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R. B. Kitaj's Paintings

In Terms of Walter Benjamin's Allegory Theory

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis investigates R.B. Kitaj's later paintings since the 1980s, focusing on his enthusiasm for fragments. While exploring diverse media from print to painting throughout his work, his main interest was the use of fragments, which in turn revealed his broader interests in the notion of historicity as fragments detached from its original context. Such notion based on Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory allowed him to embrace a much more comprehensive theme of Jewishness as the subject of his painting. In this regard, I focus on Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* to get further insights into the artist's use of fragments and his elaboration on the Jewish identity, and also examine the more expansive meanings of his works in the context of modernism.

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Introduction

R. B. Kitaj(1932-2007) was a Jewish American artist who was born in Cleveland, Ohio and spent much of his life since the 1950's in England. This paper will investigate Kitaj's later paintings, focusing on his enthusiasm for fragments in relation to Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory. Exploring diverse media from print to painting throughout his work, his main interest was the use of fragments, which in turn reveals his broader interests in the notion of historicity as fragments detached from its original context.[1] Like Benjamin, Kitaj was not only attracted by the Surrealism that André Breton advocated, but also by a venerable tradition of allegory and iconography he learned from scholars at the Warburg Institute.[2] His absorption in such pursuits reveals how much he delved into the relationship between the artistic form and its meaning in a new way, as conveyed through history.

Kitaj himself was so interested in Benjamin's theories that he even depicted Benjamin in some of his works. Some examples are *Arcades (after Walter Benjamin)* (1972-4),[3] *The Autumn of Central Paris (After Walter Benjamin)* (1972-3)[4] and a

[1] Historicity might work both in the sense of history as tradition and in the sense where every individual has its own history; it emphasizes the repetition or modulation of past events.

[2] This was from a culture which was not, biographically, the artist's: that is, the German culture of the first forty years of the twentieth century. Kitaj had been working at the Ruskin in Oxford on a G.I. grant. There he had listened to the way Edgar Wind, the Warburg scholar, wove his literary exegeses of the paintings of the Renaissance. It seems impossible not to see Kitaj's enterprise at that time as trying to give his own work that embeddedness in the verbal culture, that allusiveness which, following Wind, he saw in Renaissance painting. See Michael Podro, "Some Notes on Kitaj," *Art International*, 22 (Mar., 1979), 19.

[3] See John Ashbery, *Kitaj* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 41.

lithographic portrait of Benjamin (1966). The first two paintings not only present Benjamin as a central figure and imply his significance in modern societies through both the representations and the titles, but also they describe him with particular visual language – the flat planes of forms and clear-cut outlines. The other lithographic portrait suggests even further the aspects which attracted Kitaj greatly to Benjamin: that is, the relation between print and painting. Therefore, I will focus on reading Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, composed in 1924-5 and published in 1928, and specifically his theory of allegory, 'ruins' and 'constellation,' in order to provide the theoretical basis for Kitaj's use of fragments within his art.

In addition, I'm focusing specifically on his later paintings, where the artist concentrated on the subject of Jewishness and cosmopolitanism.[5] Kitaj's addiction to Benjaminian fragments may have allowed him to embrace such new issues, while the artist's background provided an inherent connection to them. However, the merits of Kitaj's work are not just coming from such superficial facts or from the surroundings of the artist. Rather, the rootedness of his work in such theories and his ability to contextualize them philosophically resulted as profoundness in his seemingly-depthless fragmented paintings.

In fact, it was Kitaj himself who first used the term 'diasporist' in his book *First Diasporist Manifesto*, which he published in 1989.[6] Like his canvases, this book is not a

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[4] See James Aulich and John Lynch, *Critical Kitaj: Essays on the Work of R.B. Kitaj* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 93.

[5] In the early stage of his career, Kitaj mainly created 'historical' works, engaging historical events from the past, and especially in the 1960s and the 1970s he produced a large number of screenprints: it was since the 1980s that he began to openly articulate his Jewishness in his painting.

[6] Recently in 2007, the *Second Diasporist Manifesto*, a follow up to the first one, has been published taking

coherent treatise but an associative collage of paragraphs, quotations and reproductions of his own paintings and drawings. In this book, he clarifies his ambitions as an artist in general, stating that "The Diasporist lives and paints in two or more societies at once… I don't know if people will liken it to a School of painting or attribute certain characteristics or even Style to it."[7] Kitaj hints here that he did not make an effort either at distinguishing 'himself as a person' from 'himself as an artist,' nor at falling into a specific School as an artistic movement; whenever the word 'diasporist' was mentioned, he meant something unconventionally comprehensive.

To discuss this issue is crucial in relation to his paintings overall. Although he often described specific historical narratives, those scenes regularly attempted to convey further meanings beyond those narratives. In addition, Kitaj once argued in an interview that "the 'better' the art is, the more universal it is, so that intelligent people everywhere will likely be affected by it," and he also believed that "the universal is very often a result of "particularist" criteria such as cultural traditions and destinies, personal experience, historical drama and milieu."[8] Regarding this point, although Kitaj himself did not clarify the word 'cosmopolitanism' in his essay, through his overall explanation it can be supposed that he did not refer to it simply in terms of globalized cities or entities, but used the word with a more multilayered and complicated connotation based on the relationship between the universal and the "particularist" within it. I hope to gain further insight on this by reflecting on Jacques Derrida's essay on cosmopolitanism.

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over the same framework of the artist's works chosen by him to accompany the text.

[7] R.B. Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto: with 60 Illustrations* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 19.

[8] Andrew Brighton, "Conversations with R.B. Kitaj," *Art in America* (June 1986), 104.

Ⅰ. The Artist's Exploration of the Issues of Jewishness and Diasporism

Despite the fact that Kitaj was born in an agnostic family with a left-wing political disposition and grew up without learning any Jewish traditions, while working in England as a Jewish American, he felt like an outsider and realized that the root of this feeling was connected with his identity as a Jew.[9] However, such autobiographical explanations of his arriving at the very last phase of his painting on Jewishness after all his other earlier painterly experiments – such as his involvement in print, photomontage, and montage-like painting, which will be discussed later – do not really show a strong enough motivation for his choice of this topic. Rather, they are only superficial descriptions of his ongoing strategy as an artist. As Ken Johnson pointed out, by focusing on the Diaspora, Kitaj defined the Jewish experience in the same terms that he did modernism, and therefore, for him, the Diaspora connoted not a religion but 'a state of mind'[10]. Joe Shannon has also stated that, "urgently seeking social significance, Kitaj has probed the human condition *allegorically* as well as *empirically*, using complex and difficult imagery that compels us to peer beneath the surface for meanings."[11] These comments by critics on Kitaj's Jewish paintings hint that the artist's involvement in the

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[9] Kitaj reckoned there have been no great painters, no Cezanne or Rembrandt or Matisse, but may be ten first-rate painters, not one of which has wished to be known as a Jewish artist (Chagall may be an exception). See Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 119.

[10] Ken Johnson, "R.B. Kitaj: Views of a Fractured Century," *Art in America* (March 1995), 126.

[11] Joe Shannon, "The Allegorists: Kitaj and the Viewer," *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawing, Pastels* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 17.

Jewish issues is more theory-based, which is going beyond routine art historical discourses.

This is especially true when it comes to the contemporary art scenes of his time. Kitaj disapproved of modernist abstract art, which was popular in the twentieth century, indulging instead in introspective romanticism, denying any interest in space and taking the characteristics of minimal art. To him, paintings should ultimately contain people's everyday experiences and humanist ethos, and he considered his own situations to be the most honest themes of his work. The reason Kitaj was so absorbed in impressionism was also to realize the characteristics of human experience.[12] After this pursuit, Kitaj started to investigate the topic of his identity, which was the essence of his own experience, and published the *First Diasporist Manifesto*, which contained his own paintings of Jewish themes on every other page. Among these, the characters in *The Jew etc.* (1976)[13] and *The Jewish Rider* (1984-5)[14] look insecure, their postures are twisted, and they have introspective expressions as if they are afraid to face the outside. Also, the train they are riding symbolizes 'homelessness' and 'mobility'.[15] However, this was not intended to just portray the wandering image of Jews. As Andrew Benjamin points out 'the absence of location makes the book the only residence for these people,'[16] 'homelessness' and Kitaj's interest in books and tradition are interrelated. Such homelessness and the absence

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[12] Richard Morphet, *R.B. Kitaj* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 21.

[13] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 30.

[14] See Ibid., 28.

[15] Avram Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in 20th Century Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 105.

[16] Janet Wolff, "The Impolite Boarder: 'Diasporist' Art and Its Critical Response," in *Critical Kitaj,* 31.

of location well coincide with Benjamin's notion of historicity, where every fragment is detached from its original context and accumulated. Also, books seem to belong to the spatialized baroque world of things or ruins. Likewise, such issues coming from his own identity and experiences broaden the topic of his painting to include Benjamin's theory of allegory.

Considering all such connections, it seems unreasonable to suggest that Kitaj's art that related to Jewishness occurred purely from an aesthetic purpose or from his uncluttered interest in allegory. As he viewed the world both allegorically and empirically, the other motivation can also be found in the atmosphere of the British society that he lived in. The immigration of large numbers of Jews from Eastern Europe to England at the turn of the century resulted in the xenophobic (and particularly anti-American) tendencies among some British intellectuals. The fact that the reviews of the same exhibition in museums in Los Angeles and New York in 1994 were quite different in tone from those in London, treating his work seriously and with respect, proves this.[17] This anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism among the critics in London made Kitaj increasingly vocal about his Jewishness,[18] and his images also often colluded with the visual discourses of misogyny (as seen in *The Rise of Fascism* (1979-80)[19]),[20] even though Kitaj himself has claimed to be a 'strong feminist'. According to Janet Wolff, the

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[17] Ibid., 31-32.

[18] A recurring objection to Kitaj's work was his dependence on literary sources. However, according to Janet Wolff, "it may be not so much Kitaj's dependence on *words* which alienated the critics, but what he speaks *about,*" see Ibid., 32.

[19] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 38.

[20] Many of his images – of prostitutes, of women 'naked for the men' (Kitaj's own phrase, in the Preface to *The Ohio Gang*), of nude women with clothed men (*Where the Railroad Leaves the Sea*) – produce an uncomfortable viewing position for the woman spectator. Ibid., 38.

masculinity found in his works do not reveal an antipathy to women, but it is rather for adjusting himself in the atmosphere where the Jewish male has been feminized in the discourses of the West, like the 'Oriental'.[21] This shows what 'diasporist art' or 'Jewish art' means to Kitaj. It cannot be prescribed to a specific style. Diasporist art does not have a fixed scope, as diverse views, such as post-colonialism and feminism, could be closely related as well. In the book *First Diasporist Manifesto*, in spite of the subject related to Jews, Kitaj did not stop at stating the Jewish scope with his work, but additionally went on to integrate his purpose as an artist.[22] In other words, 'diasporist art', which Kitaj designated as a link to illuminating his identity, is not just limited to Jews but is the art of all who have been classified as an outsider and have been excluded from mainstream authority. Women, foreigners, homosexuals, and non-Caucasians belong to this group. For Kitaj, the Jewish experience could be defined "in the same terms that he does modernism: a terrain of dislocation, rootlessness, fragmentation, and cosmopolitanism."[23] This notion of him was visualized in the two paintings, *My Fourth Jewish Abstract* (2002-3) and *Self Portrait as a Mondrian* (2001-3). Here, the paintings themselves do not define whether they are abstract or figurative paintings, but choose instead to remain between boundaries, even when the title clearly states the painting is abstract. Kitaj also mentioned that "as in cubism, the diasporist painting I have always done … often represents more than one view,"[24] emphasizing that his vision can be fully understood

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj*, 23.

[23] Johnson, "R.B. Kitaj," 126.

[24] Ibid.

only through the accumulated collection of words and paintings. All these facts support the close relationship between Kitaj's Jewishness paintings and the allegory theory.

However, on the other hand, Kitaj's biographical experiences add something more to the understanding of his paintings in relation to allegory. That is, his becoming vocal about Jewishness is directly based on his own experiences as an expatriate in London. *Sandra 5 (A magazine)* (1999), for example, shows his immediate response to the societal and political atmosphere where he lives. He has blamed the death of his wife, Sandra Fisher, who died unexpectedly at age 47 in 1994, on his critics – saying "They tried to kill me and they got her instead."[25] He also wrote words on this collage painting, such as, 'Jewish Art and Xenophobia' and 'Los Angeles 1999.' In fact, after having worked in London since the 1950's, Kitaj went back to LA, turning against the London critics in 1997. This episode shows that although the artist was greatly interested in the fragmented view of the world and unfixed identity, when it came to his diasporist art, there was still some ambiguity between the general way to place the past in relation to understanding the present by way of allegory, and the specific situation that an individual faces within a society.

Such breach might be resolved through what Jacques Derrida has explicated. In short, adhering to his basic attitude towards *difference*,[26] Derrida dealt with the specific topic of cosmopolitanism in his essay *On Cosmopolitanism*. Here, he seeks to locate the image of cosmopolitanism in the split between two forms of the polis, which are the city

[25] Wolff, "The Impolite Boarder," 33.

[26] For Derrida, *différence* is an attempt to conjoin the differing and deferring aspects involved in arche-writing in a term that itself plays upon the distinction between the audible and the written. It is such originary breach existing between the spoken and the written that he associates with the terms arche-writing and *difference,* and such basic scheme seems to extend to almost everything that comes into his perception.

and the state. By using the term "the city" here, Derrida locates the origin of cosmopolitanism in a village or a country house and restores it to its initial purity before the contamination of the State. Accordingly, when he mentions the term 'city of refuge', it commands our respect[27] and is granted a certain type of universality by him. On the other hand, such "law of hospitality" is limited by the legitimate police power operating as an immediate response to a massive influx of refugees in Europe.[28] However, when Derrida traces the impossibility of hospitality, he does not solve or resolve a problem for ethics or politics, and this is an accomplishment – an accomplishment since it suggests the potential that there can be in an unprecedented way at any moment, being productive while vibrating between two different modes.

I believe this opens new possibilities for interpreting Kitaj's paintings as well, as it is the artist's own emphasis that in every artwork there should be multilayered connotations based on the relationship between the universal and the "particularist." Depending on this basic logic, which can be applied to his entire work, I will discuss various or manifold ways to approach it – including art historical, philosophical, and cultural contexts – and I believe that such considerations will strengthen the artist's prime claim to a large extent. From this perspective, the identity of the Jewish need not fall in any scheme of explanation, but rather Kitaj's efforts to make an indecisiveness between the *past unconditional* and the *present conditional* only produce more powerful and fertile meanings about the topic. Furthermore, such tension would give the discussion on cosmopolitanism a new life as it is considered within the postmodern context.

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[27] Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 16.

[28] Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, 7.

Ⅱ. Contextual Relationships between Jewishness and Kitaj's Use of Fragments

1. Kitaj's Reinterpretation of American Tradition and Pop Art

Kitaj's vocalizing Jewishness hints at his great interest in the relationship between cultural traditions or history and the artistic form conveying historical truth. The connection, or even tension, between these two is more noticeable in his use of fragments in the paintings than in any other works. As one might see in *The Autumn of Central Paris (After Walter Benjamin)*, the painted fragments are clearly cut out and then rearranged without any intrinsic order. These are not Kitaj's pure conventions at all. Even at a glance, such strategy might be comparable to what the Pop artists did in the 1960's, in that both frequently made use of photomontage technique that was, in turn, influenced by consumerism and the development of modern technology. Ken Johnson has argued that Kitaj's paintings were partially influenced by Pop Art; however, his confirming this point of view was quite superficial since he mentioned only artworks that were painted in a graphic, simplifying style with bright colors. The connections existing between Kitaj and the contemporary trend of Pop Art are not linear or superficial, but are elaborated on in depth by the criticism of Lawrence Alloway (1926-1990), who was the key critic supporting the British Pop artists, using the term 'Pop Art' for the first time. Alloway has established some crucial ideas on Pop Art: that is, as a "communications network," which shows the anthropological characteristics of Pop Art, Americanness, the ambivalent

relationship between an artist's originality and anonymity in the continuum of society, an artist's construction of sign system in painting, and lastly the use of new techniques, such as photographs in the traditional form of painting.

Owing to the developments in post-war American studies including demography, history, and sociology, new research on communicational expansion done by American sociologists treated mass communications objectively, as data having a measurable effect on American lives, and has became a characteristic of American sociology. Pop Art may be intrinsically American as well, however much of it appeared in England. Regarding this, Alloway asserted that "the democratization of history leads to an increase of complexity in the material to be studied, making it bulge inconveniently beyond the traditional limits of inquiry,"[29] eventually resulting in the democratization of art, which produces unprecedented meanings in art. According to Alloway, the consumption of popular culture is basically a social experience, providing information derived from and contributing to statistically normal roles in society, and is a network of messages and objects shared with others.[30] The work of art cannot be regarded as a self-sufficient piece anymore, but is a partial sample of the world's continuous relationships.

Robert Rauschenberg, who was deeply engaged in the Pop artist movement and whose work is comparable to Kitaj's in that Rauschenberg created many assemblage works using material fragments in a similar way to Kitaj, also agreed with Alloway. Rauschenberg mentioned that the artist is a "part of the density of an uncensored

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[29] Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 5.

[30] Ibid., 4.

continuum that neither begins nor ends with any action of his."[31] Therefore, it can be assumed whenever Rauschenberg introduces fragments into the painterly planes, those fragments are employed as random samples of a society as a conglomerate, which emphasizes Alloway's anthropological viewpoint of art and visualizes the expansion of painting itself. This idea was exemplified when Andy Warhol showed the characteristic imperfections and distortions of the silk-screen process by employing the orchestration of the voids, fractures and markings, as in *Suicide* (1962). This implies the painting not as a finished whole, but only a part of the entire social communications process.

Likewise, Alloway stressed the question of the possibility for a diverse group of artists, starting from separate points, to arrive at the idea of flowing rather than arrested meaning; this can be answered through the involvement of all the artists in the twentieth-century communications network of which we are all a part.[32] Alloway explained the use of *man-made* objects' sense of meaning further: *in process*, an experience based on "the proliferation and interpenetration of our sign- and symbol-packed culture."[33] That is, as all signs derive from popular culture and a communication network, they are repeated in a system with a sense of meaning in process, and Pop Art deals with material that already exists as signs: photographs, brand goods, comics – that is to say, with pre-coded material. These sign systems are, therefore, very significant mechanisms in the Pop artists' prime objective of immersing himself into the vast communications network. Specifically, these signs were based on cultural and economic proliferation, especially of American affluent

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[31] Ibid., 5.

[32] Ibid., 42.

[33] Ibid., 47.

culture around the 1960's. For instance, signs relating to the idea of proliferation are displayed in Warhol's paintings of Campbell's soup cans and of American celebrities such as Jackie Kennedy or Marilyn Monroe. However, the meaning of *in process* was not confined only to American culture. Alloway himself was originally an English art critic, even though he was greatly attracted by the American material culture later, and in fact, many English Pop artists share a lot of characteristics of American Pop Art, which they reinterpreted in their own way.

David Hockney's (1937-) paintings are significant examples. Hockney, a student at The Royal College of Art in London from 1959 to 1961 and a close friend of Kitaj there, was in search of a 'marriage of styles' like some of his colleagues, including Kitaj. The artists with whom Hockney was associated at Royal College were Kitaj, Allen Jones, Peter Phillips, Derek Boshier and Patrick Caulfield, heralded by the press as the young stars of British Pop Art. When critic Lucy R. Lippard was exploring the birth of Pop Art, she classified British Pop Art into three periods of which the third period emerged after the 'Young Contemporaries Exhibition' in 1962, which included the new and powerful artistic group from the Royal College of Art.[34] Although these British Pop artists at the Royal College were regarded as Pop artists, it is apparent that they were not employing as many popular images as the Americans did in their paintings; they would be rather called modern figurative painters.[35] Instead of depending on the commodity culture, they were

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[34] Lucy R. Lippard, *Pop Art* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 57.

[35] In 1976, at the height of Minimal art and Conceptual art, Kitaj organized at the Hayward Gallery in London an exhibition titled *The Human Clay.* It exclusively consisted of figurative drawing and painting and proved highly controversial. In his catalogue text, Kitaj used the term School of London loosely to describe the artists he had brought together. The chief artists associated with this were Michael Andrews, Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, and Leon Kossoff. The work of these artists was brought into fresh focus and given renewed impetus by the revival of interest in

more deeply engaged in the intrinsic nature of sign system as a cultural language itself, rather than focusing on specific commodity items, figures, or the events of a specific time. For instance, for Hockney, signs could extend to include even nature, which is as universal as popular culture. He was fascinated by something one cannot quite describe and, therefore, by something transparent like water and glass – this is also why he was interested in depicting water 'in motion.' Since Hockney was not interested in fixed meaning, like Alloway and other Pop artists, he seems to have tried to simplify and abstract those common signs to the level where they have some fluent meaning, which cannot be defined and/or limited.

The artist himself said that "in all those paintings of swimming pools the water is done in quite different ways. Sometimes I did it very formally, other times it's done more naturalistically… in the way the light would dance on the water. And really the paintings about water are about movement."[36] In addition, and more importantly, he stressed that "the look of swimming-pool water is controllable – even its color can be man-made – and its dancing rhythms reflect not only the sky but, because of its transparency, the depth of the water as well," which is why he represented this rather than a river or the sea.[37] Therefore, the notion that the look of swimming-pool water could be anything, being transparent, controllable and man-made, coincides exactly with Alloway's basic ideas of the communications network and its Americanness. For American Pop artists, however, the notion of the controllable and man-made was usually applied to commodities or

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figurative painting by a younger generation that took place in the late 1970s and the 1980s.

[36] Nikos Stangos, *Pictures by David Hockney* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1979), 48.

[37] Ibid.

celebrities they shared – armed with its "translatability." On the other hand, Hockney's interests do not lie in the illustration of an object in a natural condition but in the description of "movable signs" and in the manipulation of them, and, as indicated by the 'look of things,' it emphasizes the artists' experiences in life rather than transcribing nature as is. Correspondingly, the aspect of *experience* that Alloway expounded is essential in Hockney's water paintings as well as in other Pop artists' work.

Many artists, including Hockney, tended to return again and again to the same models, indicating they tried to act as participants in a communications network by connecting themselves directly to what they saw and experienced in that network, thus eliminating conventional devices in art. Livingstone has noticed: "Hockney had observed that vision is like hearing, it is selective, you decide what's important, which means that other factors are determining what you see as well."[38] From this, it can be assumed that the Pop artists firmly put themselves in the center of world as subjects who make choices among flowing signs, thus acknowledging that they were a part of the world continuum. Hockney's use of photographs can also be understood through the notion of "selectivity of vision." For Hockney to study the infinite variety of appearance, photographs were his tool and his visual diaries, as drawing was in his earlier life. Moreover, such methods become the way the painter reconstructs "the reality," and at the same time constructs "deceptive impersonality" (in Alloway's words). That is, while the artist prefers his total control over the selection and placement of the images, the photograph may well have spurred him to a more neutral or depersonalized application of paint.[39] This explains why

[38] Marco Livingstone, *David Hockney* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), 53.

[39] Ibid., 73.

Alloway defined some aspects of Pop Art as "process abbreviation," the "reduced personal nuances of handling," and "deadpan or passive images." However, what is crucial is that this impersonality is 'deceptive.' Alloway has pointed out such devices as process abbreviation and a "game with anonymity" made the work of art free to support its interconnections with popular culture and with the shared world of the spectator, with photographs to be employed as "the skin of reality."[40] The fact that these photographs have a materiality of their own, which is generated mechanically but which we still read as the skin of reality, lets us focus on Pop artists' use of them in order to create multi-leveled signs. In this way, photographs themselves unveil such ambivalent meanings, which are imparted to the paintings by the entire society.

In brief, there is no such thing as a complete anonymity of an artist even when he exists within a communications network, but only a "game with anonymity" or a "deceptive impersonality" played by the artist could exist; that is, Pop artists keep both their originality and translatability at the same time. From this perspective, Kitaj might be regarded as a Pop artist as well. Although Kitaj's work apparently seems to exist on some different level, with all the literary sources and unfamiliar ways of using signs and conveying meanings in his painting, it could still be said that Kitaj shares the main principles of Pop Art established by Alloway.

Kitaj also seems to have had the idea of a communications network and followed the Pop artist's practice of constructing sign systems in order to make his work exist as a partial being within a society based on common knowledge; however, the difference is that he fabricated the signs to be applied to more extensive themes to the extent that those

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[40] Alloway, *American Pop Art*, 18.

connote the whole human history. Here, 'thematic' issues are even more significant than objects as signs for Kitaj. He pursued to construct a communications network which is based more on historical continuum or traditions for its source, instead of relying on current ideas formed by the newly-developed mass communications system. As a result, for Kitaj, books were another, more essential medium, which helped him broaden his painterly themes and find proper signs for this end; he was a well-known bookworm.

Similarly, his signs are collective as they are stacked over time. For instance, in Kitaj's early 'historical' works, such as *Kennst du das Land?* (1962),[41] all content appears to be mediated through pre-existing representations; therefore, "everything is in some way second hand."[42] This painting, which bears a formal resemblance to Jasper Johns's painting *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955),[43] depicts a winter battle scene from the Spanish Civil War and a star-like badge, possibly a US marshal's badge, against a white abstract background. In this way, Kitaj exhibits a form of memory connected with the representation of already existing images and ideas, and even refers to the uneasy relationship between modernist abstraction and narrative elements. When he was asked about his obsession with Cézanne in an interview for the exhibition *Kitaj in the Aura of Cézanne and Other Masters* in London in 2001, Kitaj mentioned that "A real artist has to be of his own time and so on. But I am in my own time, one hundred years later (after

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[41] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 114.

[42] Simon Faulkner, "The history behind the surface: R.B. Kitaj and the Spanish Civil War," in *Critical Kitaj*, 115.

[43] Kitaj's emphasis on working flatness as a sign of modernist abstraction in relation to figurative motifs found its precedent in the flag, target and number paintings which Jasper Johns produced in the mid-1950. This precedent became known to the students at the Royal College in autumn 1961 when another American painter Larry Rivers had visited there.

Cézanne), and I like the tension of those hundred years. And the tension of Giotto-Duchamp for that matter."[44] This exactly reveals his main focus – the tensions over different periods of history. While other – mostly American – Pop artists immerged in communication networks, using specific events, items, or figures conveying some kind of sensation shared by contemporaries, Kitaj has not only expanded the range of time to include the Spanish Civil War and Cézanne to the early twentieth-century, but also made his signs more transcendental, abstract, and, therefore, more flexible than those reified signs of his counterparts. Such contrast is better disclosed when Richard Wollheim explained there was a difference in the way Hockney and Kitaj defined modernity itself: Hockney defined it as 'the contemporary' while Kitaj defined it as 'the legendary metropolis'.[45]

Kitaj's focus is also on the artist's experiences of a communication network in his own life rather than transcribing the nature as it is or following some preexisting styles, which could again be connected to Alloway's anthropological viewpoint of art. In this pursuit, he was in close proximity to Hockney in that Hockney's main concern was to relate to us his own experience of what he had seen as an artist by constructing his own sign system and perceptual reality. It is better shown when Kitaj stated, in the catalogue of his exhibition *The Human Clay*, that "If some of us wish to practice art for art's sake alone, so be it … but good pictures, great pictures, will be made to which many modest

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[44] Anthony Rudolf and Colin Wiggins, *Kitaj in the Aura of Cézanne and Other Masters* (London: National Gallery Company, 2001), 35.

[45] Linda Nochlin, "Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation," *Poetics Today* 17:3 (Autumn, 1996), 324.

lives can respond."[46] This attitude of the artist has not only made him delve into the literary materials but also guided him to extend the subjects of his paintings to include his own memorable personal knowledge, which mainly focus on his experiences as a Jew in London. Such initial and consistent ideas are also exhibited in what he mentioned in the prologue of his book *First Diasporist Manifesto*: "Painting is not my life. My life is my life. Painting is a great idea I carry from place to place. It is an idea full of ideas, like a refugee's suitcase, a portable Ark of the Covenant. Before I run for my train, spilling a few of these painting ideas, I just want to stand still on the platform and announce some of my credentials (more later): I am a dislocated pretender. I play at being a refugee, at studying, at painting. All this is pretence in the sense Picasso meant when he said: 'The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.' "[47] As revealed in this comment, modern painting for him was only a part of 'real' life and a collection of ideas emitted from it. Kitaj must have acknowledged the popularity of modern Abstract art which was staged predominantly in New York at that time.[48] However, he cherished the idea of the artist sharing those ideas with "many modest lives" instead of practicing art for art's sake and, in this sense, he was posing a completely different attitude towards painting, or extensively art, from those of the mainstream of Modernism. They were rather closer to what Alloway and Pop artists have endorsed. Jewishness was something applied only to his own unique situation, and he seems to have realized that his art on Jewishness was more truthful and, thus, more

[46] Frederic Tuten, "Neither Fool, Nor Naïve, Nor Poseur-Saint: Fragments on R.B. Kitaj," *Artforum* 20:5 (1982), 61.

[47] Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto*, 11.

[48] Kitaj studied at the Cooper Union before moving to England.

modern on his part.

Accordingly, just as Kitaj could embrace the historical events of the Spanish Civil War in his painting, he could also employ the issue of Jewishness equally as the form of memory. In *The Jewish Rider* (1984-5) he portrayed his friend Michael Podro, the English art historian, who is shown on what is probably a personal pilgrimage on a train. Past and present are brought together: Kitaj's immediate art historical source of inspiration for this was Rembrandt's *The Polish Rider* (1655). The well-dressed passenger seems lost in thought. His relaxed pose is in sharp contrast to the steeply rising red corridor with a uniformed guard, whip in hand. Furthermore, the direction of the angle of the whip the guard wields intentionally parallels that of the smoke emanating from the chimney outside, which, in turn, blows in the direction of a tiny cross perched on a cliff.[49] Likewise, Kitaj has created complicated implications, and thus 'tensions,' constructed among the signs from all kinds of sources. Podro, in this painting, embodies the medieval legend of the Wandering Jew on an allegorical level with his own history. Through such signs (or allegories) Kitaj emphasizes the connections between the past and the present, between Rembrandt and himself, between the Wandering Jew and Podro, allowing those allegories their own lives and no fixed meanings are nailed down in a certain moment; such a manner is rare in Pop Art, which focuses only on the present. Although Warhol's signs are multi-leveled as well, what is unusual in Kitaj's work is that he was not only interested in representing the "continuity of culture" of the time, which Alloway explained at length, but was also greatly attracted by the notion of the "continuity of

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[49] Carol Salus, "R.B. Kitaj: The Tate Fiasco and Some Key History Paintings," *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 25:2 (2007), 73.

history." Considering all these pursuits of Kitaj, Jewishness must have been the most suitable subject for him to speak up in his work in favor of his own experiences of the communications network and the continuity of history.

For this reason, he not only engaged real people like Podro in his painting but, in some other works, such as *The Jewish School (Drawing a Golem)* (1980),[50] Kitaj even invented characters as though in a novel. He once mentioned that "I've always envied novelists who can create characters who may never have existed and I think it was in that spirit that I would extract these little people (from Cézanne's paintings). Like a novelist, Cézanne would re-introduce certain characters, often his bald self, in subsequent pictures."[51] For such tendencies towards narratives, Kitaj has been referred to by the noted art critic of *Time*, Robert Hughes, as "the best history painter of our times."[52] Similarly, the fact that the artist's work incorporates both the figures as allegories and those as narrative elements often confuse and baffle the viewer.

Nonetheless, it can be concluded that Kitaj conformed to the anthropological characteristics of Pop Art and Americanness when it came to the way he viewed the world as a continuum, as the Pop artists did. From this perspective, Kitaj never departed from the basic principles of Pop Art. Kitaj's work is also about "the democratization of history, which leads to an increase of complexity in the material to be studied, making it bulge inconveniently beyond the traditional limits of inquiry," to repeat Alloway's

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[50] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj,* 35.

[51] Rudolf and Wiggins, *The Aura of Cézanne*, 11.

[52] Robert Hughes, "Singular and Grand Britons," *Time* 6 (April 1987), 83.

words,[53] and, therefore, about the democratization of art which causes unprecedented meanings in art.

It is not only in such thematic issues but also in the use of new techniques such as collage or montage that Kitaj displays his advocacy of such basic principles of Pop Art: however, there is divergence from the other Pop artists' practice. While Hockney viewed the photographs as the skin of reality and used them only as a means of studying for the neutral characteristics of the world, some other artists, such as Rauschenberg and Kitaj, have further emphasized a Duchampian sense in their work by applying found materials or images directly on the picture planes. Such aspects did not attract Hockney or anyone else at the Royal College, but Kitaj has proved his affiliation with the American art tradition to some extent when he employed both found images and found texts – as notes to his paintings. Furthermore, The artist has even chosen the paint medium in order to make the forms used in the same way as the material collages, distancing the medium from traditional usage, but at the same time emphasizing its greater ease to accommodate narrative aspects in painting. For example, in *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* (1960),[54] Kitaj has put collages of photographs and movies, juxtaposed with a written account of Luxemburg's murder, onto the canvas. Besides these collages, even clear-cut forms he painted reveal the artist's deep involvement with the American tradition. The painting does carry some sort of historical narratives, but not in a linear or rational way.[55]

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[53] Alloway, *American Pop Art*, 5.

[54] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj,* 92.

[55] When he describes Rosa Luxemburg, a political theorist, and Isaac Babel, a writer of the Soviet Union, Kitaj recalls the memories of the 'premature anti-fascism' of those Americans who fought in Spain. However that was not the exclusive end, yet he borrowed these characters from the past only to "place them in antagonistic relationship to the icons of Western commercial popular culture." See James Aulich,

The artist's fondness for the paint medium can be further explained by what he mentioned in the interview with Wiggins. When he was asked regarding the unusual formal characteristics of *Los Angeles No. 4* (2000-1), he answered saying that "Sandra and I are montaged together … not at all easy, you're right. But that's one of the strange things the art of painting can try to do. I have no idea what resolve would look like. There are beautiful examples in Cézanne where bathers merge so that you can't tell which body parts belong to which bathers. His unresolve seems both daring and lifelike to me."[56] Similarly, the 'unresolve' seems to have been his resolution to represent the issues of tensions and historicity most effectively, and paint was the best medium Kitaj could use for such a purpose. Moreover, here lies the very connection between his use of paint for the montage-like forms and the artist's interest in 'lifelikeness' in art. Regarding this point, Kitaj has further cited that "Composition has a classroom sound. Life is not composed. I am certainly not composed. Decomposition sounds OK! You're right to assume that what you call decomposition in Cézanne attracts me above the elegance of Degas … My pictures and I know little of harmony."[57] In short, art and life share such characteristics as decomposition and discord for him and this is where the "artistic license" he emphasized[58] is allowed to come in.

Armed with his uniqueness and originality in artistic practice, Kitaj had great influence on the artists of the Royal College. In fact, during this period when the

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"Introduction," in *Critical Kitaj*, 21.

[56] Rudolf and Wiggins, *The Aura of Cézanne*, 27.

[57] Ibid., 30.

[58] Ibid., 31.

Americans saw the modern renaissance in art as well as material prosperity, an English yearning for their own "American prosperity" had pervaded in London. Keeping their distance from the advent of the dazzling modern developments on the other continent, such desire must have affected the British Pop artists' high opinion of Kitaj's art by and large, especially regarding his use of fragmented forms. Among notable tributes from his adopted country has been Kitaj's election in 1985 to the Royal Academy of Arts – the only American since Benjamin West in the eighteenth century and John Singer Sargent in the nineteenth century to achieve this recognition. He is, in fact, among only nine Americans to ever have been elected to the Royal Academy of Arts.[59]

In like manner, it seems that only the ostensible facets of Kitaj's painting – that is, the abstract graphic qualities – became influential to the other British Pop artists. However, the essence of his work lies not in those formal aspects but on the subject matter as related to historicity and the artist's appreciation of it. I believe the ensuing discussion on allegory will help us to gain a deep intuitive understanding of the fragmented forms and the consequential slippages in the meaning examined thus far, and to overcome the dichotomies between Pop Art and Jewish art, abstraction and figuration, and forms and subject matters.

[59] Kitaj was also one of the American ex-soldiers at the drawing school John Ruskin founded at Oxford University on the GI Bill of Rights.

2. The Artist's Own Remarks on Art and Benjamin

Kitaj's view towards the Jewish identity was not ethnocentric but comprehensive enough to include every man and every situation that faces "uneasiness," as he clarified that "Diasporist painting, like the Diasporist, is a universal conundrum, a most ancient mystery presence, a secreted reflection upon one's uneasy world."[60] It is in this same vein when he mentioned "Anyone who reads fairly widely comes across the phrase 'the Jewish Question' over and over again. It occurs in many histories, among thinkers, in novels, in anti-Semitic writing, among the Zionist founding fathers and their opponents (Jewish and not), everywhere in my own experience. Sometimes it's called a 'problem.' Diasporist painting takes up this question or problem. Diasporist painting is problematic. Its very paint stirs up these questions and problems from a new painterly vantage, where each stroke is a benerved Diasporist signature."[61] According to Kitaj, it is not just the painting but also each stroke that functions differently bearing its own purpose in art and raising 'issue.' I assume this very intuition authorized him to be undecided between the abstract and the figurative. Also, he implies when he says, "I believe Cézanne, Cubism, Picassoism, Abstractionism and Diasporism share aspects of indeterminacy,"[62] Diasporist painting for him was about ambiguity and indeterminacy, and correspondingly all those paintings which were defined by its own unique style before have common characteristics

[60] Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto*, 75.

[61] Ibid., 67.

[62] Ibid., 63.

now supporting the same goal.

Among these basic attributes of diasporist paintings comes the artist's pessimistic view point. In *First Diasporist Manifesto*, he also proclaimed that "Forever and a day, and long after Adorno (1903-69), people will argue about whether or not 'art' can or should touch upon the Shoah. The fact is that no one can touch anything but its shadow, which lies across the paths of some of us, however indistinct. Like most people, I only know the shadow, its aspect in my life."[63] All these ideas formed around restlessness, ambiguity, and melancholy, which I regard to be best described in his painting *Arcades (after Walter Benjamin)* dominated by the phantasmagorias, and which reminds us of what Walter Benjamin expounded regarding allegory.

In fact, it is not only from what I have quoted but virtually from everywhere in his book and his statements that one can detect the alliance between his 'manifesto' on art and Benjamin's theories, and from time to time, even the artist himself mentioned his akin relationship to Benjamin, who was also a Jew. For example, he said "Almost thirty years ago, under the spell of Diasporists like Aby Warburg, Fritz Saxl, Edgar Wind and the Surrealists, I made a little painting called *His Cult of the Fragment*. I was a fragmented cultist ten years before I discovered Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), the exemplary and perhaps ultimate Diasporist and *his* cult of the fragment… Things sure do Only Connect."[64] Stating this, Kitaj did not mean the writer had swayed him; rather, Benjamin was the major example of what he had cultivated himself. There are many other comparable figures. He asserts: "Diasporist history has its ups and downs. I suspect

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[63] Ibid., 55.

[64] Ibid., 59.

a *depressive* connection which formulates its own aesthetic. Typical figures here would be Primo Levi, Soutine, Kafka, Celan, Bomberg, Benjamin, Jean Améry, Rothko, painters X, Y and Z…. Diasporists who are not Jews will speak for themselves."[65] He also stated in an interview: "I want to begin all over again and recollect in some untranquility; a recollection in art,"[66] showing that Kitaj has consistently kept his preoccupation with fragmentation and juxtaposition. Thus, for him, those figures might have delivered the same value as fragments themselves.

However, it seems logical to say that Benjamin's theories – especially the theory of allegory – have sharpened his fragmented perception of reality, which was in turn sharpened and shaped by Baudelaire and Proust. In fact, Kitaj seems to have studied Benjamin's theory in depth and the text given as a background reading for *The Autumn of Central Paris (After Walter Benjamin)* best describes this great preoccupation. It was usual practice for Kitaj to provide footnotes placed next to paintings in an exhibition. However, they were never to help the viewer better understand the literary aspects of the paintings, but were rather presented as a visual version of the painterly fragments, only to baffle the viewer to a greater extent. To this momentous painting, he added several unrelated comments including "He (Benjamin) used strange and difficult methods of bringing together images from texts and from the world, not uninfluenced by surrealism (his disciple Adorno calls them CITATIONS)", "The COLLAGE implication in Benjamin's treatment of THE BARRICADE is a paramount source for this composition", and "Benjamin thought that the artist is compelled to assume roles that look subversive

[65] Ibid., 73.

[66] Tuten, "Neither Fool, Nor Naïve," 69.

but are, in fact, harmless."[67] Although fragmented, these texts display the artist's diverse means of approach to Benjamin. In short, Kitaj shows that his own interests both in surrealism and Benjamin are from the same root; by using the word 'barricade' he suggests the pivotal method Benjamin had used, and exhibits how he interpreted the same method in a pictorial space through the pile-up of figures. Additionally, borrowing Benjamin's words about the role of an artist, Kitaj proclaims his own mission as an artist – being subversive and harmless at the same time. While delving into Benjamin's essays, the artist seems to have been able to successfully intensify the connection between the concrete artistic language and the philosophical thoughts around it in his later Jewish paintings.

[67] Podro, "Some Notes on Ron Kitaj," 19.

3. Fragmented Paintings and Montaged Citations

While this paper focuses on Kitaj's later paintings and on his Jewishness identity, bearing Kitaj's ambiguous status within an art historical context, and considering his relevance to Benjamin and his theories, it seems necessary to consider his earlier paintings in order to examine his exploration of the print medium in the initial stage in relation to his achievements in painting. For more than ten years during the 1960's and 1970's, Kitaj produced a large number of screenprints, which generally took the form of collage compositions. His major excursion into high-tech printmaking began with his introduction in 1963 to the printer Chris Prater, at London's Kelpra Studio.[68] For instance, his print series called *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*, consisting of 15 screenprints, is one of several print series, which he had produced in cooperation with Prater. Kitaj's selection of the theme – the composer Gustav Mahler, a symbol for him of Vienna and the culture and tradition the artist had so enthusiastically embraced – reveals him to be "both an innovator and someone prepared to explore beyond the boundaries of what might have been considered possible subject-matter for art."[69]

A number of new possibilities shown in this print series remained the main project throughout his entire work and kept expanding to imply the relationship between

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[68] Prater started his screenprinting business in 1957 producing good quality screenprinted posters and advertising material for commercial companies, but then Prater's undoubted talent in screenprinting saw him move into the realm of artists' prints in 1960. See Jane Kinsman, *The Prints of R.B. Kitaj*, (Scolar Press, 1994), 14.

[69] Ibid., 26.

images and words. *Go and Get Killed Comrade – We Need a Byron in the Movement* (1966), one of the prints of the *Mahler* suite, for example, made reference to the White Rose movement, with the intention of 'honoring the memory of Hans and Sophie Scholl among others; to be made to act in the Mahler sequence,' as indicated in a note in his 1965 New York catalogue.[70] The Scholls were Catholic students who had been youthful heroes in the anti-Nazi resistance movement known as the White Rose. Captured, the Scholls appear in a newspaper photograph in the company of guards before their execution. Kitaj added a second photograph as a poignant footnote to this episode. This identical image has been cropped by the editor, leaving only Sophie Scholl and the guard who has been mistakenly identified as her husband, and given the caption 'Hans and Sophie Scholl. Curiously Unappreciated': words truer than the newspaper intended.[71] Such twist of words is also shown in the print's title, which implies another martyrdom, derived from the quip made by the leader of the British Communist Party during the Spanish Civil War.[72]

Accordingly, it seems unmistakable that this individual print does not have any specific issue or is representing an event. These prints also accompany 'afterwords' to those images attached years later by the artist.[73] Such texts occasionally provide related

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[70] Pat Gilmour, "R.B. Kitaj and Chris Prater of Kelpra Studio," in *Critical Kitaj,* 220.

[71] Kinsman, *The Prints of R.B. Kitaj*, 32.

[72] Ibid.

[73] "This collage print is 'about' Sophie and her brother Hans Scholl and their White Rose group. They were beheaded (she was 22) in 1943 a few hours after Judge Freisler condemned them for resistance within Germany. The German Widerstand must have been extraordinary … a fascinating slip of a thing there at the black heart of darkness, easy to snuff out, to behead. Maybe Sophie Scholl in her university classroom was even lonelier than a Jew about to die among her own … Or is that too poetical? I wish this sheet could have been more of a poem (even though I am rather fond of it). 25 years after this print, I got an amazing letter from a German who tells me that the sister of Sophie Scholl just visited his house to meet Freya von

information to the image so that the viewer can better understand; yet at times is puzzling with clueless explanations. All these facts suggest Kitaj was not interested in the new medium itself, but rather in the possibilities it gives and in the extensive cultural and literary traditions beyond it. In this vein, the print medium seems to have been practiced by him in search for new potentiality in painting.

Indeed, a new grandeur of conception, boldness of idiom and clarity of image characterize the paintings Kitaj began to produce in 1964. The sense of painted collage and of intentionally jarring juxtapositions of image and style remain a vital ingredient of paintings such as *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* (1960) and *Kennst Du das Land?* (1962), both of earlier years, and such as *Eirie Shore*[74] and *Walter Lippmann*,[75] both of 1966. However the latter two images are now phrased in a much harder language and pieced together with a graphic precision as part of an overall surface design.[76] The figures that in Kitaj's previous paintings had tended to be mere ciphers take on a more convincing corporeal reality, still expressed in largely graphic terms, allowing Kitaj to effect distortions of human anatomy as expressive in their own way as in *Where the Railroad Leaves the Sea* (1964).[77] Such new qualities in painting still endure in his later

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Moltke, the widow of the leader of the Kreisau resistance group (also murdered). The title is taken from something a Communist is supposed to have said to Stephen Spender – 'We need a Byron in the movement'. Stephen is 85 as I write and when I phoned him this morning he said yes, that was the idea – that he should go fight in Spain, but maybe not those exact words." See Ibid., 33.

[74] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 39.

[75] See Ibid., 189.

[76] Marco Livingstone, *R.B. Kitaj* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 20.

[77] Ibid. For the image, see Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 39.

paintings on Jewishness, as seen in *Cecil Court, London WC2 (The Refugees)* (1983-4),[78] and prove that, considering his constant indulgence in thematic issues in general, technology and form were not his main focus in art. That is, the artist explored print not for its own end but within a broader context, and such an aspect clearly differentiates Kitaj's graphic art from American Pop Art with which his print is often identified.[79] Kitaj once stated that "technology is too industrial for my taste and inadequate to my romantic project and pessimistic frame of mind,"[80] and this reveals that both mediums were used interdependently, so as to find some new way Kitaj could solve the problems he had while experimenting with literary sources in his painting. Additionally, unremitting experiments were made possible by what Kitaj referred to as "artistic license." In an interview he stated, "… this is where artistic license comes in. The license my century awarded me to do anything I like, which might have disgusted a few of the ladies and gents on the list at the left (some of whom I adore)."[81] Likewise, Kitaj seems to have clearly acknowledged practical benefits acquired from the new techniques of the modern era, and for him, these techniques were not overwhelming but devices accommodating an artist's taste.

Kitaj's indulgence and experimentation of this new medium does not appear

[78] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 156.

[79] Kitaj has explained his equivocal attitude to printmaking as a hatred of technology in a conversation with Gilmour. See Pat Gilmour, p. 87. Even though he experimented with this print medium due to its rapidity and easiness at hand when compared with his working in painting, he realized that the process had become too free and too flexible, and therefore such randomness was quite at odds with his character, which eventually resulted in his rejection of his past screenprints. The artist described himself as the least spontaneous of persons. See Kinsman, *The Prints of R.B. Kitaj*, 34.

[80] Morphet, *R.B. Kitaj*, 48.

[81] Rudolf and Wiggins, *The Aura of Cézanne*, 31.

irrelevant to his primary absorption in the literary tradition and his persistent investigation of it in art. Such inclination was to the extent that Brian Sewell, in the context of one of the more dismissive reviews of Kitaj's 1994 exhibition, has commented that "Kitaj is 'imprisoned by his library'," as the artist's over-literariness was seen as a flaw by English art critics.[82] While studying under the teachings of Edgar Wind at the Ruskin school of Oxford, Kitaj came to agree with Wind's thoughts, especially when he advocated that a fictional method should be used in order to impose seriousness into art; this connected with Kitaj's method of employing numerous fragments. Up to the mid 1960's, Kitaj steadily developed his interest in modern American poems through routes other than Wind, an example being the post-Poundian aesthetics formed around the Black Mountain College.[83] As a group of poets, they were interested in compositions such as that of Rauschenberg's 'bulletin board', and similarly regarded paper as an area for poetic energy and letters as image and hieroglyphs.[84] In turn, as Kitaj showed steady interest in American poems, he was better acquainted with poets who went to England from the United States 50 years earlier, such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, thinking he could do the same with paintings. The self-conscious engagement with literature brings to mind the tradition of *ut picture poesis*, and at the same time Duchamp's declared need to put painting once again in the service of the mind.[85] But, the primary reason he praised the

[82] Janet Wolff, "The Impolite Boarder," 34.

[83] This was a poet group formed in the 1950s with Charles Olson in the center, and poets such as Jonathan Williams and Robert Creeley who were also friends with Kitaj.

[84] James Aulich, "Introduction," 7-8.

[85] Jim Aulich, "The Difficulty of Living in an Age of Cultural Decline and Spiritual Corruption: R.B. Kitaj 1965-1970," *Oxford Art Journal* 10: 2 (1987), 49; Kitaj also said that "Some books have pictures and some pictures have books." See Ashbery, *Kitaj*, 133.

work of poets is the simple and intensive way poems contain the whole universe. For this purpose, Eliot and Pound used fragmentation to write poems, which is a characteristic they share with Kitaj, and the way Eliot put the past and present in continuum also became a model for Kitaj's paintings.[86]

To be more specific, many scholars agree that there is a relationship between Kitaj's *If Not, Not* (1975-6)[87] and Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. With a Breugel-like panoramic composition, this painting shows the death-gate of the Birkenau-Auschwitz Camp towering over a hellish swamp in which float fragmentary people, animals and objects. Though it can be said the atmosphere of this painting itself is similar to that of Eliot's poem, what particularly attracted Kitaj's interest was how Eliot brought out extended meanings by adding notes to his poems. As Eliot said 'the poem which is absolutely original is absolutely bad,'[88] it is probable that poems like these had a great influence on Kitaj's working style. As noted by Robert Creeley, a further aesthetic device in this painting is the 'peculiar tumult of dreams,' and 'the feeling of things' coordinated and led by color, which lends objects an expressive character in contrast to the physical order.[89] What appears as 'discontinuity' and what exists as 'soft tumult' is nothing other than the intermediary realm, which crystallizes out of the overlapping fragments unified by a pictorial aesthetic, whose original trace is lost in the abundance of references.[90] Here

[86] Morphet, *R.B. Kitaj*, 13.

[87] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 29.

[88] James Aulich, "Introduction," 7.

[89] Robert Creeley, "Ecce Homo," in *R.B. Kitaj: Pictures/Bilder* (Zürich: Marlborough, 1977), 7.

[90] Martin Roman Deppner, "The Trace of the Other in the Work of R.B. Kitaj," in *Critical Kitaj*, 185.

in the "abundance of references" exists the very connection between his use of fragments established through the print medium and his broader interest in literary sources. In similar fashion, Kitaj's intentions become clearer when studying his work in the context of a 'totality' that bridges the past and the present and with the use of materials from various sources, as not only Kitaj but also Eliot and Pound have pursued in their works, rather than looking for the meaning in a narrower context.

Likewise, Kitaj has decided to give a new identity to his paintings by removing the image from its original context, bringing to mind two of the artist's constant practices over the years: that of recycling images from one picture to another, and that of reproducing in his catalogues details from the pictures in such a way as to suggest that, removed from their customary context, they have the potential of another life.[91] In addition to the fact that such methods of recycling and reproducing could be easily achieved through the print medium as discussed above, it was through Surrealism that Kitaj has brought all those materials together on a plane. For example, *Go and Get Killed Comrade – We Need a Byron in the Movement*, as in so many other Kitaj's collage prints and paintings, mixes the tragic with the comic. A male protagonist is without a human head, in the manner of Max Ernst. In fact, Kitaj clearly admits that he was influenced by Surrealism by declaring that in his view 'Warburg was like a Surrealist: he tried to bring odd things together like Breton did: "Magic and logic flowering on the same tree". Somehow the two strains came together'.[92]

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[91] Livingstone, *R.B. Kitaj*, 21.

[92] Marco Livingstone, "Iconology as Theme in the Early Work of R.B. Kitaj," *The Burlington Magazine* 122:928 (Jul., 1980), 488.

Accordingly, Ernst's *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934)[93] had a great significance for Kitaj's work.[94] However, while Ernst's hero might have the head of a rooster or a wild beast, Kitaj's replacement is a steam-powered train, a symbol of the Russian Revolution.[95] This running male figure with arm raised has been appropriated from one of his earlier paintings, *Tedeum* (1963), which was in turn derived from a photo of a performance of Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit* (1946).[96] This mixture of sources becomes possible only with his notion that the fragments function, again, like the words in poems; even in the case that we are uncertain about these sources, it still reminds us of the Scholls' fate symbolized through their heads obliterated by a train. Based on such facts, the implication for our hero here becomes ambiguous, as it could merge either with the martyred students or with Ernst's figure, and this, in turn, evokes an even greater effect on the viewer in the same way as the Surrealist strategies of Breton operated. Basically, all of these are directly related to the 'free-associational' technique, which was employed for Surrealist purposes, and it leaves room for Kitaj to relate them to any social, political, or other contemporary issues, which were not Ernst's own intention, but Kitaj's goals.

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[93] *Une Semaine de Bonté* (A Week of Kindness) is a graphic novel and artist's book composed in collage by Max Ernst, made during a three week visit in Italy around the time of Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany. The novel was first published in Paris in 1934, as a series of five pamphlets of 816 copies each.

[94] Kitaj owned this collage novel, which he bought for ₤2.10s while he was at the Royal College. See Livingstone, *R.B. Kitaj*, 172.

[95] From one such train Trotsky ran his military campaign. See Jane Kinsman, p. 32.

[96] Gilmour, "Kelpra Studio," 220.

4. The Tradition of Allegory and Art

Fragments as form in Kitaj's later painting are not as distinct as in his earlier work. The figures now stand in a more rational and integrated space than before. (See *The Jew etc.* (1976) and *The Jewish Rider* (1984-5).) However, I assume that Kitaj's notion of 'fragments' are not limited only to form as an artistic expressive tool, but rather it is much more about the fragments as facts existing within a society which art can contain or convey, and therefore about the notion of historicity. This does not mean that his exploration of fragmented forms in painting by using print medium has been abandoned in later work; rather, passing through those experimental periods, his focus seems to have grown comprehensive and profound and to include a broader notion of fragments on contemporary issues. Accordingly, it seems that to discuss the idea of allegory at this point is appropriate and could provide further interpretations for Kitaj's paintings.

Regarding this, Adorno, who is indebted to Benjamin on the subject of the fragment, has provided great possibilities for the use of the fragment as he had accepted it as a 'form of philosophy' through his understanding of the essay. His notion, as such, is based on the Romantic formation of fragment, which is, according to him, "a construction that is not complete but rather progresses onward into the infinite through self-reflection"[97] He has put the emphasis on the "essential incompleteness of the fragment" and insisted on this incompleteness as the essential condition for the presentation of the

[97] Theodor Adorno, "The Essay as Form," Trans. S.W. Nicholson, in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 24.

absolute. In other words, each fragment presents the absolute, but incompletely. Fragments are therefore not just parts as exclusive particles, but they require further supplementation through further fragments.[98] This permits the combination of fragments, each relating to every other, and therefore is an infinite process of reflection. To quote what Adorno explained regarding the essay, "The essay has to cause the totality to be illuminated in a partial feature, whether the feature be chosen or merely happened upon, without asserting the presence of the totality. It corrects what is contingent and isolated in its insights in that they multiply, confirm, and disqualify themselves, whether in the further course of the essay itself or in the mosaic-like relationship to other essay."[99] Correspondingly, the essential incompleteness of fragments departs from the dogmatic form of the system as a hierarchical structure, breaking radically with Kant's dogmatism and Descartes's axiomatization.[100]

Adorno's suggestion of the collaboration of fragments and its urging reflection on them for the absolute makes more radical sense when it comes to the fragments as images. It was Craig Owens who further argued those allegorical aspects, especially with regard to contemporary art, based on broader philosophical explanations. Many of them have been discussed in his article, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism." According to Owens, allegory first emerged in response to a sense of estrangement from tradition; throughout its history it has functioned in the gap between a present and a past, which without allegorical reinterpretation, might have remained

[98] Stewart Martin, "Adorno's Conception of the Form of Philosophy," *Diacritics* 36:1 (Spring 2006), 57.

[99] Adorno, "Essay," 16-17, 24-25.

[100] Martin, "Adorno's Conception," 58.

foreclosed. A conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present – these are its two most fundamental impulses.[101] An unmistakably allegorical impulse has begun to reassert itself in various aspects of contemporary culture: in the Benjamin revival, for example, or in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, and Owens describes Walter Benjamin as the only twentieth-century critic to treat the subject without prejudice, philosophically.[102]

Among what he has elaborated on as a theory in his two long essays on allegory, some of the crucial characteristics include that "allegory is an attitude as well as a technique, a perception as well as a procedure" and "allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another; the Old Testament, for example, becomes allegorical when it is read as a prefiguration of the New." This provisional description –which is not a definition – accounts for both allegory's origin in commentary and exegesis, as well as its continued affinity with them.[103] It is well described in many of Kitaj's works, especially when they were exhibited or published in a catalogue with footnotes. These footnotes are usually not only irrelevant to the paintings in content – they work as fragments on the same level as those in the paintings do – but also unfixed as they have changed from exhibition to exhibition and from catalogue to catalogue. By adding these subsequent footnotes, the artist has presented the possibilities of having endless new senses even after the *creation* of a work, as if the work has its own ongoing history. Apparently, in a similar fashion, Kitaj seems to have worked based on the notion of 'allegorical reflection' allowing the

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[101] Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulses: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980), 68.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 68-69.

texts to be read in consideration of either the painting that they were attached to or other texts. That is to say, either the image or the words can convey some significance only when they are juxtaposed and overlapped with one and other. Consequently, like the characteristics of allegory itself, the meaning of the painting can never be determined, but is only 'provisional.'

Owens has strengthened this point further by stating that "Conceived as something added or superadded to the work after the fact, allegory will consequently be detachable from it" and due to this essential supplementary characteristic of allegory, in contrast to the association of the symbol with aesthetic intuition, "allegory is extravagant, an expenditure of surplus value; it is always *in excess*."[104] Owens makes a distinction between an allegory and a symbol, which he ascribes to Heidegger,[105] by saying that "if the symbol is a motivated sign, then allegory, conceived as its antithesis, will be identified as the domain of the arbitrary, the conventional, the unmotivated."[106] For sure, it is very 'detachableness' and lavish giving authorization for Kitaj's use of diverse forms of fragments, including corporeal fragments, commentaries, and photographs, which are intrinsically unmotivated and incoherent. Owens expounded that the first link between allegory and contemporary art was through the "appropriation of images" – which include a film still, a photograph, or a drawing – and viewed "an appreciation of the transience of things and the concern to rescue them for eternity" to be one of the strongest

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[104] Ibid., 83-84.

[105] Near the beginning of "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1971), Heidegger has introduced two terms which define the conceptual frame within which the work of art is conventionally located by aesthetic thought: an allegory and a symbol.

[106] Ibid., 83.

allegorical impulses in photography.[107] Therefore, the technique of photomontage is possibly the best way for an artist to express the very essence of allegory with its own "arbitrariness and contingency" in a visual language.

On the other hand, however, the allegorical supplement is not only an addition, but also a replacement, which in turn results in the possibility of perversion.[108] This fact actually does not imply any negative aspects but rather permits a great amount of freedom in the interpretation of art. Susan Sontag, who wrote her essay "Against Interpretation" (1964) about the same time Kitaj had begun his career as an artist, has explicated in the essay that the mimetic theory by Plato and Aristotle, which developed the perspective viewing art as a "form of therapy," should be terminated in modern times when decorative and abstract art becomes problematic with it. In this modern era, she explains, "A great deal of today's art may be understood as motivated by a flight from interpretation. To avoid interpretation, art may become parody."[109] In general, what she has mentioned seems to be in a similar vein with what Benjamin tried to give as an alternate reading of modernist works through allegory. It also lies along the same line with what Owens meant by saying that the manipulations to which the artists subject the fragmented images work to "empty them of their resonance, their significance, and their authoritative claim to meaning."[110]

In fact, it is only through such manipulations, such as the photomontage

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[107] Ibid., 71.

[108] Ibid., 84.

[109] Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," *A Susan Sontag Reader* (Random House Inc., 1983), 101.

[110] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulses," 69.

technique or a play with words, that the artist can show his artistic license in this new mode of art. To illustrate this, Arthur Danto has once considered at length a painting that was particularly offensive, the 1984 *Self-Portrait as a Woman* (1984),[111] while exploring the baffling quality of many of Kitaj's works in a review of the artist's retrospective in *The Nation*. This provocative title was surely meant to arouse expectations of something interesting, but, as Danto points out, "No one would know, I think, that it was a self-portrait unless one were told. The painting shows us a woman, naked rather than nude, since she is wearing high heels and red socks… the artist has chosen to take on the bodily attributes of a woman for some metaphorical purpose the painting itself does not clarify… Were it not for the title we would see it as no doubt symbolically charged in some way… Kitaj's title complicates our attitude."[112] Kitaj didn't make any direct or coherent claim to meaning in this painting; however, he has still left both fragments bearing 'incompleteness' and ruptures among them, making the painting barely escape a complete closure to meanings with the help of 'detachableness' and 'supplementation' of allegory – these introduce a number of possibilities of interpretations into art.

In like manner, those images exist only as 'ruins' detached from their original contexts and, thus, construct different ways of signification. It is such distance from the history that causes the gaze of melancholy, which Benjamin identified with the allegorical temperament. In fact, in the history of allegory, the reason that it was condemned was because allegory had been associated with history painting, enlisted in

[111] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 125.

[112] Linda Nochlin, "Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation," *Poetics Today* 17:3 (Autumn, 1966), 325-326.

the service of historicism. However, it was Baudelaire who first conceived modern art, at least in part, as the rescuing of modernity for eternity through the ephemeral, which threatened to disappear without a trace.[113] In "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Benjamin emphasized this aspect of Baudelaire's project, and therefore, it can be said that Benjamin's theory of allegory started from this very rescuing project. Additionally, Owens explains photomontage in art to be the common practice of allegory "to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal,"[114] for Benjamin, in turn, *inter*pretation was dis*inter*ment.[115] Based on all such qualities of allegory formed over time and well-discussed by Owens, Benjamin has given some further insights, such as to liberate writing from its traditional dependency on speech so that "written language and sound confront each other in tense polarity."[116] Likewise, such "allegorical impulses" comprise the basic attributes of Benjamin's theory of allegory.

[113] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulses," 77.

[114] Ibid., 72.

[115] Ibid., 84.

[116] Ibid., 85.

5. The Artist's Later Works Viewed in Relation to Benjamin's Theory of Allegory

Benjamin was one of the most influential figures for Kitaj's art in general, not only from the perspective of Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), but, more forcefully, of his earlier essay *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1927). Although the former interested him strongly due to the fact that issues of reproduction were also main concerns for Kitaj when he was making prints; the latter provided much more fundamental motivation for his entire work. Some critics have noticed and mentioned this connection that existed between Kitaj's work and Benjamin's theory of allegory discussed in this essay. For instance, Joe Shannon has quoted from Benjamin's essay on allegory that "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else"[117] in order to help the allegorical understanding of Kitaj's work. Olivia Carol Salus has also pointed out that understanding the meaning of allegory enriches the study of Kitaj's painting.[118] Kitaj's text itself provides no guidelines as to the importance of allegory for Benjamin. Nevertheless, the relevance to it seems quite apparent when he experiments with the fragments in his print, not out of contemporary sources as in Pop Art but from everywhere, from the past to the present and from poems to the political issues. I argue that this wide range of subjects can only be explained by

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[117] Joe Shannon, *R.B. Kitaj* (Hirshhorn Museum oand Sculpture Garden, 1981), 19.

[118] Olivia Carol Salus, *Four Martyr Icons of R.B. Kitaj: An Analysis of Their Pictorial Narratives* (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1989), 218.

Benjamin's theory of allegory.

The Origin of German Tragic Drama is a treatise on critical method; it traces not only the origin of baroque tragedy, but also its critical disapproval.[119] It stands as a seminal work; assembled are the themes that will preoccupy Kitaj throughout his career: progress as the eternal return of catastrophe; criticism as redemptive intervention into the past; the theoretical value of the concrete, the disparate, the discontinuous; his treatment of phenomena as script to be deciphered. This essay, as Benjamin's most sustained and original work, begins with a general theoretical introduction on the nature of the baroque art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, concentrating on the peculiar stage-form of royal martyr dramas called *Trauerspiel*, where time is spatialized. Baroque tragedy, he argues, was distinguished from classical tragedy by its shift from myth into history. That is to say, although tragedy is customarily regarded to be relevant to historical factors, in this type of tragedy history breaks down into images, not into stories. With such world perspectives, to him, myth is an "uncritical nonchalance with history,"[120] while history gives greater historical accuracy and material evidence, thus presenting a better sense of history, which is constructive, not descriptive. According to Benjamin, history is a construction: it constructs a new past that has never existed, and this construction task is achieved through the dialectical function of shattering, mutilation, and the fragment, which is in turn in accordance with what Baudelaire mentioned regarding the "destructive force of allegorical intention."[121] At the same time, in many ways, it seems to comply

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[119] Owens, "The Allegorical Impulses," 85.

[120] Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Aesthetics and Politics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukacs* (NLB 1977), 103.

[121] Norbert Bolz, "Aesthetics? Philosophy of History? Theology!," in *Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in*

with the urgings of Adorno “towards greater historical precision and materialist objectivity.” In a similar fashion, the baroque was a world of things (emblems or ruins) and spatialized ideas; allegories are in the realm of thought, what ruins are in the realm of things.[122] The issue which is significant for Kitaj here is the question of “how does one interrupt the flow of history without having everything dissolve into something amorphous?” and the answer to this is: “through citation and montage.”[123] Kitaj’s investigation in print engages such ‘things’ or ‘ruins’ from every type of source. Every fragment in his work is based on history but they are detached from the original context, becoming ‘ruins,’ and allowing themselves to create new meanings in new contexts.

All these ideas on allegory are based on his melancholic view, as Benjamin mentions, “Significance and death both come to fruition in historical development.”[124] He mentions that “The only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory,” and he interpreted German baroque plays as allegories of historical pessimism.[125] Allegory arises from an apprehension of the world as no longer permanent, as passing out of being: a sense of its transitoriness, an intimation of mortality, or a conviction that “this world is not conclusion,” as revealed when he says “with this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is

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Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory, Edited by Gerhard Richter (Stanford University Press, 2002), 231.

[122] Salus, *Four Martyr Icons,* 219.

[123] Bolz, “Aesthetics?,” 230.

[124] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* Trans. John Osborne, (NLB, 1977), 166.

[125] Ibid., 219.

characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance,"[126] indeed as a world of the material fragment.

Regarding such pessimism and ensuing fruitfulness, for instance, Andrew Benjamin stated about *If Not, Not* – the painting beneath the horror of Auschwitz with the reference to the biblical necessity for sacrifice – that "despite this cursory and tentative interpretation… what emerged was the interplay between life and death. Survival and sacrifice; one not reducible to the other and yet both present."[127] In this 'saturnine view,' history is as nature and nature is eternal transience. This transitory characteristic of allegory is not only applicable to the images with narratives as shown in the running figure without a head in *Go and Get Killed Comrade – We Need a Byron in the Movement,* but also to inanimate objects as in the scene of *Desk Murder* (1970-84).[128] In the latter, the scene can never be without its pretext, nor can it become identical with it, remaining always separate, and allegory here involves temporality, a gulf of time between meaning and sign, or rather, between sign and sign.[129] Such a gulf, in fact, represents the dialectical power of the fetish character in that, belonging to the past, the stock of images becomes "fixed starry images in the philosophy of history, drained of their quota of productive force" as a constellation,[130] and accordingly they allow the connection between the past and the present.

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[126] Ibid., 175.

[127] Andrew Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, (London, New York; Routledge, 1991), 93.

[128] See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 70.

[129] Giles Peaker, "Natural history: Kitaj, Allegory and Memory," in *Critical Kitaj*, 69-70.

[130] Adorno and Benjamin, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 116.

It seems that Adorno had an influence on Benjamin from a Marxist point of view regarding this dialectical power: in detailed correspondences with Benjamin, Adorno emphasized that "to understand the commodity as a dialectical image is to see the latter as a motif of the decline and 'supersession' of the commodity, rather than as its mere regression to an older stage" and also "the fetish is a faithless final image, comparable only to death's-head."[131] Moreover, such dialectical images generated by the commodity character are not situated in an archaic collective ego, but in "alienated" bourgeois individuals; this distances Benjamin's theory away from a mythical mind. Considering those aspects of commodity materials – the commodity as death's head, the alienation inherent in them, and their dialectical power – the melancholic view is an essential element of allegory as it creates dialectical images, being eventually fruitful. Furthermore, Benjamin emphasized the position of the human being in front of the apparatus displaying self-alienation as a productive power, and Adorno added to this the notion of the "autonomous work of art" – which is transcended by its own technology – being "inherently dialectical: within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom."[132] This alternative relationship to technology allows a great intuition to Kitaj's fragmented paintings as well: the montage technique used in his painting itself signifies the freedom and the dialectical self-dissolution of myth and, therefore, constructs a more comprehensive sense of history.

Likewise, for Benjamin, part of what makes *Trauerspiel* so inscrutable is that its relationship to history is only ever allegorical, in the sense that the play presents

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[131] Ibid., 114-115.

[132] Ibid., 121.

fragments and broken shards of history without narrativizing them, as we are accustomed to seeing in most plays. When placed on the stage, rather than maintaining a denotative relationship to history where history is told, the spatial constellation of these fragments reveals a true idea of history. In the same way, for Kitaj, painterly planes as well as print surfaces were the stage where the artist could exert his efforts to make the physical fragments function as ruins, so the constellation of those fragments helps the true understanding of the subject of each art work. Briefly, the radical practices of montage offer a vivid way of making the familiar strange by consistently interrupting the conventional process of interpretation based on myth.

The difficulties Kitaj faced while he was exploring themes, such as poetry, history, politics, heroes and villains, which are hard to grasp and, thus, hard to narrativize, helped him pursue his painting in connection with the new medium of printing. Given Kitaj's immersion in photographic material and reproductions of all kinds, as well as his introduction in 1963 to screenprinting, he was well-prepared to absorb the writings of Benjamin, which he came across in the mid-sixties. Benjamin became an exemplar at once, as Kitaj recalls, "because of the impossible-to-categorize quality of his creative, highly fragmented texts."[133] However, I argue that this quality applies not only to his earlier works but also to his later paintings on the Jewishness issue. This is so because Jewishness must have been one of the most complicated and 'impossible-to-categorize' issues for Kitaj himself, as a Jewish-American who had a lot of criticism from the London art critics. In addition, this issue for him is actually a critical way that shows the polarization and dissolution of the 'consciousness' dialectically between society and

[133] Livingstone, *R.B. Kitaj*, 22.

singularities.[134] Such approach to the concept of 'community' was made possible by Benjamin's transformation of a theology into a method. That is, theology survived as a descriptive or as a "basic science" for Benjamin so that he could regard religion as a guarantor of totality: humans can make do without religion, but society cannot.[135] In this vein, it seems that Kitaj could also make a work of art which generates meanings dialectically between society and individuals, and the general and the particular. Consequently, his Jewishness should be understood in a similar way.

Cultural theorist Giles Peaker has argued in his essay that "*The Autumn of Central Paris* is a portrait. It is not an allegorical portrait, but a portrait of allegory – a likeness or semblance of 'fragment-life.' The allegorical assemblage of elements is refigured as an integral whole at the level of the reflection upon allegory."[136] By saying this, he has pointed out the integrating aspect of his later painting, and he read this painting rather as "a symbol of allegory" and regarded that it opens up the possibility of a reflection upon allegory only to collapse back into the symbolic as it does so.[137] Although, in doing so, he is going against some parts of Benjamin's theory, I assume this allows for a much more profound understanding of his later paintings, as this "allegory as a sign" contains not only historicity but also the present. I believe that what makes his later paintings appear more complicated is this ambiguity or oscillation between the historicity which allegory implies and the present, which practical issues in a contemporary society involve in the notion of allegory. This intricate relationship might be resolved from the

[134] Adorno and Benjamin, *Aesthetics and Politics*, 113.

[135] Bolz, "Aesthetics?," 232-233.

[136] Peaker, "Natural History," 81.

[137] Ibid.

Derridean perspective – that is to say, by being productive while oscillating between the two.

Ⅲ. Conclusion

Kitaj’s main concerns in art were very extensive and, therefore, to a certain degree seem to be quite discursive and inconsistent over time: since the very beginning of Kitaj’s engagement in painting in the 1960s he seems to have had a great preoccupation with printmaking and the abstract graphic qualities of American Pop Art, and in later years with the thematic issue of Jewishness, which is seemingly a completely separate, different terrain. However, once realizing that his involvement in those new techniques in his earlier career had been only from the experimental spirit of the artist and in the service of the ‘mind,’ the artist explored the potentiality of fragments as a means for articulating the subject of Jewishness. Such enthusiasm continued until he became vocal about the Jewishness and cosmopolitanism with a more integrated composition in painting. In this context, it seems Kitaj’s diasporist art cannot be truly interpreted without being related to Benjamin’s theory of allegory. Again, this notion is not limited only to the format of painting, but it is rather more closely applied to the abstract, philosophical ideas that Jewishness connotes.

Kitaj’s painting from time to time, however, goes beyond this explanation through allegory, as he appears to have viewed it as the sign for the Jew, allowing the reinterpretation of his Jewishness in a slightly different context: that is, in Derrida’s postmodern discourses. This aspect has something in common with what the artist stressed about the universal as a result of “particularist” criteria such as cultural traditions

and destinies, personal experience, historical drama and milieu. Andrew Benjamin has pointed out that, for Kitaj, "Judaism is not presented simply in terms of the images of the Holocaust… The Jew remains within the open question. Even the Holocaust cannot close the question of Jewish identity."[138] Such symbols as the train, therefore, become the site of an "interpretive differential plurality" and of "non-reducibility." His unremitting experiments with fragments as an artistic form can be also understood in a similar way; that is, engaging fragments might have been a short cut for Kitaj to reveal the resolution between the two different modes: universality and conceptions of identity.

In addition, as Kitaj defined the experience of Jews in the same sense as the word 'modernism' in that both are about dislocation, rootlessness, fragmentation, and cosmopolitanism, and modernism was another preoccupation for him. Just as Benjamin's theory of allegory began as a rescuing project with a desire to redeem the past for the present, Kitaj also seems to have suggested an alternative mode of modern art. Kitaj's fragmentary, and basically nonhistorical, view of modernity, which Kitaj himself might denominate as his diasporist vision, makes even more senses when it comes to what the philosopher Richard Wollheim says: "In Kitaj's world picture, the term modernity has a denotation that has been distended over time; it is used to refer to everything that it has ever been used to refer to since it first gained circulation as a tool of criticism, now more than a hundred years ago."[139] This discovery seems to have been quite significant for Kitaj in developing his own art, since his pursuits in art in general are also very closely related to Romanticist strategies, so that he could have found Surrealism based on the

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[138] Andrew Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, 88-89.

[139] Richard Wollheim, "Kitaj: Recollections and Reflections," in Richard Morphet, *R.B. Kitaj*, 39.

European tradition lying in a similar vein.

Likewise, he could be considered an artist who has found an appropriate balance between American art and the European artistic tradition; American art being totally different from its original context for him. Toward this end, Benjamin’s theory of allegory must have been a useful tool for him to fragment the world and pile the fragments, only to permit their unfixed meanings.

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