an extreme intimacy, a banality that makes them barely exist as subjects of interest in themselves." quoted in Kurt W. Forster, Antiquity and Modernity in the La Roch-Jeanneret Houses of 1923," *Oppositions*, 15/16, (Winter/Spring 1979), p.142.

52 Foster, p.148.

53 Fredric J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory & Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 4.

54 For Le Corbusier's political position after World War I, see Mary MacLeod, "'Architecture or Revolution:' Taylorism, Technocracy, and Social Change," ? According to MacLeod, Taylorism, and the vision that links technology to social change, "was fundamental to Le Corbusier's architecture and theory during the postwar period." MacLeod also underlines Le Corbusier's interest in Taylorism for the design of the Dom-ino system.

55 Theodor Adorno, The Curious Realist: On Siegfried Kracuer," in *Notes to Literature*, vol.2, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 72.

56 I have discussed the idea of montage in Adolf Loos, F. L. Wright, and Mies van der Rohe in *Ontology of Construction*, p. 1994. On the occasion of Alvar Aalto's centennial exhibition at modern museum of art, Kenneth Frampton argues for montage as one of several topes in Aalto's work that still is relevant to the emerging future. See Frampton, Domus, no. 801, February 1998, pp. 52-53.

57. Howard Caygill, Benjamin, Heidegger and the Destruction of Tradition," in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy,* edited, Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 25. The article discloses fresh ideas on Benjamin and Heidegger's approach to tradition, art and technology.

58 Michel Foucault was the first to coin the concept of heterotopia in discussing urban space. It is to Demetrio Perphyrios credit to use the term and shed a different light on modern architectural discourse. His discussion on Alvar Aalto is pertinent to my following reflections on this architect though I avoid following Perphyrios' structuralist and semiotic approach to architecture. See Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism* (London: Academy Edition, 1982).

59 See Vincent Scully, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, (New York: George Braziller, 1960).

60 Discussing the importance of *the principle of dressing* Gottfried Semper suggests that the formal elements of architecture can enjoy an artistic expression beyond their structural-technical sense. See Gottfried Semper, *The Four*

Elements of Architecture and Other Writings, trans. H. Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p.248.

61 Writing from a structuralist position and the semiotic theories of the late 70s, Demetri Porphyrios argues that Alvar Aalto was convinced that in architecture, "the passage from representation to signification had to be harnessed and kept within the realm of a continuing discourse established by history." And he sees Aalto's various columns borrowing their figurative richness neither from the emotive physiognamy of a non-architectural world, nor from the self-indulgent commemoration of abstraction, but from architectural history itself." Porphyrios, p. 44.

62 Kenneth Frampton, "Alvar Aalto," *Domus*, no. 801, February 1998, pp.52-53.

63 Gevork Hartoonian, "Mies van der Rohe: the Genealogy of Column and Wall," *Ontology of Construction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 68-80.

64 It is to Fritz Neumeyer's credit that he brought to our attention the significance of the hut in Mies's architecture, and the literature addressing the artistic aspect of construction in Mies. See "Construction as Promise of Art: Building Art in the Raw," in *The Artless Word* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 110-133.

65 For the first position see Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 161-165. Although Frampton's assessment here relies on Mies's writings, however he underlines the importance of wall/column articulation and "the authority of the trabeated architecture as it had been inherited from the ancient world, the implacable elements of roof, beam, column and wall." For the second position see Fritz Neumeyer's quotation of Sorgel in *The Artless Word* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 132. If one agrees with Sorgel that "This post system must be aesthetically so composed that it appeals to reason, soul, and eye, thus making it gratifying: that is the artistic task," then the artistic references of tectonic are reduced primarily to an aestheticism rooted in the subject's (architects) head leaving no room for a distorted recollection of memory.

66 Fritz Neumeyer, "Iron and Stone: The Architecture of the *Grobstadt*," in *Otto Wagner*, ed. Harry F. Mallgrave, (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993), pp. 115-156.

67 Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless Word* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 81.

68 Adolf Loos, "Architecture," in Tim Benton, Charlotte Benton, and Dennis Sharp eds., *Architecture and Design 1890-1939* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1975), pp. 41-45.

69 Here I am recalling Massimo Cacciari's discussion of Adolf Loos in *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

The Crisis of the Object II

Gevork Hartoonian

The Object of Purpose

To further explore the theoretical issues involved in discussing art, architecture, and technology, it is necessary to attend to Walter Benjamin's idea of the dialectical image, one more time. The quest would concern the avant-garde art, and the argument presented here wishes to present a different paradigm to interpreting contemporary architecture. To this end it is necessary to navigate at a theoretical plateau where the idea of wish-images meets Gottfried Semper's discourse on theatricality.[1]

Exploring the nature of cultural transformation taking place during the late nineteenth century Europe, and the experience of surrealism, Benjamin underlined the irreducibility of cultural artifacts to the matter-of-factness of the technological world. Benjamin's strategic position was centred on the idea of wish-images: presenting a picture of the recent present that is inflicted by dream-like elements of the past. Whether one can still hold his position today is a valid question to raise. What marks the present situation, however, are mediatic-images that make the best work of surrealism look outmoded. The situation prompts the following postulate: that any critical understanding of the complexities involved in the modern discourse on art and technology demands discussing the purposefulness of architecture; a useful criterion to differentiate architecture from both art and utilitarian objects.

The dialectics of autonomy and purposefulness does indeed problematize a clear-cut distinction between art and architecture. The merit of discussing wish-images in architecture necessitates detecting and recalling some aspects of the culture of building—those elements that for historical reasons are now outmoded—within recent cultural and technical developments. The architectural examples that are discussed in this essay aim at demonstrating that to attend to wish-images neither suggests returning to nineteenth century historicism, nor the eclecticism exercised during the high days of post-modernism. The intention rather is to underline the criticality of the culture of building for criticism.

Among other writings concerning surrealism, Hal Foster's occasional detours to architecture are constructive. Juxtaposing the dialectical pair of dada/constructivism with surrealism/Leger, Foster highlights those aspects of the surrealist experience which are useful for a concept of modernism that does not entertain "industrialist objectivity," nor "announce a new technological world, a new rational man."[2] Also important is Foster's association of Fernand Leger's approach to technology with Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus. If constructivists explored the possible ways that the cultural could become industrial, Le Corbusier's affirmative approach to technology, instead, restrained the purposefulness of the culture of building, leaving architecture with no choice but to internalize the image of machine. Furthermore, Foster's position recalls Theodor Adorno who drew some similarities between the freezing moments of surrealism and that of photography. Adorno indeed anticipates Foster by saying that: "Surrealism forms the complement to the *Neue Sachlichkeit,* New Objectivity, which came into being at the same time. The *Neue Sachlichkeit's* horror of the crime of ornamentation, as Loos called it, is mobilized by surrealist shocks. The house has a tumour, its bay window. Surrealism paints this tumour: an excrescence of flesh grows from the house."[3] And he continues, "Childhood images of the modern era are the quintessence of what the *Neue Sachlichkeit* makes taboo because it reminds us of its own object-like nature and its inability to cope with the fact that its rationality remains irrational."[4] Thus the claim that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Surrealism present a paradoxical pole, the in-between of which is occupied by various artists' and architects' responses to the crisis of the object.

Foster's dialectical pairs provide a conceptual tool for examining the concrete impact of the loss of aura on architecture, especially when the discussion concerns architecture's difference from the fine arts. Secondly, Foster directs one's attention to the complex relationship between art, craftwork, architecture, and the criticality of the concept of construction in modernity.

A useful theoretical move toward differentiating architecture from both art and handiwork is to visit Martin Heidegger's remarks on the specifics of a "thing," craftwork and art. For Heidegger, "the piece of equipment is half thing, because characterized by thingliness, and yet it is something more; at the same time it is half art work and yet something less, because lacking the self-sufficiency of the work of art."[5] Likewise, it is possible to suggest that architecture is more than a craftwork; architecture is not just a useful object, and yet, architecture is less than art because there is purpose to architecture that art necessarily does not have to subscribe. The criticality of craft and construction for architecture is obvious. What makes architecture different from craftwork, however, has to do with that which makes a utilitarian work different from the object of art. It is a subject topical not only for Le Corbusier and Loos, but also for George Simmel whose remark on the handle of a vase is

worth attention.

In a short piece titled "The Handle," Simmel underlines the difference between "function" and aesthetics. Relegating the latter to an "ideal space, which has no more contact with real space," he concludes that a craftwork like a vase has more bearing on reality.[6] Simmel's remarks on the handle and its relation to the vase is informed by a paradigm different from that of Heidegger. The difference has to do with Heidegger's mapping of "thing" in the matrix of art and craft. Moreover, for Simmel, the vase touches the life-world mainly in its moment of use; when it is "filled and emptied, handed here and set there." For Heidegger, the thingness of a craftwork speaks for the non-empirical realms such as unconsciousness, and the remembrance of an object in association with human existence. Interestingly enough, Heidegger's position recalls Adorno's criticism of Simmel, the gist of which is owed to Ernst Bloch. In spite of the absence of a handle, one can discover in the pot, as Bloch notes, "the incommensurable aspects of the object, anything about human beings that might be hidden from him." And yet, according to Adorno, it is not the proportions of the pot that makes it beautiful, but "what has been accumulated within it, its process of becoming and its history, what has disappeared into it and what thinker's gaze, which is both tender and aggressive, arouses in it."[7] Therefore, one can argue that architecture's entanglement with human existence is not limited to the image of the human body, or for that matter the image of the machine, to mention two axioms central to contemporary traditions of architecture.

There are other dimensions to architecture that have the potentiality to evoke what Proust called "involuntary memory": a remembrance that is stimulated by the traces of the usefulness of an object, that absent life of an object which drove surrealists to stroll through flea markets. This is like saying, as Adorno does, that "the human origins of the products of this period—their relationship to the work from which they issued—have not yet been fully concealed; in their production they still show traces of an artisanal organization of labor while their distribution is still predominantly assumed by small shopkeepers."[8] Adorno's remarks recall Heidegger's vision of the potter who makes a jug without thinking of its sides or bottom, or the materiality of the clay. The potter shapes the void to gather the purpose of containing.[9] The detour from Heidegger to Simmel, and then to Bloch is important if one recalls Loos's distinction between art and architecture, a position that was launched against the early modern architects' obsession with mechanistic understanding of function.

Only a small portion of architecture relates to the realm of art, Loos claimed. For him tombs and monuments were works of art because they do not have to satisfy anyone. Architecture, instead, is positioned by purpose and need.[10] Loos' position worked in two directions; it criticized both the Viennese

Secessionist group, and that circle of the Bauhaus school that would nurture the seeds of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.[11] One might recode Loos's view of the tomb and monument in association to Bloch's remarks on the pot: thus the proposition that, if emptied of its metaphysical content, a monument is nothing but an outmoded object whose allegorical emblem might recall far deeper residues of life than the object-type of machine products. Again, one recalls the polarity between Surrealism and the New Objectivity. Similar to Simmel, the Bauhaus wanted to touch the life-world in its functional and practical horizons. Surrealists, instead, intended to reach the deeper realm of life through distortion and disposition of the object from its common use and place. Like the empty void in Bloch's pot, the dialogical relationship between presence/absence in the surrealists' work problematizes the equation Bauhaus would make between culture and technology.

The discussion concerning the difference between architecture and art also demands addressing the nihilism of technology. From a positivistic point of view, instrumental rationality is the true heir of the usefulness of equipment. To undo this view, it is enough to recall Michael Zimmerman's argument where he suggests that for Heidegger, "the technological system strives for ever greater production for its own sake," and thus abandons the human projects.[12] Moreover, in deconstructing the foundational thinking of humanism, Heidegger realized that technology has no inner essence, and its alleged nihilism is in fact metaphysical. While the early Heidegger saw art as the last redemptive force resisting technological destructiveness, in "Art and Space" the redemptive power of the work of art is subdued, especially when the work is directly entangled with the technological system, a mechanism that uproots every cultural product and tosses them to the orbit of commodity production. Paradoxically, the nihilism of technology "makes possible the openness and the anxiety necessary for the arrival of a new, post-modern era."[13] Rebuffing Heidegger's position, some post-modernists locate the crisis of the object in the bedrock of simulacra, and smooth the passage for the return of historicism and the avant-garde. In this paradox, the missing point in the writing, teaching, and even building of some circles of neo-avant-garde architecture is that which is intrinsic to architecture, the culture of building. Only through the culture of building does architecture's autonomy preside in the object's infusion with purpose.

Material of Technique

The perceptual horizon opened by computer technologies has drastically transformed architecture's form, and yet it has not been able to reduce architecture to the state of art, an autonomous entity. The alleged pocket of resistance in architecture speaks for "purposefulness," a subject central to architecture's affiliation with craftsmanship. When this is established then the

question to ask is of the following nature: how far is it possible to sustain the state of semi-autonomous architecture when the nihilism of technology prevails in the domain of culture? Again, Benjamin's views on film and architecture might be useful in expanding the horizon of the question. Even though architecture and film are both appropriated collectively, the enduring life of architecture, however, stands for something material, of which the ephemeral world of film is devoid.

In "The Work of Art" Benjamin presents two criteria concerning contemporary appropriation of the work of art: firstly, that film is not an art in the conventional definition of the term, but technique. Secondly, the peculiar experience of masses with the film is associable with the ways architecture has been appropriated historically. Architecture enjoys an ontological bound with the life-world that after the loss of the aura the masses had no choice but to engage a state of fragmentation and distraction essential to film. On this, Benjamin is clear and sharp: "Buildings have been man's companions since primeval times. Many art forms have developed and perished." And he continues, "Architecture has never been idle. Its history is more ancient than that of any other art, and its claim to being a living force has significance in every attempt to comprehend the relationship between masses to art."[14] Excluding architecture from the classical categories of the work of art, Benjamin concludes: "buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception, or rather, by touch and sight." For him, the relation of tactile to habit and use is such that it dominates the optical appropriation of the work. In fact, the optical factor is conditioned, according to him, by use and habit and not by rapt attention.

Two conclusions should be drawn from Benjamin's observation. Firstly, the most enduring elements of architecture embrace those that involve both constructive and aesthetic aspects of form. This is not to suggest that the historically received forms and typologies should be imitated as if they were written rules. Rather, these formal structures should be recoded by the "handing over" of architectural traditions to the process of modernization. Typological studies, for example, are still valid subjects of research if "type" is considered a spatial construct like "corridor" where the use and logic of making are fused into the form of corridor. This understanding of type does not equate it with the ossified forms of the classical language of architecture. An argument can be advanced to suggest that central to re-articulation of the relationship between seeing and making is the memory and habits glued to a particular type. Secondly, the optical side of architecture is not merely limited to what a building represents symbolically or otherwise. For Benjamin "habit determines to a large extent even optical reception." The priority given to habit over optics recalls Loos' belief that architecture "arouses feelings in people. The task of the architect is therefore, to define what the feelings should be."[15] But, if the habits are not permanent, then, how should Loos' statement be reapproached

in the light of distractions generated by film and other forms of art that are, in one way or another, conceived within the perceptual horizon opened by the process of mechanical reproduction? More importantly, how should one evaluate Benjamin's belief that after the loss of aura the work of art seizes every opportunity to release its exhibitionist value, an aesthetic sensibility that is formative for the present state of object. From fashion to videotapes, every cultural product of late capitalism stresses the exhibition value of the work. This is true even for architecture where distraction finds its architectonic form in fragmentation and juxtaposition of dream- like forms with familiar tectonics that mistakenly can be taken for the experience of Surrealism.

At this point it is worth speculating that the distraction Benjamin sought to inhere to modern technology is also applicable to Semper's definition of the tectonic. For Semper, the tectonic is a cosmic art in which the art-form relates to the core-form in "a *structural-symbolic* rather than in a *structural-technical* sense." The perceived duality in the tectonic attests not only to the in-between state of architecture (compared to the opposition between art and craft), but also marks a departure from the classical *techne* by which the homology between technical, semiotic, and aesthetic of architecture is sustained. What is involved here is the possibility of radicalizing Semper's theory further. One way of advancing it would be to say that after mechanical reproduction of art, and facing a contemporary drive for fragmentation, the tectonic should stress the fact that the perceived spatial envelope is, literally, a fabrication: it is a falsehood. When this is established, then the question to ask would be the following : how and to what end is it useful to advance an argument making a distinction between atectonic and the tectonic?

The distinction between what is essential to architecture and what is excessive or ornamental was not grounded until the functional-rationalists' attempt to separate these architectonic elements from each other.[16] Leon Battista Alberti, for one, saw the relationship between the column and the wall differently. He treated these architectonic elements more like grammatical entities whose particular juxtaposition would connote certain meanings embedded in the metaphysics of humanism. Mies' architecture, to mention just one contemporary example, instead, entertained the "structural symbolic" dimension of the column and the wall, and the way these elements wrap and disclose the space where the tectonic, beyond every function, marks a departure from the totalizing content of *techne*. Any clarification of "structural symbolic" necessitates discussing techne in the first place.

The Greek word for technology, techne, connotes the art of making that is fundamental to every activity involved in cultural production. The architectonic implication of *techne* is present in the Vitruvian triad of *firmitas*, *venustas*, and *utilitas*. The triad characterizes the Greek understanding of an object in the most general connotation of the word. In the Renaissance reading

of Vitruvius, however, *techne* was moulded with the values of a culture where "resemblance" was a formative theme.[17] In this context, architecture functioned as a symbol to mediate between the life-world and the mythologies of the divine forces. Seemingly, a transparent maze surrounded the object during the Renaissance through which the masses could reach (perceive?) something beyond the immediate usefulness of artifacts. Like every icon of Christianity, the object was made to last, and by its very duration the object also had to endorse the permanence of the world cherished by Christianity. Secondly, the suggested perception of transparency alludes to the homology that connects the desire of a craft-person, and the product of his/her skills. These qualities of the object were dramatized by a perspectival regime, the visual cone of which clothed, speaking symbolically, the durable integrity of an object with the fabric of Christian morality. Thus, for a long time to come, art and architecture could not possess any meaning except those whose signifier was bathed in the cultural vicissitudes of Christianity. One is reminded of the importance of centrality or cross-shaped plans permeating the design of renaissance churches. Nevertheless, since the Renaissance, the constructive content of *techne* has been diminished and the word's connotation is reduced to mere intellectual practise, perpetuating an ideal integrity between architecture and society, i.e., architecture as style building, something similar to the compositional character of language.

The brief historical detour is not meant to lament the bygone past. Even Heidegger's recourse to *techne* was not a nostalgic yearning for the Greek way of seeing and making. One understands the nihilism of technology by recalling *techne,* and by demonstrating the protein nested in technology if the metaphysics are brushed aside. The loss of aura, and the autonomy of art from technique are historical; meaning that, today, art and architecture cannot avoid the import of technique. Therefore, the duality in Semper's tectonic is historical, and yet his discourse on the subject keeps the dialectics between the core-form and the art-form on a hinge. The tectonic speaks for the materiality of form, construction, and purpose. One implication of which is that the tectonic has the potentiality to re-present values that have no direct connotation of the logos of construction.[18] Meaning that, if "purpose" is merely reduced to representing values extraneous to those emanating from construction, then the line between atectonic/tectonic is blurred and architecture is relegated to the realm of scenographic.

The implied hinge, or joint in Semper's tectonic, is suggestive of presenting montage as a mode of making that relates architecture to the experience of film.[19] Besides Benjamin's association of film with architecture, the association can be articulated differently. Consider this : the etymology of the word tectonic goes back to *tekton* signifying a carpenter.[20] In addition to Semper's emphasis on the essentiality of the experience of carpentry for archi-

tecture, most traditional builders were good carpenters in the first place. There is no doubt that film and carpentry are two unrelated professions; however, one might speculate that filming and carpentry are engaged with raw materials, and the fragmented processes involved in preparation of various frames and dramatization of these cuts through montage and visual effects recollect some archaic moments of making that are essential to joinery. A carpenter too makes each part of an object separately; a process that sometimes is carried even to the last point of the object's artistic embellishment. Only when all cuts are prepared, then the fragmentary pieces are assembled together through joints, moulds, and reveals. What makes the analogy between film and carpentry interesting, has to do with the fact in these two *métiers,* technique and artistic embellishment are tied together though serving different purposes: film is a non-objective entity whose virtuality has sneaked into every facet of today's life-world. A work of carpentry, instead, is a "thing" that not only occupies space, as does the body, but its products have been good companions to the body in more ways than one.

Kasmir Malevich once said that, "a chair, bed and table are not matters of utility but rather, the forms taken by plastic sensations, so the generally-held view that all objects of daily use results from practical considerations is upon false premises."[21] Like weaving and ceramics, carpentry enjoys an ontological bound with the body. More importantly, the aesthetic and technical skills invested in film and joinery are appreciated by the masses through habit and use. And yet, in both montage and the tectonic, technique is embellished through artistic means without reducing one to the other. If the concept of montage is emptied of its artistic dimension, then film is nothing but technical reproduction. Likewise, the tectonic cannot avoid the mentioned hinge; that is, a chosen structural system imposes certain limitations on artistic embellishment of the constructed form. Mies's Barcelona Pavilion, for example, is erected by a regular steel frame structure. The final form, however, appears as made of horizontal and vertical planes sustaining the tectonic dialogue between the column and the wall. Furthermore, the implied duality in the tectonic alludes to the historical fact that by the nineteenth century, *techne* could not continue its classical poetics. Both the subjective and objective transformations of the time necessitated an architecture whose complexities are worth examining through the idea of wish-images.

Wish-images: Then and Now

Again, since the Renaissance and through various re-interpretations of classical idioms, architecture had to wait until the early nineteenth century to think of itself as architecture. The century's loud yearning for style alludes to the disintegration of *techne* and architecture's desire for autonomy. The fact that the century's best architecture made room to juxtapose a masonry con-

struction-system with iron-made structural elements should be considered positive. It was a step towards deconstruction of the metaphysics of *techne,* a transformation that made both romanticists and academicians of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts uncomfortable. According to Neil Levine, "the dematerialization of structure and abstraction of space that has come to characterize modern architecture, along with the consequent transparency of surface and reflexive relationship between exterior and interior, or container and contained, has its sources in that particular object of 19th-century mechanomorphism celebrated by Hugo." And he concludes that, this "allowed architecture to break out of the confines of classicism."[22] Before the suggested historical break comes to its full completion, there were moments in architectural history that are critical for the main theme of this essay; that is, examining the fruits of associating the idea of wish-images with the idea of theatricality.

Besides the arcades, there are other buildings that connote Benjamin's idea of wish-images. A few buildings of the nineteenth century were conceived neither in the image of Classical nor Gothic architecture. Many architects made an attempt to reinterpret the culture of building with an eye on what was going on in the technical fields and values produced by modernization. Consider the tectonic qualities of the visionary projects proposed by Viollet le Duc. In the interior of what seems to be a concert hall, the stone is cut not to receive another piece of stone but a structural iron bar. The perceived structural network covering the central space, weaves steel and stone together presenting a structural image that mediates between the bygone memory of Gothic ribbed vault and the not yet borne space-frame structure of Buckminester Fuller.

Viollet le Duc's architectonic montage was also at work in Henry Labrouste's Bibilotheque Bibliotheque Sainte-Genivieve. In the main reading room of the library, the stone pedestals receive iron columns that are shaped and detailed in the classical form of flout. More dramatic, as far as the idea of wish-images is concerned, are the cast-iron arches of the main reading room. The exposed truss of these arches juxtaposes structural logic with a classical sense of ornamentation: similar to a burdened row of leaves forming a cyma and abacus, the floral forms, cut out of the fabric of the truss, are meant to increase the inertia of iron. Frampton observes that " Labrouste strove for a consistent tectonic expression, one in which the ornamentation would be derived directly from the process of construction."[23] And Robin Middleton notes that, besides their utilitarian use, iron was entertained for symbolic aims. According to Middleton, Labrouste "aimed not just at making evidence the structural system, but to present it as part of a civic décor appropriate to the nineteenth century."[24] Middleton's position recalls Semper's idea of theatricality in architecture discussed on another occasion.[25] What should be added to Middleton's observation, however, is the use, if not the abuse of "nature" to

domesticating the new industrial materials. The idea of masking structural members with references to natural forms reappears in August Perret's 25 bis rue Franklin. Here the concrete structural frame is framed with sunflower ceramic in-fill, representing the duality between the core-form and the art-form. In these examples, the tectonic speaks for the form derived from construction and the values laden in the Enlightenment; in particular, the century's desire to juxtapose History with Nature; the outmoded with the new. The intention was to "return" to a mythic time when the natural world was not separated from the experience of everyday life. The cladding of rue Franklin disguises the frame and, at the same time, expresses the desire for a repressed state of the natural depicted in Laugier's hut.

Exploring many other examples from the late nineteenth century architecture, one wonders why the use of iron was confined to the interior spaces that were enclosed by masonry walls? A plausible answer to this question might have to do with the metaphysics of monument whose language was for a long time associated with the classical language of architecture. It also speaks for the impact of Semper's theoretical speculation concerning the lack of corporeality of iron, and thus, its unsuitability for monumental effects. In fact, in an early struggle to redeem architecture from the classical vocabulary, architects were not yet able to articulate the tectonic forms suitable to steel and glass without reducing architecture to the engineers' dazzling work evident in the new building types such as exhibition halls and train stations. In this mutation, Peter Behrens's Turbine Factory is exemplar to demonstrate the centrality of "purposefulness" for any tectonic consideration.[26]

On the one hand, the solid battered corners of the main facade of the AEG Factory are conceived to suggest the masonry wall's non-load bearing character. On the other, the exterior architrave conceals a triangular girder visible from the inside. What is involved here is Behrens's misuse of the tectonic hinge to inject monumental sensibility to the main faced of a factory. The details used in this building show Behrens's awareness of the ways steel-frame structures work. But the perception invested in the overall form of the building has less to do with the forms derived from the chosen construction technique. The difference between front facade and the side elevation, facing the factory's ground, reveals Behrens' understanding of the dichotomy between art and technology, and his inclination to turn the dichotomy in favour of traditions of symbolic representation, rather the tectonic culture.[27] In the AEG Factory, most detailing, cutting, and putting together of different materials ultimately serve to convey the temple-like image of the main facade. Frampton's reading is convincing: "While accepting the ascendancy of science and industry with pessimistic resignation, Behrens sought to bring the factory under the rubric of the farm—to restore factory production to that sense of common purpose innate in agriculture, a feeling for which the newly

urbanized semi-skilled labor of Berlin would supposedly still have a certain nostalgia."[28] As discussed before, when the horizon of "purpose" is limited to the representation of the kind that has nothing to do with the expressive potentialities of construction, then, not only the line between atectonic/tectonic is blurred but the complexities invested in wish-images are compromised with historicism. To shed critical light on some aspects of modern architecture, the observation should be extended to a discussion that centres on the difference between theatricality and theatricalization.

The early history of modern architecture demonstrates the fact that architects were forced to revise the classical discourse of construction. While the historicists covered construction by historical styles and pumped a new blood into humanism, the Jugendstil, for example, used artistic freedom to advocate a modern vision that goes beyond the ordering principles dictated by the machine and mechanization. A few architects who wanted to resist the forces unleashed by technology, sought refuge in primitive art. An ancient sculpture or a vase, for instance, was admired either for its unspoiled expressive qualities, or for the material and technical aspects that were seen unseparated from the myth surrounding primitivism. Joseph Masheck associates the first inclination with German Expressionism and the wide spread interest in themes such as empathy and expression discussed by Wilhelm Worringer and others. The second line of thinking might be traced in Semper, William Morris, and G. V. Plekhanov, a group who in one way or another underlined the importance of labor and material over "play."[29] In addition, upon the arrival of modernity, the century was already divided into revivalist camps in favour of the Renaissance humanism, or the Gothic transcendentalism. Both movements offered alternatives to modernity's will to disintegrate totalities of every kind. The salvation was seen in the sensuous beauty of the classical, and/or in the power of expression attributed to the Gothic architecture.

In this polarity of ideas, Semper's simultaneous aspiration for Renaissance architecture and primeval arts seems rather intriguing. Semper was fascinated noting the ways material and technical experience carried out in the four industries of carpentry, ceramic, masonry, and weaving contributes to the art-form of architecture. Even Worringer, who disliked Semper's view on Gothic architecture, claimed that Gothic sculptural modelling belongs "not to the history of art, but to the history of handicraft."[30] Here Worringer sounds a Semperian materialism. However, what Semper saw in Renaissance architecture was the structural flexibility, providing more options to carrying primitive motives from their craft-based roots into a "higher" order, i.e., architecture. This was perhaps his way of saving the past traditions, and juxtaposing the new with the old. That the Gothic architecture was a tectonic-form did not concern Semper. It was rather the absence of duality between the core-form and the art-form that made him sceptical of the tectonic potentialities of Gothic

architecture. The lack of flexibility in Gothic form robes the stone wall of its expressive potentialities, and minimizes the tectonic expression of enclosure, a subject essential for Semper's theory of theatricality.

The duality in the tectonic pondered here has to do with the need for flexible relation between the art-form and the core-form, and thus the possibility of "lawful" articulation of a chosen construction method. The duality also alludes to the historical fact that, although by the nineteenth century the gap between theory and practise was institutionalized, architects were still able to consider construction as the sole domain of "artistic design."[31] Now, the question to ask should be the following: is the tectonic attainable only when the duality between structure and the skin is established? And, should one associate Semper's distinction of the core-form from the art-form with the historical division between the object and the subject? For it turns out to be that in monolithic structures the tectonic does not necessarily reveal its poetics through an actual separation of the load- bearing members from the enclosure. Paradoxically, in Semper's discussion of the evolution of Assyrian column, we are reminded that, at one point, the wooden shaft (the core-form) disappears and the metal sheathing is used to function for both the core-form and the art-form.[32] The case can be made to argue that the embellishment of the art-form, at some point, might attain a degree of autonomy that, without referring to its initial dualistic origin, can still stand for the tectonic. If this is so, then, are there moments in modern architecture when construction was conceived as "self-illuminating" form?

An argument can be advanced to suggest that contemporary interest in displaced objects of Surrealism, and the work of some Russian Constructivist architecture is in part due to the work's anonymous rapport with an archaic past. Interestingly enough, according to Benjamin, Constructivism and Surrealism "accepted the antinomy of bourgeois thought (not identical with being), the subject-object division— in order later to protest against it even extremely sharply." Precisely for that reason, Expressionism and *Neue Sachlickheit*, according to Benjamin, could not produce any artistic result but a pathological insight or a dry abstraction."[33] This observation is critical not only because it maintains the importance of technology for the early modern architecture, but also the fact that it offers a paradigm to postulate the criticality of wish-images for Russian Constructivist architecture.

For there is the tendency to discuss Russian Constructivism to conflate its achievements with Constructivist International, and place their work to the universe of technological products. One is reminded of Manfredo Tafuri and Hubertus Gassner who highlight the historical avant-garde's huge investment in technology.[34] The criticism of these two scholars is valid if the subject matter is seen strictly from the historical scope of the project of modernity, and the inevitability of accepting modernization as an alternative to Ex-

pressionism and historicism. When this is established, then the question to ask is of the following nature: how should one assess the project of modernity if it is necessary to make a distinction between art and architecture without reducing diverse tendencies within Constructivism to formalism? According to Christian Lodder, even in the Russia of 1917-22 "there were important differences between Gabo's constructions with their rather mathematical approach to form and the more empathically textual, abstract work of Tatlin."[35] Indeed, Constructivism permeating Vladmir Tatlin's reliefs and counter-reliefs, and numerous kiosks and stage set designs were primarily inspired by the iconological tradition of pre-modern Russia, and a vision of primitivism that would emphasize the texture of material (*faktura*), use of simple techniques, and disdain for "artistic design."[36]

At the conceptual level, however, even Boris Arvatov's stress on technology differed from the Bauhaus effort to reduce art and architecture to the vicissitudes of technology. The fact is that, from its inception, the Bauhaus had close ties with the heads and representatives of industrial institutions. This was not the case with constructivists: Not only Russia after the revolution had no organized industrial representatives; the constructivists' collaboration with the educational institutions enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy that lasted at least until 1922. Moreover, the advocates of *Neue Sachlickheit* considered technology as a means belonging to the sphere of production with no major relevance to the realm of values; that is, the realm of "everyday things."[37] For constructivists, instead, theoretical comprehension of the dialectics between production and consumption was critical for any consideration of technology as part of "material culture." It is indeed in the realm of consumption where according to Arvatove "The ability to pick up a cigarette-case, to smoke a cigarette, to put on an overcoat, to wear a cap, to open a door, all these 'trivialities,' acquire their qualification, their not unimportant 'culture,' which find their meaning in the maximization of economy and precision, in maximum cohesion with the things andtheir purpose."[38] Here technology is presented as an engine of collectivization of culture in the broadest meaning of the term.

The position put forward by Arvatov and others was not meant to waive the past times; to subdue the object with explicit references to vernacular elements of the kind used in Walter Gropius' Sommerfeld House, for example. The stone base and symmetrical composition of Gropius' design frames a romanticist vision of architecture whose form is derived from the nature of material. The uniform use of wooden structural elements in Rodchenko's constructs, and in Melinkov's design for the Russian Pavilion in Paris, instead, does not mimic the rational organization of the world of technology. Here the rawness of metal and wood are embellished beyond the utilitarian attributes of material and those pumped into the design by the artist. These constructs

demonstrate the ur-forms of material culture and its laden potentiality to resist against reduction of the world of consumption to mere commodities. When nostalgia for the bygone forms, and sentimental appreciation of material are suspended, then the chance is given to the most archaic to be redeemed through ur-images; that is, when technological nature "flashes together with the old in an anticipatory image of humanity and nature reconciled."[39] Therefore, the European avant-gardes stopped short of entertaining the wish-image quality of constructivist objects. This is not to disregard the fact that the wish-image quality of Constructivism lost its critical edge as soon as the ideological apparatus of the Soviet State asked artists/architects to produce practical objects; the move slowly diminished the aura of revolution and turned the original energy of constructivist objects into a norm. Not too late, Stalin forced architects to abandon every norm except those represented by the classical language of architecture. This was an uncanny return to the, so to speak, "natural" state of the object, an ideological rebuff to the crisis of the object indeed!

In associating "wish-images" with Russian Constructivists, the intention is not to ignore Benjamin's interest in the work of Le Corbusier, Loos, and Paul Scheerbart.[40] In different ways these architects also shocked the foundation of the received traditions and made room for architecture relevant to the experience of modernity. What should be underlined here is that constructivists neither pursued the Bauhaus project, nor registered technology to pure aesthetic ends. For constructivists, technique was a derivative of material, and both were perceived to be at the service of material culture. *Tecktonica, factura*, and construction, discussed by Aleksei Gan, presented a conceptual triad capable of charging the object with various semiotic layers in accordance with an optimistic ambience informed by the motion of revolution.

The tendency to tie technique with raw material and purpose is epitomized in Tatlin's Monument to the Third International, and in Lyubov Popova's stage set designs. These works were perceived and constructed by simple techniques and skills inherent in the Russian craft of log cabin making. Consider Tatlin's Monument to the Third International where three different volumes, made out of glass and wrapped by steel structures, represented the constructive dimension of the October Revolution. "My monument is a symbol of the epoch. Unifying in it artistic and utilitarian forms, I created a kind of synthesis of art and life."[41] Tatlin's explanation recalls the ready-made objects of his counter-reliefs; a montage of material, technique. There is another filmic side to Tatlin's monument: renouncing every additional element from the body of architecture, Tatlin's tectonic articulation intends to transform human perceptibility. Like Dziga Vertov's Kino-Eye, Tatlin's monument upholds the world "without a mask as a world of naked truth,"[42] and avoids using shock effects of the kind entertained by the formalist avant-gardes. The same nakedness energizes Popova's stage set design: these simple wooden constructs set the

stage free for the "event" to unravel. If for modernism architecture was meant to be a socio-political agent, then the unbearable minimalism and lightness of Constructivist architecture marks a departure from any longing for silence and redemption, themes essential for European constructivists' tragic encounter with modernism.

Furthermore, the monism implied in *tecktonica*, *factura*, and construction does indeed undermine the duality between the core-form and the art-form of any tectonic form. Constructivist architecture might be considered monolithic structures not of the kind that would use symbolic geometry, as was the case with the French Revolutionary architecture. Like a filmic frame, constructivist work demonstrates the infusion of "idea" with technique, stressing the materiality of the object. The animated body of such architecture enchants the viewer as do the images envisioned at the awakening moments, that momentary pause when construction recalls the dormant and forgotten experiences that reside in the subconscious.

Consider A. Leonid and Victor Vesnin's design for "Pravda Building;" Ivan Leonidov's "Lenin Institute;" Melinkov's "Commisarial of Heavy Industry," and more importantly, Ikaov Chernikhov's "Architectural Fantasies." These works conjugate the pre-historic sense of construction with the aesthetics of machine technology. In "Industrial Tales," for example, one confronts architecture devoid of applied decoration, and yet the final object is represented as an ornament per se. Chernikhov's architectural drawings are comparable to Piranesi's engravings where technique becomes, to use a Semperian word, "self-illuminating symbols," directing the spectators' eye to the particularities of construction.[43] More importantly, his drawings address the problematic theme of the frame and cladding that has been at work since the nineteenth century. Conceiving construction as an artistic design, Chernikhov's work was indeed unleashing the fear Sigfried Giedion noticed nesting beneath the historicists' masking of construction. According to Giedion, "Construction in the nineteenth century plays the role of the subconscious. Outwardly, construction still boasts the old pathos; underneath, concealed behind facades, the basis of our present existence is taking place."[44] While Giedion was making rather radical remarks in connection to the early architecture of Le Corbusier, Russian Constructivists were weaving the anticipatory potentialities of technology with the collective practice, grafting revolutionary sentiments into the linguistic potentialities of architecture.

Now, putting behind the architecture of the machine age, the question to ask would be the following: what are the implications of the idea of wish-images for the present architecture? More specifically, how should one discuss the neo-avant-gardes' seeming respect for an Expressionism that is motivated either by computer technologies, or by hybrid formulation of an abstract and yet vigorous form of the kind that might be associable with

Constructivism?

A negative response to these questions centres its argument on the historicity of the idea of dialectical image discussed by Benjamin. That space, time, and events, the structural elements of an ambience where one could see and construct wish-images of the kind that Constructivism produced are obviously unavailable anymore, and perhaps gone for ever. The implied scepticism has to do with the Nietzschean distinction between dreaming while asleep, and going to sleep to dreaming. Karl Marx suggested that the historicity of an event is experienced once; its second occurrence is nothing but farce. The uniqueness of modernity, its territorial and technological transformations spread a maze through which old and new was intermingled. Architects had no choice but to construct a world out of dichotomies embedded in any juxtaposition of steel with the received culture of stone architecture. The scepticism put forward here also takes into consideration the socio-cultural developments unfolding since the 60s, and the return of historicism, neo-rationalism, and the historical avant-garde.[45] Furthermore, like the early stages of modernization, the impact of current telecommunication technologies and globalization of capital on architecture are new adventures expanding the horizon of the instrumental reason. While media images are initiating new veins of perceptual expressions, architecture still bathes in the watersheds of modernity. There remains, however, a similarity between neo-avant-garde practice and Russian Constructivism that should be addressed. The common chord running through Peter Eisenman's drive for formless architecture, Zaha Hadid's abstract expressionism, Rem Koolhass's hybrid and surreal constructs, and Bernard Tschumi's aspirations for architecture of "event," is the ghost of Russian Constructivism. The metaphor of ghost, the negative of a living body, connects the work of these architects to the historical avant-garde and the latter's attempt in perceiving architecture beyond any limitations (functional, symbolic, and political) that were imposed by the project of modernity. And yet, looking from the vantage point of late capitalism, one might charge the historical avant-garde's redemptive project with naiveté, i.e., that unconscious awareness of the walls erected by modernity, which gave them the chance to perceive wish-images that are not available today.

What are the fruits of this rather bleak vision compared to the celebratory approach of postmodernism? Instead of pursuing the *Zeitgeist* in current architectural practise, to get hallucinated with what telecommunication technologies can do for architecture, to avoid the culture of building and discuss architecture as a text among other interdisciplinary texts, the intention throughout this essay was to present a framework discussing architecture from the point of view of the disciplinary history of architecture. The aim also was to demonstrate that the neo-avant-garde's strategic position, to continue the dream of the project of the historical avant-gardes, turns out to be nothing

but another technique towards full implementation of the nihilism of technology. To demystify neo-avant-garde architecture is not to flatten its achievements. But to historicize, to show the material presence of the past and to re-empower the thematic of the culture of building even at the dawn of this new century when commodification of culture is almost total and the historical project of modernity has seemingly been exhausted. Only in this way might one avoid considering the technification of architecture as the last chapter of the book of crisis of the object.

Notes

1 On the subject of theatricality see Gevork Hartoonian, "Gottfried Semper: the Structure of Theatricality," *Art Criticism*, 18/2 (Spring 2003): 6-21.

2 According to Hal Foster, surrealism "takes a different view: mechanization does not produce a new objective being; it creates an uncanny hybrid beast like the insectoid men in 'Aboutissements de la mecanique.'" Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p.148.

3 Theodor Adorno, "Looking Back on Surrealism," *Notes to Literature*, vol.1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

4 Adorno, p. 90.

5 And it follows that "Equipment has a peculiar position intermediate between thing and work, assuming that such a calculated ordering of them is permissible." Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p.29.

6 Discussing the formal logic of the handle of a vase, Simmel suggests that utility and beauty approach the handle as two demands that are alien to one another—the first coming from the world, the second from the formal law of the vase—and that now a higher-order beauty, takes hold of both and reveals their dualism to be in the last analysis a unity not further describable." George Simmel, "The Handel," quoted in Theodor Adorno, The Handle, the Pot, and Early Experience," *Notes to Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), vol.2, pp.211-220. One major difference between Simmel and others mentioned in these pages has to do with the fact that Simmel's approach to modernity has a grain of pragmatism, and thus he approached "objects" (commodities?) from their exchange value and use. This could be considered one basic difference between him and Adolf Loos. According to Harry Liebersohn, in *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel "examined capitalism as a functioning system and largely ignored the entrepreneur and skilled worker who were Weber's chief actors. Instead it focused on another figure largely ignored by Weber: the consumer." Liebersohn, *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870-1923* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 135. This aspect of Simmel's thought is entertained in the architectural history of the period I am concerned with by Fredric J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

7 Interestingly enough, Adorno associated Bloch's "tempo with the experience of

expressionism in which the object can no longer be contemplated peacefully and with composure." Adorno, "The Handle, the Pot, and Early Experience," p. 216.

8 Fredric Jameson discusses here a romanticist tempo in surrealists search for "mystery" that would speak for the natural state of cultural products. See Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 104.

9 This comparison is interesting in the context of Adorno's famous criticism of Heidegger in the *Jargon of Authenticity*. For Heidegger's reflection on the pot see *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 169.

10 Adolf Loos, "Architecture."

11 For a discussion concerning the differences between *Sachlichkeit* and *Neue Sachlichkeit* see Fredric J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 41, and Stanford Anderson, "*Sachlichkeit* and Modernity, Or Realist Architecture," in Harry F. Mallgrave, ed., *Otto Wagner* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities, 1993).

12 Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.235.

13 Ibid, p. 236.

14 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," quoted in Ibid, p. 240.

15 Adolf Loos, Architecture," 1910, in *Architecture and Design: 1890-1939*, Charlotte Benton and Dennis Sharp, eds. (New York: Waston-Guptill Publications, 1975), p. 45.

16 Recently, Shaowen Wang reminded me of Anne-Marie Sankovitch's comprehensive work on this subject. See Sankovitch, "Structure/Ornament and the Modern Figuration of Architecture," *The Art Bulletin*, LXXX/4 (Dec. 1998): 687-717.

17 I am thinking of Michel Foucault's claim that "up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture....The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars." Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 17.

18 See Harry Mallgrave's introduction to Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

19 See Gevork Hartoonian, "Montage: Recoding the Tectonic," in *Ontology of Construction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 5-28.

20 See Kenneth Frampton, "Introduction: Reflections on the Scope of the Tectonic," in *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995). Also see Indra Kagis McEwen, "Daedalus and the Discovery of Order," in *Socrates' Ancestor* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 41-78.

21 Kasmir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1959), p. 98.

22 Neil Levin, The Book and Building," 1982, p. 173.

23 Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), p. 45.

24 Robert Middleton, "The Iron Structures of the Bibliotheque Saint-Genevieve as the Basis of a Civic Décor," *AA Files*, no. 40, (2000).

25 Gevork Hartoonian, "Tectonic: the Structure of Theatricality," *Art Criticism*, 8/2 (2003): 6-21.

26 Many scholars have discussed this building among which are the following. Stanford Anderson, "Modern Architecture and Industry: Peter Behrens and the Cultural Policy of Historical Determinism." *Oppositions*, 11, (Winter 1977): 52-71, Mechtild Heuser, "La Finestra Sul Cortile Behrens M. Rohe: AEG-Turbinehalle, Berlin," *Casabella*, no. 65 (January 1998): pp. 20, Also see the next footnote. My interest in this subject was inspired by Fritz Neumeyer's, "Iron and Stone: The Architecture of the Grobstadt," in ed. Harry F. Mallgrave, *Otto Wagner* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1988), pp. 115-153.

27 According to Stanford Anderson, "Behrens designed the public, street facades of the building, incorporating modern engineering construction into forms which he conceived through the adaptation of established architectural conventions to the new problem of representing modern industrial enterprise." See Anderson, "Modern Architecture and Industry," *Oppositions*, 11: 68.

28 Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.112.

29 Joseph Masheck, "Raw Art: 'Primitive' Authenticity and German Expressionism," in *Res*, no. 4, (Autumn 1982): 93-116. In this article Masheck sides with the expressionist reading of primitive work of art and seemingly misses both Joseph Rykwert's and Harry F. Mallgrave's charge of the crude materialistic content of Gottfried Semper's discourse. On this subject see Mallgrave's *Gottfried Semper* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), specially the last chapter. On the subject of empathy see *Empathy, Form, and Space*, trans. Harry F. Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou (Santa Monica: the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994). However, whether it was the influence of Darwinism or the results of archeological research, one can see some similarities between Semper's emphasis on the importance of practical arts for aesthetic laws and G. V. Plekhnov's argument that the origin of ornament goes back to hunting, and how the early wooden elements incised into the body as part of the act of hunting, later would become the source for ornaments made out of metal. See G. V. Plekhanov, "Labour, Play and Art," and "Art and Utility," in *Art and Social Life* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1953), pp. 75-129. For Semper's idea of *Stoffwechel* that is, "the carrying over of motives visually from one material to another," see Wolfgang Hermann, *Gottfried Semper In Search of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), p. 86.

30 Quoted in Joseph Masheck, "Raw Art" *Res*, no. 4 (1982): p. 96.

31 For a discussion of the tectonic in contemporary architecture, and Gottfried Semper's discourse on what he called core-form and the art-form, see Gevork Hartoonian, *Ontology of Construction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

32 See Harry F. Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann, Gottfried Semper: *The Four*

Elements of Architecture and Other Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 38.

33 Randoti, p. 146.

34 See Manfredo Tafuri, "U.S.S.R.-Berlin,1922: From Populism to 'Constructivist International'" in Joan Ockman, ed *Architecture Criticism Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985), pp. 121-181, and Hubertus Gassner "The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1994), 298-319. After exploring various utopian manifestations of German humanitarian populism and expressionism, Tafuri sees the impact of the 1922 exhibition of Russian artists in politicization of dada and introduction of constructivist utopia based on technical organization of the real. Tafuri concludes that "the soviet avant-garde, found itself objectively carrying out the task of revealing that the only 'politicalness' possible for the avant-garde was that of announcing the advent of a universe of *non-values, amoral, elementary*: exactly the technological universe of the organized development of great capital denounced by Grosz as a terrifying universe 'without value'." P. 179. While Tafuri suggests the inevitable failure of any project within the problematic of the history of modernity, Gassner seemingly sees in Suprematicism and other more subjective oriented tendencies within constructivism the missing chance to oppose the move of Russian Modernism towards total modernization of life and art.

35 Christian Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 38.

36 Besides the influence of Picaso and Western Futurism, Christian Lodder, stresses the import of "native Russian artistic traditions and Primitivism as manifest in peasant and children's art, employing icons," for Vladmir Tatlin and the Russian Futurist movement. Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p. 11. In a remarkable essay Kenneth Frampton also discusses the importance of Primitivism, a tendency to "preserve the inherent material quality of the transformed substance and, at the same time, to express directly the nature of its transformation," and finally a sensibility derived from use of simple techniques and raw materials advocated by film makers like Dziga Vertov, for Productivism. See Frampton, *Oppositions*, Fall 1976/6, pp. 26-43.

37 Boris Arvatov, "Everyday Life and the Culture of Thing (Toward the Formulation of the Question)," trans. Christina Kiaer, *October*, no. 81, (1997): 120. For Arvatov's ideas also see Christian Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p. 105-108..

38 Arvatov, p. 126.

39 Susan Buck-Morss relates Benjamin's utopia assessment in the Passage-Werk to communist goals stated by Karl Marx, and suggests that "It is with the new, technological nature that human beings must be reconciled." And the paradox of such reconciliation is that one has to give up "nostalgic mimicking of the past and paying strict attention to the new nature, the ur-images are reanimated. Such is the logic of historical images, in which collective wish- images are negated, surpassed, and at the same time dialectically redeemed." Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 146. Christina Kiaer

associates Arvatov's vision with Benjamin's belief in the possibility to "redeem the past" through wish-images. See Christina Kiaer, "Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects," *October*, no. 81, (1997): 105-118.

40 Here I am alluding to John McCole's reading of Walter Benjamin's discourse on technology in terms of what he calls "anthropological materialism." The latter traces the "bodily collective" in the outcroppping of images depicted by surrealists and by Proust, and "a bodily sphere (*Leibrarum*), which was beginning to come into its own through recent developments in technology." McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Anthinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 172. According to McCole Benjamin's understanding of the place of technology in culture was closer to Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier than the advocates of *Neue Sachlickeit*. For a brief and concise documentation of Benajmin's attraction to the work of modern architects, specially Le Corbusier and Scheerbart, see Detlef Mertins, "The Enticing and Threatening Face of Prehistory: Walter Benjamin and the Utopia of Glass," *Assemblage*, no. 29, (April 1996).

41 See Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, p. 65. In regard to the intuitive dimension of Tatlin's work, Lodder sees the presence of "an almost mystical element, which is related to the messianic conception of the artist's role, as creator and interpreter of the environment" p. 66.

42 Annette Michelson, "The Man With the Movie Camera: From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* (March 1972): 60-71.

43 For an extensive elaboration of theatricality in Gottfried Semper, see Harry F. Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper Architect of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). Also see Hartoonian, *Ontology of Construction.*

44 Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete*, (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), p. 87. It was this last statement of Giedion that in part stimulated Walter Benjamin to invest in technology as the source of new collective needs. After receiving a copy of Giedion's book Benjamin admired him in the following words: "I am studying in your book.... the differences between radical conviction and radical knowledge that refresh the heart. You possess the latter, and therefore you are able to illustrate, or rather to uncover, the tradition by observing the present" p. 53.

45 See Hartoonian, *Modernity and its Other* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1997).

What's Jewish About Jewish Art: Some American Views

Matthew Baigell

The various notions concerning the nature of Jewish art form a rich if inconclusive chapter in the history of modern Jewish art. For some, Jewish art was and perhaps still is defined not by style or content, but by who did it and for what purpose. The most comprehensive statement in this regard was offered in 1925 by California artist, Peter Krasnow. "Jewish art is a Jewish subject, by a Jewish artist, acquired by a Jewish collector."[1] Others described Jewish art as being concerned with justice, freedom, and hope. For example, art historian Avram Kampf observed that "there shines through their [Jewish artists'] work a deep sympathy for the disadvantaged and exploited, a quest for meaning, an appeal to moral conscience, and an active commitment to social justice," based on the prophetic tradition in Judaism.[2] Then there are those who have invoked something that might be called—with sloppy sentimentality—"the Jewish spirit." For example, Israeli artist, Abel Pann, in 1920 believed that "the national spirit is the soul of a people... When a Jewish artist expresses himself sincerely, he will reflect something specially Jewish in his work: he will create Jewish art."[3] After sifting through many observations similar to Kampf's and Pann's, one is reminded of art historian Richard Brilliant's tough-minded assertion: "Feeling it will not do as a critical standard."[4] There is in fact no critical standard. A cursory review of the literature suggests that the answers that have been given in the past have been based on political issues of the moment or on little more than wishful thinking and dreadful sociology. The real question should be: What have people thought about the nature of Jewish art?—not what is the nature of Jewish art?

Here is a short history of some other answers to that question. The first important exploration centered around the beginnings of the organized Zionist movement, particularly the art exhibition held at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 in Basel and philosopher Martin Buber's speech accompanying the exhibition there. Buber, influenced by middle European nationalistic move-

ments of the time, thought that a Jewish art would grow only when a Jewish national culture might flourish in a Jewish homeland—Palestine. The second centered around several published remarks made by a variety of artists and critics in the Soviet Union during and just after the Russian Revolution in 1917 when Jewish artists, cut free from czarist repressions and momentarily encouraged by the new Bolshevik regime, expressed the possibility of building a modern Jewish art based on a combination of eastern European folk art sources and contemporary styles imported from the west—in Russia.[5]

A third more diffuse exploration of this notion occurred in 1948 and 1949 during a series of organized discussions concerning the nature of Jewish art—in New York.[6] The discussions this time did not center around the creation of a Jewish art in Palestine or in Russia, but rather a desire to figure out what it was. The participants, artists, critics, and observers of the Jewish art scene, knew Jewish art existed and their conversations revolved around its nature. They were not concerned with the strictures of the Second Commandment, or the historical rarity of Jewish art, or the allied questions: does Jewish art exist or can it be brought into existence? They knew it existed; several were making it. They were trying to define it. Their discussions were wide-ranging and were neither the first nor the last to have been published in American journals and pamphlets on the subejct, but their remarks are significant in the history of Jewish art in that they, too, were offered at another crucial moment in the history of modern Judaism—on this occasion a few years after the end of the Holocaust and at a time when the state of Israel was in process of creation. For those involved, it was probably a time for taking inventory based on their own past immigrant experiences and present-day hopes, to regroup after the disaster of World War II, and to minimize the assimilative tendencies of a younger generation of American Jews.

In retrospect, we understand today that the question—what is Jewish about Jewish art?—is obviously impossible to answer, and perhaps should not even be asked, although this was not entirely clear earlier in the twentieth century. Evidently, observers still thought in terms of a monolithic Jewish people and culture or else they could not have imagined the possibility of arriving at a definition let alone a plan of action to create such an art. The hard fact is that the participants in this ongoing discussion, particularly those that took place in Russia and New York, were, by and large, men, either born in eastern Europe between, say, 1880 and 1900 or the children of parents born there. These demographic factors seemed to have defined their Jewish universe. They did not consider women artists or anybody with a Mediterranean or African heritage, or the different experiences of those from religious or secular, rural or urban, and wealthy or poor backgrounds. Basically, they concerned themselves with male artists born within a few decades of each other and from a circumscribed geographical area—in effect themselves and their

friends, largely secular and culturally eastern European Jewish.

Before considering some of the opinions offered in 1948-1949, I want to indicate a few ways observers thought about the nature of Jewish art. The question—what is Jewish about Jewish art?—can be likened to the question—are the Jews a distinct race? Both questions assumed that Jews, under whatever conditions and wherever they might be found, were a monolithic group. Concerning race, the term, "race" was often used to describe Jewish people in Europe and America, primarily in a pejorative manner, around the turn of the last century. Jews were considered physically and morally degenerate, too weak to serve in the army, and, even in America, a clear menace to the gene pool.[7] But, to confuse matters, the word "race" was also used in a neutral context to encompass what we would now call "culture" or "ethnicity." For example, on one occasion the late-nineteenth century Dutch artist, Josef Israels, was referred to as both a Jew by race and a Dutchman by race in an English-language Jewish magazine.[8] As historian Eric L. Goldstein observed about American Jews, although it describes those in Europe as well, they "drew comfort from a racial-self-definition during the late nineteenth century because it gave them a sense of stability at a time when many familiar markers of Jewish identity were eroding." Such definitions provided "emotional security [and] a degree of communal assertiveness" and reflected a general anxiety over the desire both to assimilate and maintain difference simultaneously.[9]

To add to the confusion, the term "race" was also used in a way that blended the biological with the cultural. For example, the critic Van Wyck Brooks, speaking in general terms in 1908, suggested that "an artist can produce great and lasting work only out of materials which exist in him by instinct and which constitute racial fibre, the accretion of countless generations of ancestors, trained to one deep, local, indigenous attitude toward life. A man is more a product of his race than of his art...he cannot be a supreme artist without expressing his race."[10] This point of view, according to which, the line between cultural and biological inheritances becomes ambiguous, marks a kind of Lamarckism whereby ingrained cultural traditions become ingrained genetic traits.

This same confusion also became part of the discussion of the nature of Jewish art. For example, the artist and writer, Louis Lozowick, in an article in 1926 assessing the work of the Russian Eliezer Lissitzky (Lozowick's spelling), observed that since an artist's work "was the adumbration of traits quintessentially racial, a closer unity was necessary between the Jewish artist, the Jewish people, and Jewish tradition." It became necessary, then, to study folk art, synagogue decoration, book illustrations, and tombstone inscriptions. From a mixture of these sources together with modern western forms, a Jewish art would emerge based on form rather than theme. For Lozowick, exploration of form, based on an artist's spontaneous reactions, springs from one's intuitive subconscious, thus permitting "an unhampered objectification of the na-

tional strain." Whatever the theme (and it could be Jewish), it is really form, color, and line that determine the "racial stock of the artist."[11] Lozowick seemed to be suggesting that an analysis of Jewish folk art (in Russia) would suggest the kinds of forms, colors, and lines that, modified by modern western art, would determine the nature of Jewish art. How the Jewish national strain or racial stock influenced the nature of Jewish cultural artifacts, or vice-versa, remained moot.

Lozowick probably picked up these ideas when he lived in Berlin from 1922 to 1924. There he met and became friendly with Lissitsky, Issachar Ryback, and Natan Altman, among others, who had been active in promulgating a Jewish art before the Soviet regime clamped down on such activities in the early 1920s.[12] In fact, in 1919, Ryback and Boris Aronson wrote one of the most important articles on the subject. Like Lozowick in 1924, they held that art "mirrors racial aspects and national forms... Only through the principle of abstract painting, which is free from any literary aspects can one achieve the expression of one's own national form...Therefore, it is the emphasis on the formal aspects of painting rather than on subject matter which reveals the true racial identity of the artist." Lozowick might also have been acquainted with the artist I. Tchaikov who in an essay written in 1922 entitled "Sculpture," argued the same point.[13]

How such an art was to emerge among artists who held varying degrees of Jewish religious beliefs and cultural memories in a politically fractured eastern Europe cannot be imagined at this late date. In any event, the repressive policies of the Soviet government coupled with the departures by several artists for Germany, France, and the United States in the late teens and early twenties ended such speculations. However, an important observation to be made about these points of view is that anything that smelled of Jewish provincialism or backwardness was to be avoided. Traditions had to be updated. Jewish art had to be updated. Even if Jewish subject matter was used, it had to be presented in a contemporary style in effect announcing the modernity of both modern Judaism and of the artist involved.

Where Ryback's and Aronson's speculations jumped oceans, other conjectures jumped the generations—not to say logic. For example, Aaron Spivak in 1929 argued that Jews think about objects rather than look at them because of a congenital deficiency "to see the plastic, the pictorial, the 'form' in Nature."[14] Since "Jews are by nature metaphorical [and] cubistic," and since seeing plastically "is not necessary in modern art, [the] the eminence of the Jew is possible... It becomes, then, quite clear why Jews today have become great plastic artists: it is because modern plastic art—cubism, futurism, etc.—is abstract, intellectual." In effect, modern art and Jewish genetics met and merged in the twentieth century.

This might sound lunatic, but both a popular art critic of the 1930s, L.

A. Schutze, and Francis Henry Taylor, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the Post-World War II, period basically agreed with this point of view. Schutze held that Jews replaced any sense of optical beauty with an abstract one because they based aesthetic problems on algebraic methods.[15] And Taylor believed that Jews were "initiators of very analytical, very intellectual modern art." They all seemed to understand this "though they may never have had direct contact with each other, [but] have had centuries of common background."[16]

Art critic Robert Pincas-Witten's position as late as 1975 was not much different. He felt that Jewish art was basically abstract, but disagreed in equating the abstract nature of Jewish art with twentieth-century modernism. He reasoned that Jewish art was abstract because of its origins in eastern aniconism and the eastern European Jewish commitment to The Book, two sources "now inextricable [that] are root causes for the abstractness of Jewish art." For Pincas-Witten, "Jewish abstraction does not entail a belief in the consonance of Abstraction and Modernism," since Jewish abstraction predated modernism by many centuries. So his argument is that modern art had finally caught up with the Jewish attitude toward art.[17]

An important point that emerges here, in extension of the Russian discussions concerning the presentation of Jewish subject matter in modern styles, is that Jewish subject matter was no longer important or even necessary in a definition of Jewish art. In effect, a Jewish artist who created abstract forms could now be Jewish without proclaiming or revealing his/her religious or cultural heritage, a totally assimilated figure whether he or she knew it, free from any parochial inheritance. But on the other hand, if one follows Pincas-Witten's logic, a Jewish artist who creates abstract forms might still be carrying around some cultural baggage—not because of personal choice but because of religious heritage, an inadvertent personal dilemma if one is sorting through issues of individual identity.

On the totally other hand, some held that Jewish art was entirely emotional and expressive—and still the product of a monolithically considered people. No less a cultural figure than the English critic, Sir Herbert Read, obviously catering to his own prejudices, lumped all Jews, past and present, into an indistinguishable, undifferentiated mass when he argued that Jewish art does not exist because Jews *are* a nomadic desert race. Despite the existence of generations of stable Jewish settlements in countries around the world with decent amounts of rainfall, he found that "the Jew still retains the essential mobility of temperament, the inquietude, that distinguishes his forefathers." He held that the Jewish art that does exist is romantic and does not respect form as Aryan art does because it avoids "the definite and the static... It sees in painting, not a means of interpreting the outer world, but a means of expressing the inner self. That is why it uses the essential types of individualistic art—

lyricism and symbolism."[18] According to Read, then, all Jews, past and present, unceremoniously lumped together as a single entity, nevertheless managed to produce artists who were individualistic in their lyricism and symbolism. There is a serious disconnect here. Even so, as late as 1963, Read's basic idea was refashioned in an essay by Daniel Sperber on then recent Jewish art. Sperber thought that the Jewish artist "could never approach art purely intellectually: it was from intellectualism that he tried to escape to the freedom of emotionalism."[19]

Are there limits to emotionalism—or to this point of view? The European critic, Waldemar George did not seem to think so. Writing about an exhibition in Germany in 1929, he said, "the art of the Jews is international, even supranational. It communicates to the world its dynamic principle..., its 'nervousness,' its anxious character, its instability, and its exaltation."[20] This sounds ominously close to anti-Semitic cant in that it virtually calls Jewish art a neurotic, cosmopolitan art, a variation on the belief that Jews help destroy and betray national cultures because of their rootless cosmopolitanism. (In comparison, Abram Efros, in Russia, found Jewish art to have an elegiac contemplativeness about it.[21] Go figure.)

Circumstances in the United States were different from those in central Europe around 1900 or Russia around 1920, despite the fact that many artists and observers came from eastern Europe. There were no local, longstanding Jewish traditions or a folk culture to build on and no immediate imperatives such as advocating Zionism or the ability to develop for the first time a Jewish art free of official interference. Nor were there Jewish communal incentives other than those based on personal friendships among artists who lived primarily in New York. Although writers and artists did form organizations in that city, these never achieved the centripetal power of similar organizations in Kiev, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Warsaw. In the United States, both artists and commentators, now cut loose from their cultural moorings and essentially free, really free, to explore any style and point of view in a much friendlier environment, were able to imagine a broad range of definitions of what Jewish art might be. As one observer noted, "The natural platform, that source from which the Jewish artist derived his inspiration for the 'Jewish style,' has been eradicated."[22]

At a series of meetings in 1948-1949 sponsored by the Jewish Art Center-Congress for Jewish Culture in which the nature of Jewish art was discussed (among other topics), the participants, without a program, were left only with their imaginations.[23] The mood was elegiac and inward-turning, the participants seeming to suggest that a separate Jewish art might yet develop within a dynamic, integrative American culture. In their own ways, the assessors of a Jewish art paralleled the previous decade's appraisers of American Scene Painting during the 1930s who had hoped that regional cultures and

regional art styles based on a pioneer past would and could remain static forever after. In both instances, it marked the equivalent of walking through life looking backward at a moment that never really existed.

The sculptor William Zorach denied the existence of a specific Jewish art, believing that art is influenced by the environment in which it is made. But at the same time, he held that "Chagall and Max Weber...create something Jewish in their art, but that is just because they lived, philosophized, and conducted themselves as Jews. Therefore something Jewish vibrates in them which is strong enough not to have been entirely drowned by the strong European influences" (p. 11). We have an art, then, derived from competing environmental influences—European-Jewish and for Weber, American-Jewish. Art historian Rachel Wishnitzer avoided environmental influences entirely by observing that a Jewish artist will often create something Jewish "because his entire mental outlook is Jewish," an outlook that allowed for "far-reaching abstractions, unexpected associations and suggestions" (p. 12) (perhaps in artists such as Chagall and Weber?).

Artist Isaac Lichtenstein also avoided environmental concerns finding the spiritual quality of Jewish art to have a specific form "which can only be comprehended by the Jewish artist." By that he meant that Jewish artists must create in terms of their own Jewish spirit and thus "express [their] genuinely Jewish art-concept" (p. 14), presumably in cosmopolitan New York or Paris. But artist William Meyerowitz was not entirely certain even of that. He believed that "if a person detects Jewish art in painting, then Jewish art actually exists in that painting for that person." But, circling around and contradicting himself, he also held that since 'we have not yet learned to distinguish that which is Jewish in art," we cannot yet define Jewish art [!]. (p. 13). And artist Yehudah Tofel maintained that "one recognizes a Jew in a work of art just as one recognizes a Jew on the street, unless the Jew purposely disguises himself." Ultimately, a Jewish artist will reveal "the most hidden concerns of his soul," when he is free of external influences (p. 15). He did not say how or where this was to be achieved. Another artist, Saul Raskin, concerned himself with the nature of a Jewish style, instead. He held that since Eastern art is traditionally two-dimensional and Western art three-dimensional, Jewish artists, products of both East and West, would develop "a specifically Jewish style..., a sort of two-and-a-half dimensional style" (p. 13). No examples were cited.

Art critic Max Kozloff offered a more tough-minded but I think equally illogical analysis on at least two occasions. In 1976, he lassoed together figures such as Gertrude Stein and Alfred Stieglitz with Bundists, Socialists, and Zionists into an outsider culture that "fueled a political critique of the civic structures around them... They could conceptualize the capitalist experience as a historical phenomenon, and illuminate it, either in unfriendly analysis or the activation of its processes." And about twenty-five years later, he sug-

gested that several Jewish American photographers reveal a point of view that ultimately relates to the immigrants' sense of finding their place in America.[24] In both instances, however, he did not illuminate anything intrinsically Jewish but rather the position of outsiders observing and therefore commenting on a mainstream that was not always easy to enter and form which they might have felt somewhat remote. In regard to the New York photographers, mostly children of immigrants, their attitude, as Kozloff generalizes it, is tied essentially to a chronological period that will pass when that generation ultimately leaves the scene.

Kozloff's most recent essay is the latest in a discussion that is now over eighty years old concerning the nature of Jewish art. To think that a definition is possible flies in the face of reason unless one sets up very narrow parameters for discussion about an essentialized past and present. It assumes that Jewish experience is static rather than evolutionary and it omits interesting and obviously contradictory possibilities derived from the experiences of individual artists and the ways they have self-identified as Jews in different countries over the centuries.

In whatever ways observers have tried to answer the question—what is Jewish about Jewish art?—and this includes observations about the makers of such an art, their use of color, of form, of representational or abstract imagery, their relationship to modern art, their responses to hostile environments as well as to the imperatives of a Jewish sense of justice, there has always been some agreement and disagreement. But there is no overall metanarrative that describes the nature of Jewish art, not culturally and not biologically. Ben Shahn neatly summed things up when he said, "there are Jewish artists and there are even Jewish themes, but there is no Jewish art. If you would like to have Jewish art, Israel would have to be isolated from the rest of the world for years."[25] That is not likely to happen, and, besides, Martin Buber to the contrary, we would have an Israeli art, not a Jewish art.

Notes

1 Peter Krasnow, "What of Jewish Art" An Artist's Challenge," *The Menorah Journal* 14 (December 1925): 540. For this and the following two notes, I could add at least a dozen similar citations.

2 Avram Kampf, *Jewish Experience in the Art of the Twentieth Century* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1984), 51, 70.

3 Abel Pann, "Concerning Jewish Art," *The Menorah Journal* 6 (August 1920): 220.

4 Richard Brilliant, "Remembering and Jewish Art," *Jewish Art* 12-13 (1986-1987): 258.

5 For the Zionist Congress, the most easily available sources are Gilya G. Schmidt.,

ed. and trans., *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); and Schmidt, *The Art and Artists of the Fifth Zionist Congress, 1901: Heralds of a New Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003). For Jewish art in Russia around 1917, worth a study all of its own, see Avram Kampf, "In Quest of the Jewish Style in the Era of the Russian Revolution," *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1979):48-75; Miriam Rajner, "The Awakening of Jewish National Art in Russia," *Jewish Art* 16-17 (1990-1991): 98-121; the essays in Ruth Apter-Gabriel, ed., *Tradition and Revolution: The Jewish Renaissance in Russian Avant-Garde Art, 1912-1928* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1987); and Susan Goodman, ed., *Russian Jewish Artists in a Century of Change, 1890-1990* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1995).

6 I worked from a microfilm copy in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, the John Weischel Papers, Roll N60-2, Frames 122-144, of the essay written by Nochum B. Minkoff entitled "Artists and Scholars View Yiddish Art: Notes on the symposiums at the Yiddish Art Center" included in the pamphlet, *Jewish Art Center: Aims and Aspirations*, published by the Congress for Jewish Culture in 1949.

7 Robert Singerman, "The Jew as Racial Alien: The Genetic Component of American Anti-Semitism," in David A. Gerber, ed., *Anti-Semitism in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 103-105. Singerman lists some books and articles published around 1900, including William Z. Ripley, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (1899); Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, *Israel Among the Nations: A Study of the Jews and Antisemitism* (1904); and "Recent Jewish Immigration to the United States," *Popular Science Monthly* (Feb. 1903): 342. On the positive side, see Samuel Walker McCall, *Patriotism of the American Jew* (New York: Plymouth Press, Inc., 1924), 118-147. The issue was also discussed in the pages of *The Menorah Journal*. See Charles W. Eliot, "The Potency of the Jewish Race," in 1 (June 1915): 141-144; and A. L. Kroeber, "Are the Jews a Race?" in 3 (December 1917): 290-294.

8 A. Basler, "The Jews in Modern Art, *East and West* 1 (April 1915): 26.

9 The title of Eric L. Goldstein's article gives its context: " 'Different Blood Flows in Our Veins': Race and Jewish Self-Definition in Late Nineteenth Century America," *American Jewish History* 85 (March 1997): 30.

10 This passage from Van Wyck Brooks' *The Wine of the Puritans: A Study of Present Day America* (1908) is cited in Susan Hegeman, *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 70.

11 Louis Lozowick, "Eliezer Lissitzky," *The Menorah Journal* 12 (May-June, 1926): 175, 176.

12 Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt, ed., *Survivor from a Dead Age: The Memoirs of Louis Lozowick* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 192-194.

13 Issachar Ryback and Boris Aronson, "Di Vegen fun der Yiddisher Maleriei," *Oifgang* (Kiev) (1919), cited in Avram Kampf, "In Quest of the Jewish Style in the Era of the Russian Revolution," *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1979), 60, 62, 63. I Tchaikov's essay, "Sculpture," published in Kiev was excerpted in *Khalystre* (Warsaw) in 1922, pages 50-52. Translation by Renee Baigell.

14 Citations are taken from Aaron Spivak's article, "The Jew Enters the Plastic Arts," in *The Menorah Journal* 16 (May 1929), 403-407.

15 L. A. Schutze, "No Jewish Art?", *The Art Digest* 10 (February 1936): 7.

16 Cited in Alfred Werner, "What Is Jewish Art?" *Judaism* 11 (Winter 1962): 36.

17 Robert Pincas-Witten, "Six Propositions in Jewish Art," *Arts Magazine* 50 (December 1975): 67, 69.

18 Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968 [1931]), 219, 220.

19 Daniel Sperber, "Trends in Modern Jewish Art," *Judaism* 12 (Winter 1963): 30.

20 Waldemar Geroge, "Introduction," *Jüdische Künstler unserer Zeit* (19129), cited in Margaret Olin, *The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 160.

21 Abram Efros's article, "Zamethi ob iksusstve," in the magazine *Novyi* 48-49 (1916) is cited in John E. Bowlt, "From the Pale of Settlement to the Reconstruction of the World," in Ruth Apter-Gabriel, ed., *Tradition and Revolution*, 44.

22 Ilya Schor, "A Working Definition of Jewish Art," *Conservative Judaism* 16 (Fall 1961): 30. See also Arthur D. Cohen, "From Eastern Europe to Paris and Beyond," in Kenneth E. Silver and Romy Golan, eds., *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris 1905-1945* (New York: Universe Books, 1985), 62.

23 The following citations are taken from Nochum B. Minkoff's summaries mentioned in note 5. I could not find anywhere transcripts of the meetings.

24 Max Kozloff, "Jewish Art and the Modernist Jeopardy," *Artforum* 14 (April 1976):44; and his *New York: Capitol of Photography* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2002), 69-78.

25 Werner, "An Interview with Ben Shahn," *Congress Bi-Weekly* 33 (March 7, 1966): 23.

Game On: Videogames, Popular Culture and the New Aestheticism of Interactivity

William Martin

The day of 9 November, 2004 marked a turning point for the ever-burgeoning videogame industry. The date marked the release of the highly anticipated sequel to the futuristic first-person-perspective shooter game, *Halo: Combat Evolved*, for the Xbox console system. The game's developer, Microsoft, estimated more than 1.5 million copies of the game (which retails for $49.99) were pre-ordered before its Tuesday release and more than 7,000 retailers across the country opened their doors at midnight to frenzied crowds. Microsoft reports that after the first day of sales over 2.4 million copies of *Halo 2* had been sold, bringing first-day revenue to over $125 million, making the release of *Halo 2* the most profitable day in videogame sales history.[1]

Such record-breaking figures, while astounding, I will argue, are also representative of a shift in popular entertainment that appears to be making itself ever- present each year as production values for such games climb and sales continually outstrip annual revenue of previous years. Release-date sales of *Halo 2* have surpassed all profits generated by first-day ticket sales for any Hollywood-produced blockbuster film. These figures can largely be attributed to the shifting demographics that games like *Halo 2* appeal to – no longer is the medium of the video game isolated to adolescents and teens, but a growing number of games cater to college-age adults and older.

According to Steven Poole, author of *Trigger Happy: Videogames and the Entertainment Revolution*, "in the 1980's videogames were indeed mainly a children's pursuit, but now games cost between twenty and fifty dollars and are targeted at the disposable income of adults. The average age of videogame players is now estimated to be twenty-eight in the United States; one 2000 survey reported that 61 percent of all U.S. videogamers are eighteen and over, with a full 42 percent of computer gameplayers and 21 percent of console gameplayers thirty-six years of age or older."[2] Additionally, Poole

cites that, "according to the European Leisure Software Publishers' Association, the British videogame market already grosses 60 percent more than total movie-box office receipts, and 80 percent more than video rentals. On the other side of the Atlantic, Americans named videogames as their favorite form of entertainment for the third year in a row in 1999...total videogame software and hardware sales in the United States reached $8.9 billion, versus $7.3 billion for movie box-office receipts."[3]

And the numbers are ever-increasing. According to the NPD group, a worldwide market information company, "total U.S. retail sales of video game hardware, software and accessories grew 10 percent in 2002 over 2001. The video game industry generated $10.3 billion in record-breaking sales, surpassing the previous record high of $9.4 billion in 2001."[4] Each year, the figures are outstripping former records. According to the NPD group, the videogame industry shattered all previous years for record sales in 2003, taking in $11.2 billion in game and console sales.[5] Taking these figures into consideration, it seems evident that the videogame can no longer be regarded as the flash-in-the-pan, after-school leisure activity of children, but rather an intensely adaptable and increasingly popular pursuit for a significant portion of the population.

For the majority of this demographic, the most popular genre of games are rated "M" for "mature," as they are flagged for their themes of "blood and gore, violence, strong language and strong sexual content."[6] Perhaps most emblematic of this genre of games is the *Grand Theft Auto* series for the Sony-manufactured console, the Playstation 2. In the extremely popular *Grand Theft Auto III*, the player controls the movements and actions of the primary character, an escaped convict, from the third-person perspective. Moving through the New York City-inspired fictional locale of "Liberty City," players have the option of following a linear "story mode" or to rejecting the narrative and simply exploring the city on their own volition. This choice allows for nearly limitless possibilities within the game's environment. A player can either follow the story mode in which the ex-con carries out "missions" for the various rulers of Liberty City's many underground crime syndicates or refuse the game's offering of linear progression by traveling through the extensive virtual city (complete with variable traffic conditions, times of day, and even weather) and interacting with its inhabitants. Indeed, the player-controlled main character in *Grand Theft Auto III* could be equated to a digitized, contemporary reworking of Baudelaire's *flaneur*.

Yet, *Grand Theft Auto III* does not solely conscribe to these modernist conventions as can be shown through its rejection of narrative progression. According to Jesse Walker, author of the essay, "Birth of a Medium: Video games, art and moral panic," "for Henry Jenkins, a professor of media studies at MIT, the video game *Grand Theft Auto III* is a bit like *Birth of a*

Nation, the 1915 film that cineastes praise for helping create the basic grammar of the movies and simultaneously damn for celebrating the Ku Klux Klan. 'In terms of what it does for games as a medium, *Grand Theft Auto III* is an enormous step forward,' says Jenkins. 'It represents a totally different model of how games can tell stories and what you can do in a gamespace.'"[7] In effect, this breakthrough in the freedom of gameplay allows for the ascendance of new terminology to define the ever-increasing expansion of the technological capacities of videogames and the environments they depict. The term "nonlinearity" is emblematic and inextricably intertwined with the rise of a new aestheticism of interactivity. According to Torben Grodal, a professor of media studies at the University of Copenhagen, "for many scholars within the humanities, the idea of total interactivity and supreme agency is linked to that term. The term is heavily loaded with associations provided by different strands of postmodernist-deconstructionist thinking, for example, those derived by Derrida. According to their philosophy, linearity is a product of a Western, metaphysical logos-thinking (e.g., causality), enhanced by the linearity of alphabetical writing...The computer "hype" version of nonlinearity consists in claiming that the computer media possibly emancipates one from these metaphysical and ideological constraints."[8] With increased innovations made in both available technology and actual game design, games like *Grand Theft Auto III* are redefining how we perceive and play a game. As game design technology has advanced to such a degree as to allow for the rejection of a single grand narrative, the concept of fully interactive virtual environments and characters inevitably becomes the most important feature in the functioning of the player/game interface. As a direct result of the tremendous interactivity and player choice in linearity and nonlinearity, the "*GTA*" series has been remarkably popular, with the latest sequel, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, selling over two million copies in the first six days of its release.

Today, with the phenomenon of the gaming culture showing evidence of ever-increasing popularity, the issue of its viability as an artistic medium and the criticality that it encompasses must be addressed. It goes without saying that enormous effort and capital is put into the development of such games as *Halo 2* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series; with production costs spiraling into the millions in dollars and the import of well-regarded film directors, artistic consultants, high-level Hollywood voice talent and popular musicians and composers all contributing to the final product. In direct consequence of this phenomenon, videogame culture seems to be increasingly encroaching into the gallery space as a burgeoning form of creative artistic expression. As early as 1989, the American Museum of the Moving Image in New York City exhibited a retrospective of videogames entitled *Hot Circuits: A Video Arcade*, which was on display from June 6, 1989 to May 20, 1990.[9]

Keeping the statistics of the videogame's ever-increasing profitabil-

ity in mind, one can find little doubt in the visionary aspects of presenting such a show as early as the *Hot Circuits* show in a space oftentimes reserved for what is regarded as "serious" or "high" art. While initial reviews of the show were mixed, perhaps a result of the public's apprehension to regard a leisure activity like the videogame as a viable source of art historical criticality; the very possibility of such a show raises questions regarding the reconsideration of the videogame's place as a medium in the oftentimes hierarchical art world. According to Rochelle Slovin, a founding director of the American Museum of the Moving Image and proponent of the 1989 show, "looking back at it today – when new media is an everyday subject, and early video games are enjoying not only increased critical attention but are being repackaged for nostalgic use on home computers – the exhibition seems to have been a decade ahead of its time."[10]

Slovin's sweeping statement regarding the influence of videogames in contemporary culture is indeed significant. As the economic evidence suggests, the popularity of videogames can no longer be attributed to a mere trend, but rather a phenomenon of immensely pertinent significance. That said, the show, albeit "ahead of its time," received an ambiguous reception regarding the "seriousness" of the videogame as an artistic medium. For many, the videogame was still regarded as merely a diversion. Even today, with the videogame revolution at the height of its influence and showing no signs of slowing down, the mere utterance of the word "videogame" tends to trigger either an immediate reaction of contempt or enthusiasm. The evidence, however, suggests that those with reservations are on the losing side of the argument. With the rapid popularity of videogaming spreading out across the demographical board, the presence of the videogame in the world of art seems to be ever-increasing. In fact, "ludology," stemming from the Latin word for "game," is a burgeoning critical movement dedicated to videogame theory and the scholarly examination of "the semiotics of video game play."[11]

Over the course of the 1980's and 1990's, technological advancements in how the image is represented expanded at an incredible rate. Videogames in the 1980's were limited by the capabilities of graphics technologies and representation was often two-dimensional, with the "play" of games traditionally being exhibited in a side-scrolling linearity. Yet, in the 1990's, the computer industry cracked the code for three-dimensional representation in a manner remarkably similar to the perspectival progression found in the painters of the Renaissance, thus allowing the player to experience the represented environment in a wholly new way, and allowing for the ascendancy of nonlinear play. According to Henry Jenkin's essay, "Art Form for the Digital Age," through the intensification and proliferation of their popularity, videogames can no longer be regarded as a time-killing leisure activity, but are increasingly following similar developmental trends of other, now-accepted mediums that

were previously viewed under scrutiny for their artistic merit.

As computer technology continues to expand, the videogame's relevance and critical regard has come under increased scrutiny as a viable artistic medium. Early in the evolution of the videogame, according to Jenkins, "critics didn't believe that the computer could adequately express the human spirit...The computer is simply a tool, one that offers artists new resources and opportunities for reaching the public; it is human creativity that makes art. Still, one can only imagine how the critics would have responded to the idea that something as playful, unpretentious and widely popular as a computer game might be considered art."[12] To further buttress this point, Jenkins points to the work of literary critic Gilbert Seldes work, *The Seven Lively Arts* (1925). Seldes' work took the radical tactic of claiming that America's foremost contribution to art had been through vehicles of popular culture such as film and jazz – artistic modes that were regarded as "low brow" pastimes of the masses early on. According to Jenkins:

> Readers then were skeptical of Seldes' claims about cinema in particular for many of the same reasons that contemporary critics dismiss games—they were suspicious of cinema's commercial motivations and technological origins, concerned about Hollywood's appeals to violence and eroticism, and insistent that cinema had not yet produced works of lasting value. Seldes, on the other hand, argued that cinema's popularity demanded that we reassess its aesthetic qualities.
>
> Cinema and other popular arts were to be celebrated, Seldes said, because they were so deeply imbedded in everyday life, because they were democratic arts embraced by average citizens. Through streamlined styling and syncopated rhythms, they captured the vitality of contemporary urban experience. They took the very machinery of the industrial age, which many felt dehumanizing, and found within it the resources for expressing individual visions, for reasserting basic human needs, desires and fantasies. And these new forms were still open to experimentation and discovery. They were, in Seldes' words, "lively arts."[13]

For Jenkins, like the outgrowth cinema for the modern period, the medium of the videogame is the "lively art" of the digital age and is to be celebrated for its classless nature, coupled with an inherent critical flexibility. Indeed, the videogame offers a highly-modifiable and egalitarian modus of artistic expression for a burgeoning crop of contemporary artists with computer-savvy programming skills. Like Theodor Adorno's early defense of the artistic viability of jazz music, videogames are emerging, in a remarkably similar fashion, as a truly revolutionary mode of expression in which the viewer no longer simply

"views" but explodes traditional conventions of the audience through the new aesthetic elements of interactivity and "play."

In conjunction with the ascendancy of the videogame as a popular culture device, there is evidence of a marked increase in the presence of the videogame in the art world as an extension of a modernist artistic project of "play," yet with its own unique aesthetic of the player/game relationship. *Game Show*, a Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art exhibit from the spring of 2001 to 2002, dealt solely with the concept of play and this concept of interactivity, with three of the works on display, (by digital artists Natalie Bookchin, Lonnie Flickinger and the duos of jodi and Thomson & Craighead) exploring the "new media" of the videogame. According to the curator of the exhibit, Laura Steward Heon, "artists have been intermittently at play in the game field for most of the twentieth century. Working in Paris during the interwar period, the surrealists used games, such as exquisite corpse, *frottage*, and automatic writing, in much the same way that they used psychoanalysis and "primitive" cultures – to escape the confining cultural constructs of the period."[14] Yet, games and the element of play did not leave off with the surrealists. Mark J.P. Wolf, author of the essay, "The Video Game as a Medium," states that "the time-based and interactive nature of the video game also fit in with trends in 1960's art. The "happenings" of artists like John Cage and Allan Kaprow emphasized experience and process over product (sometimes including the audience's participation), and Sol Lewitt's famous essay of 1967, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," placed more importance on concept than on a tangible art object."[15] Through the extreme freedom of play within a virtual environment allowed through contemporary gaming technology, it becomes apparent that videogames are "playing" not only with an entirely new form of media, but also a new aestheticism of interactivity.

2004's Whitney Biennial also featured artists working solely within the context of videogames and videogame culture. Among the handful of digital artists on display, two pieces specifically utilized the videogame as the medium of choice. In *Velvet-Strike*, by Anne-Marie Schleiner, Brody Condon and Joan Leandre, the trio of artists developed what is known as a "MOD," short for "modification," which allows the codes of pre-programmed commercial game releases to be altered in various ways. According to Sarah Northmore, MODs are "written for specific games that enable the player to distort the original design and play sequence of the licensed game. Varying in complexity, these add-ons have since mutated in-game variables such as character skins and game sequences. Emerging media artists create MODs not merely to satisfy personal fancy...but to use them as tools for political critique. These artists are recasting the political and social dynamics of interactivity and authorship, player and provider."[16]

Velvet-Strike is a MOD of the popular online-based first-person team

shooter game, *Counter-Strike*, in which players interact in an online environment, playing as either a member of a group of terrorists or a squad of counter-terrorists. Through the group's modifications to the game's original programming code, "Schleiner...gathered dozens of 'sprays' – virtual spray paint stencils...that generate antiwar and antiviolence messages. The sprays range from a declaration asking players to 'Give Online Peace a Chance' to a depiction of two male soldiers in a loving embrace."[17] The work is intensely politically charged, thus creating an entire virtual environment to explore that is filled with antiwar messages, yet, in a caustic twist of irony, armed commandos still roam about, oftentimes violently interrupting the player/viewer's exploration of the three-dimensional virtual environment Schleiner has created. According to Christiane Paul, *Velvet-Strike,* "...was conceptualized as a direct response to President Bush's so-called 'War on Terrorism'...Putting the 'weapon' of public opinion back in the hands of the players, *Velvet-Strike* enables users to spray their anti-war graffiti (one of them reads 'Hostages of Military Fantasy') onto the walls of the game environment. *Velvet-Strike* directly intervenes in and 'rewrites' a commercial product, a strategy often used in activism and in the creation of tactical media."[18] This subversion of the commercially-released game is oftentimes referred to as "hacktivism." Using the popular culture phenomenon of the videogame to deliver the group's antiwar stance, *Velvet-Strike* addresses the mass commercialization and distribution of the videogame as an effective and viable modus of transmission for both a commercially and politically subversive message.

In her latest work, *Operation Urban Terrain*, or *O.U.T.* (2004), Schleiner has "hacked" the game *America's Army*, a game that drew heavy criticism last year when it became available for download through the United States army's website as a recruitment tool targeting the videogame generation. According to Northmore, "*America's Army* is an online combat game created by the United States military in their efforts to commercially package M.O.U.T. training (pronounced müt, an acronym for Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain) for the American public. 'It's creating an acceptance of military intervention in different aspects of civilian life,' according to Schleiner. '*O.U.T.* is a response to how entertainment, virtual, military, and urban spaces are coming together in *M.O.U.T.*'"[19] In her MOD of *America's Army*, Schleiner altered the game's environment to transform the playspace of the original game from its decidedly non-Western locales to the streets of New York City. As a protest to the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, Schleiner and a collaborator rigged their bodies with a laptop and projectors, then "projected the game action live onto three discrete locations in NYC: intersections in midtown, Harlem, and near the Manhattan Bridge in DUMBO, Brooklyn."[20] As a result, Schleiner's work addresses not only political critique and analysis, but the overlap of the virtual and the real and the division of virtual space from reality.

Cory Arcangel and collaborative group BEIGE also had work on display at the Whitney that utilized the videogame. In contrast to the collaborative work of Schleiner, Condon and Leandre's alteration of a popular contemporary game, Arcangel works with early videogame technology from the 1970's and 1980's. According to Brian J. Sholis, "he [Arcangel] believes that these machines – often Commodore 64s, Atari 800s, or 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment Systems – 'have personalities, shapes, and architectures' that are worth investigating. To Arcangel and his collaborators...it is not the data – software – that is important, but the computers themselves."[21] Arcangel's work uses outdated technology as a conduit to project digital reworkings of existing, recognizable imagery and iconographic representations of popular culture. It should be noted that Arcangel's work is not solely nostalgic, but also questions the "fixity" of the past through an alteration of a "classic" videogame; as well as the limitations and the creative advantages of limitative technologies in the gaming machines of the past.

In his work, *Super Mario Clouds*, Arcangel has "hacked" a classic game from the 1980's era 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES. With *Super Mario Clouds*, Arcangel and his collaborators altered a cartridge of the classic Nintendo game *Super Mario Brothers* to remove all of the visuals needed to play the original game, leaving the viewer only with the now-iconic background of the game's scrolling low-resolution cloudscape. The work not only addresses the possibilities of the early technology's functional limitations, but also questions what can be deemed as aesthetically pleasing in the digital age. In this case, digitally reworked representations of something now familiar to us is transmitted through a wholly alien approach. In a sense, Arcangel's play on the now iconic *Super Mario Brothers* clouds can be viewed as a Baudrillardian simulacra *within* a simulacra. Where the original game simulated clouds and players recognized them as such, Arcangel's work now calls to mind the game itself prior to what the clouds were initially intended to signify, thus creating a "chain of command" in the viewer's registry of what the image represents.

Arcangel further explores the question of digitized aesthetic representation in a series of landscape studies from 2002 entitled *NES Home Movies: 8-bit Landscape Studies*. Using 360-degree photographs taken of his hometown of Buffalo, New York, Arcangel then "hacked" the photographic image so that it could be transferred into the Nintendo console's 8-bit cartridge format. In doing so, the original photographic image is reworked into an 8-bit, low-resolution representation of the original photograph. According to Christiane Paul, "*Landscape Study #4* fuses traditional landscape photography with gaming aesthetics, creating a scenery that effectively transcends the media from which it borrows and seems to evolve into a new manifestation of pop art."[22] Through this transference, the representation's accuracy contin-

ues to condense as the functional limitations for accuracy have morphed from the authority of a photograph into the cartridge's own unique set of aesthetic qualities. Additionally, Arcangel's work also explores the aesthetics of interactivity between the work of art and its viewership. In his work from 2002, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, Arcangel altered the game cartridge of the classic shooting gallery game, *Hogan's Alley*, in which the player uses a light gun to fire at the screen, and replaced the original targets with an 8-bit representation of the legendary Pop artist. According to Sholis, "though avowedly apolitical, Arcangel's relationship with outdated machinery evinces a refusal to participate in the consumer culture associated with the never-ending and lightning-fast cycle of technological turnover."[23]

While games have traditionally been from the first and third-person perspectives, point-of-view, or POV, technological advancements in both the third and first-person have allowed for, according to Christiane Paul, "...the distinction between a player experiencing the world of the game from their own position and point of view and a player creating or choosing a visual representation that acts as a stand-in throughout the game."[24] Of these two typical POVs, it is the third-person perspective is perhaps most intriguing. According to Bernie Yee, an editor and analyst of the gaming industry, "first-person games give no sense of the body, the virtual self. They are disconnected from the immersiveness that designers long for. First person doesn't give us peripheral vision, a real sense of space. Third person is a poor substitute perhaps, but at least it give us a body to identify with, a sense of space to exist in."[25] On display at the 2002 Documenta XI in Kassel, Germany, Chinese artist Feng Mengo uses similar modification techniques to produce a wholly new way of viewing the videogame and its ever-expanding environments of user freedom and interactivity. Feng's work is a modification of the popular third-person perspective "shoot-'em-up" game, *Quake III Arena* (oftentimes referred to by fans as *Q3A*). In his modification of the commercially-produced title, the artist created *Q4U* ("Quake for You"), "in which he inserted a 'skin' – a visual representation of himself equipped with a weapon and camcorder – into the game and made himself the main character."[26] Feng's work raises questions regarding the "avatar" – the visual representation of the user/participant/player on screen. According to Paul, "*Q4U*...questions concepts of online identity in the context of role-playing but directly implements the artist in the commercial environment and violence of the game."[27] Such an avatar within the videogame's virtual space could possibly be an allusion to the Lacanian "mirror stage," that, according to Bob Rehak, "occurs in human infants between the ages of six and eighteen months, when they first encounter and respond to their own reflection as an aspect of themselves,"[28] which is simultaneously symbolic of the illusionary ego and, at the same time, the moment of recognition signals a split, "...permanently dividing one from oneself as sign and

referent."[29] For Lacan, this split severs the self from the object that allowed the self to come into being, thus creating a "lost object" or *objet petit a*, which is sought but never recovered over the course of one's lifetime.

For Rehak, the videogame avatar that Feng Mengbo's work attempts to work over into the self is a cogent, visual exemplification of the Lacanian *objet petit a*. According to Rehak, "appearing on screen in place of the player, the avatar does double-duty as self and other, symbol and index. As *self*, its behavior is tied to the player's through an interface (keyboard, mouse, joystick): its literal motion, as well as its figurative triumphs and defeats, result from the player's actions. At the same time, avatars are unequivocally *other*. Both limited and freed by difference from the player, they can accomplish more than the player alone; they are supernatural ambassadors of agency."[30] In this sense, the videogame inevitably exacerbates itself as a mirror-image of ourselves in a world that, like the work of Anne-Marie Schleiner, seems to be playing with the division of real and virtual spaces.

Keeping Feng's virtual extension of the self within the context of the game in mind, the media theories of Marshall McLuhan seem unequivocally appropriate. Writing in 1964, McLuhan stated in his book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, that "games are popular art, collective social *reactions* to the main drive or action of any culture. Games, like institutions, are extensions of social man and of the body politic, as technologies are extensions of the animal organism... As models, they are collective rather than private dramatizations of inner life. Games as popular art forms offer to all an immediate means of participation in the full life of a society."[31] One could only imagine what McLuhan might make of the contemporary videogame and its increasing approach to absolute player freedom. Using McLuhan's assessment that "technological mediation is a condition of culture,"[32] a new form of artists have arisen alongside a digitized "global village" of gameplayers controlling avatars of themselves in a multisensory experience within the realm of a virtual space. As a result, this new artist must be capable of transcending the barriers of the visual so as to "paint" within the invisible coding of software rather than pigment. According to William J. Mitchell, Alan S. Inouye and Marjory S. Blumenthal's book, *Beyond Productivity: Information Technology, Innovation, and Creativity*, "even more than film, computer games require a close marriage between the practical aspects of code and art, and between programmers and artists, at every stage of production. It is not just that different skills are required to produce the end result. Rather, it is the constant state of communication among art, technology, and design that has to be maintained from beginning to end."[33] Within this realm, creativity posits itself as a triumvirate between the initial programmer, the artist modifier and that modification's player/viewer. This creative overlap of interrelationship exists not only within subversive "hacks" of games, but within the production of the

commercially-produced games themselves that artists such as Anne-Marie Schleiner, Feng Mengbo and Cory Arcangel have altered for their own work. As a result of this creative relationship, MOD artists are capable of understanding and, in turn, manipulating software in such a way that they have the ability to subvert commercially pre-produced software and to alter such software through such MODs and "hacks" in order to produce an entirely new experience using the aesthetics of interactivity and play. In this burgeoning new realm of artistic expression, the click of a mouse or the keyed alteration of a code is capable of generating a fully-interactive artistic experience that no brushstroke can replicate.

Notes

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Contributors

Matthew Baigell is Professor of Art History at Rutgers University.

Gevork Hartoonian is Associate Professor in the School of Design and Architecture at the University of Canberra, Australia.

Hee-Young Kim is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Alabama.

William Martin holds an MA in Art History, Theory and Criticism from Stony Brook University.

Martin Ries studied art at the Corcoran Art School and American University in Washington, D.C., at Pratt Graphics, and Hunter College in New York. He was Assistant Director of the Hudson River Museum, and studied art history at Hunter College with Leo Steinberg, Ad Reinhardt, William Rubin and E. C. Goossen. He has published and exhibited his art in this country and abroad. His website's address is www.MartinRies.com.

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Art Department
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-5400