GREAT MOMENTS IN AMERICAN PAINTING: DOGGED LOOKS FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

by

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Abstract

This thesis studies a unique development in modernist painting in the United States of America during the 1950s; the shift away from abstract expressionism, most vividly distilled in the work of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. In the context of the early Cold War, the appearance of Louis' first Veil series and Noland's Circle Paintings is no coincidence. They mark the onset of a new mood taking hold of the country in the years following World War II. Yet, if these colorful and deeply sensuous images seem to speak to a new optimism, to possibilities opened up, and to freedoms renewed, we would be missing the point. In fact, they are founded on a theory of expression that is not only critical of the surrounding culture, but stakes out the most pessimistic of positions possible in that culture. This thesis is an attempt to develop a series of hermeneutic frames for reading modernist abstraction in this negative light.

In order to unpack these images I take recourse in the art criticism of Clement Greenberg; specifically his notion of the decorative, a kind of unity and immediacy of surface, which I implicate in a number of wide-ranging dialogues emerging around the modern subject. It is especially toward structuralist trends in American psychiatry and social psychology, that I turn my attention. For in effect, my interpretative operation hinges on a dismantling of the decorative as a metaphor of the transformative or constitutive moment of the subject. That is, I break down the seamlessness of the decorative into a set of semantic components or fragments significant in the individual biography, yet silenced by the totalizing, intra-textual imperative of expressivity. What one finds in these paintings is that despite all attempts at expurgating intention in order to distill the aesthetic, an intentional structure can be found lying just under the surface, bound to the individual life lived, and functioning on a metonymic or associative level.

It is toward the sobering question of materialism that I continually return. For if Greenberg's interest in Sullivanian Interpersonal Psychiatry provides an

initial framework for addressing the problems of painting after abstract expressionism, it also provides an entrance to more specific questions about the transformative which Pollock entertained in terms of Jungian therapy and Gestalt psychology, which Louis' fascination with Rorschach Psychodiagnostics summoned, and that Noland's stake in Reichian therapy amounted to. Undoubtedly the point is, that the aesthetic, if an image of plenitude, if a bearer of the utopian impulse, is always paradoxically inscribed by the trace of a material history that precedes it, that renders it utterly contingent.

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Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it. Every feeling is bound to an *a priori* object, and the representation of this object is its phenomenology. Accordingly the theory of mourning, which emerged unmistakably as a *pendant* to the theory of tragedy, can only be developed in the description of that world which is revealed under the gaze of the melancholy man. For feelings, however vague they may seem when perceived by the self, respond like a motorial reaction to a concretely structured world. If the laws that govern the *Trauerspiel* are to be found, partly explicit, partly implicit, at the heart of mourning, the representation of these laws does not concern itself with the emotional condition of the poet or his public, but with a feeling which is released from any empirical subject and is intimately bound to the fullness of an object. This is a motorial attitude which has its appointed place in the hierarchy of intentions and is only called a feeling because it does not occupy the highest place. It is determined by an astounding tenacity of intention, which, among the feelings is matched perhaps only by love -- and that not playfully. For whereas in the realm of the emotions it is not unusual for the relation between an intention and its object to alternate between attraction and repulsion, mourning is capable of a special intensification, a progressive deepening of its intention. Pensiveness is characteristic above all of the mournful. On the road to the object -- no: within the object itself -- this intention progresses as slowly and solemnly as the processions of the rulers advance. The passionate interest in the pomp of the *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen,* in part an escape from the restrictions of pious domesticity, was also a response to the natural affinity of pensiveness for gravity. In the latter it recognizes its own rhythm. The relationship between mourning and ostentation, which is so brilliantly displayed in the language of the Baroque, has one of its sources here; so to the self-absorption, to which these great constellations of the wordly chronicle seem but a game, which may, it is true, be worthy of attention for the meaning which can be reliably deciphered from it, but whose never-ending repetition secures the bleak rule of a melancholic distaste for life.

Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,*
trans. J. Osborne, (New York: Verso, 1977), pp. 139-140.

Preface

Think of this dissertation as a study on a number of levels. The first, and perhaps most important, a series of reflections on the body ... my body ... a body on the brink of its historical ruin. Secondly, and in as much, a succession of not unrelated investigations into modernist painting in the United States during the late 1940s and 1950s. I like to think of the latter as a contingency felt in terms of a painful, direct, and naive correlation with the former; a kind of inverse relation, where injuries sustained in an active life climbing, have necessitated periods of convalescence and/or sustained immobility. In this sense, I like to think of the injuries accrued and accumulated during the course of writing -- forcing its writing, shaping its writing, but also failing that writing, insofar as never surfacing as the object, but rather as a deferred or displaced sign of that writing -- as a sort of mineral inscription left by a writing on the body, a hypogram that determines through the necessity, anteriority, and wholeness it describes. Think of this dissertation as a fall, and think of each chapter as the re-staging of a fall, i.e., an attempt to grasp the image of a succession of historical reflections on a damaged life. The role of a preface should be nothing other than setting such a stage-work in motion.

In 1512 Durer inscribed on a self-portrait: "Where the yellow spot is, to which I point with my finger, there it hurts." If it was to the spleen -- the source of the melancholy disease -- which Durer pointed, I offer my own brief catalogue of ruination, chronologically listing significant injuries sustained while climbing. Two examples should suffice: Whereas, I like to think of the first draft of the first chapter, entitled a "'Fabulous Invalid': 'American Capitalism' at Mid-Century (Not a Great moment At All)", in terms of a reductive reading that circumscribes it to a bowstring tweak of the middle and index finger tendons of my left hand in early June of 1989, the summer prior to beginning this project, I would circumscribe the first draft of Chapter Three, formerly entitled "In a Forceful Attempt to fix the Eye on the Sun: Greenberg Reading Pollock Reading Greenberg", to a long-term

muscular imbalance contributing to a degenerative condition in the lower vertebrae, which left me supine for five months of 1995 in the Boreas. That a second draft of Chapter Three was contingent on a torn meniscus in the right knee in November and December of the same year, that a third draft was precipitated by a reflaming on the biceps tendon in the left shoulder in August of 1996, or that a fourth draft was contingent on a separation of the ACL joint in the right shoulder, in the autumn (i.e., the fall) of the present year in no way alters this framework of causality.

I list those injuries that have left permanent scar tissue and have led to some kind of arthritic condition or weakening; those injuries that required institutional attention and/or extended health care, including hospital stays and extensive physiotherapy; and finally those injuries that required dosages of anti-inflammatories and/or pain killers larger than normally prescribed. I take the liberty of also listing those injuries sustained prior to the period of writing whose genealogy can be tracked as ontologically significant in repetitive instances of injury occurring during the period of writing:

Torn medial cartilage, right knee, surgery (Mar. 1976).
Dislocations both left and right knee (1976-1996).
Broken heel plate, right foot (Aug. 1979).
Dislocation left shoulder (Sept. 1986).
Shattered wrist and forearm, right hand (Apr. 1987).
Dislocation and floating bone chip middle joint, middle finger (May 1988).
Bowstring tweak of both middle and little finger tendons, left hand (Jun. 1989).
Nerve damage index and first finger, left hand, renervation surgery (Jul. 1990).
Crack and splinter of wrist joint and capsule, right hand (Jun. 1992).
Bowstring tweak: middle and index finger tendons, right hand (Mar, 1993).
Lower vertebral damage at L4 -L5 (Feb. 1994).
Upper vertebral damage at C5 - C6 (Aug. 1995).
Torn meniscus right knee, 40% surgically removed (Nov. 1995).
Flamed biceps tendon connector, left shoulder (Apr. 1995).
ACL separation, right shoulder (Aug. 1997).

Introduction

The immediate. One might well recruit the narrow window on the world it provides for a defense of modernist painting and criticism in the United States during the late 1940s and 1950s. This dissertation is in large part an exercise in courting just this kind of temptation, but also, and importantly, it is an attempt to out-manoeuver and unravel the immediate as well. It is a historical rereading of the shift toward abstraction in the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland; a culturally oriented reinterpretation which does not diminish the centrality of formal questions the immediate describes. Moreover, it is a historical rereading of Clement Greenberg's understanding of the aesthetic; a reappraisal of a cool, bland, Apollonian detachment, what Greenberg considered the only defensible position in the context of post-war American culture. In sum, this dissertation unpacks the image of totality the immediate provides in terms of an essential contradiction; that the utopian impulse is itself paradoxically bound up in the material history of the surrounding culture.

I argue that the immediate, if central to the circumscribing of a symbolic moment, is simultaneously complicit in a redefinition of the modern subject being forged in the surrounding culture as a whole. The great irony of the loose grouping of positions under consideration -- the principle reason why Greenberg would have galvanized these painters into a loose sort of grouping in the first place -- is that each reluctantly accepted precisely this paradox as the defining feature of the modern American moment. By resituating the grouping in the context of the wider field of discourses which made the post-war period one of the high moments in American history, I am able to recover the subtleties of this despairing politics. For the most part this melancholic posturing has been obscured by the extant literature on the subject which has traditionally been polarized in two camps: that of an intrinsic criticism focusing on purely formal conceits, and that of an extrinsic criticism concentrating on social, historical, and political concerns. In order to understand

fully the complexities of the position, I employ a methodological framework that is inclusive of both tendencies. For the essential fact remains, that formal problematics became an issue for painting in the first place precisely because of a long history of highly charged political negotiations. The instantaneous or immediate aspect of surface, what Greenberg calls the decorative, was intimately connected with the social. A recourse to the immediate is bound up in a supremely pessimistic account of the individual under the conditions of modernity; one which acknowledges the self as only a fiction. If it appears to find some meager repast in the notion of *bildung*, it is worth noting now that it rests finally, only, on the "veils of illusion" which the impoverished notion of the self provides. It is, I think, an account of the modern predicament which deserves special attention. Especially today during a moment in history when the illusion of the centered and stable subject remains as firm a shibboleth as the tenets of a therapeutic culture in the Academy.

My research focuses on linking up the grouping to a constellation of discourses in American psychiatry and social psychology, all acutely aware of the odds stacked against the individual, all highly cognizant of the threat posed by "totalitarianism", all founded in the principles of structuralism, and finally, a general milieu increasingly defined by dynamic psychiatry. That the immediate had become the concern of a number of trends in American psychiatry and social psychology should be of no surprise. In the context of broader historical processes contributing to the deradicalization of the American Left, the immediate as a dynamic and transformative moment had been narrowed down and isolated out as all that remained of the revolutionary project itself. If a moment rich with possibility however, the immediate was also the crucial mechanism for both revolutionary and therapeutic failure. It is not unimportant that the detached and contemplative feel of high modernist painting was born of this active and engaged history. The cult of action will haunt it. Guilt drives this painting to continually

transform the imaginative into all manner of individual acts of notability. In fact, if one were to describe Greenberg's project in terms of an aesthetic education of mankind at mid-century, it would have to be conceived of ironically as an education in the physical: A kind of phys. ed. degree with a specialization in Schiller.

Invariably, all this leads to the central problematic addressed by this dissertation, the question of materialism -- Greenberg's materialism, and the kind of materialism one confronts in the specific cases of Pollock, Louis, and Noland. Most simply put the immediate is a metaphor of the transformative moment; a nothing; an impossible moment when matter is in the process of becoming meaning. It is what Sullivanian Interpersonal Psychiatry -- the most significant trend in dynamic psychiatry -- had isolated as the "relatively fixed pattern of energy transformations"[1] that determined the character, personality, and consciousness of the subject. For a materialist like Greenberg, the immediacy or instantaneous potential of the medium's surface analogically corresponded to the physical and material processes precipitating consciousness, but blinded to consciousness because constitutive. The immediate operates as a metaphor of an unknowable totality or unity otherwise blinded to the subject, yet crystallized out as a function of the decorative or formal possibility of surface. The immediate stands in for a physical or material content within the aesthetic. The immediate as surface-matter is a metaphor of feeling or emotion, what Greenberg calls "sensations, the irreducible elements of experience".[2]

It is, of course, easy to dismiss the temptation of the immediate outright. (An extrinsic criticism has done this for long enough and to no avail). It is my attempt here to yield to its temptation, expurgating the social in the process, and only after the fact, seek recompense by reconfiguring the social within and through the narrow window on the world the immediacy of surface provides. For upon careful analysis,

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[1]Harry Stack Sullivan, "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and in Life", (*Psychiatry*, v. 11, n. 1, Feb. 1948), p. 5.

[2]Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon", *Partisan Review* (July-Aug. 1940), in *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 1: Perceptions and Judgements, 1939-1944*, ed, John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 30.

what one finds, is that the necessity and totalizing nature of metaphor, as the crucial trope in high modernist painting is itself complementary to another kind of signifying system. Focused in the autobiographical it is a system founded on a repetitious and consistent process of metonymic association and contingency. In fact, as Paul de Man writes, "The relationship between the literal and figural senses of a metaphor is always metonymic, though motivated by a constitutive tendency to pretend the opposite".[3]

This insight offers the single most important entrance into high modernist painting and criticism. Undoubtedly the original motivations behind this thesis can be traced back to what I dimly perceived of then as a gap in the literature spanning precisely this point. For if an intrinsic criticism has been unwilling to broach the question of the social, an extrinsic criticism has suffered as great a loss from its wholesale dismissal of Greenberg's insight into a theory of expression in painting. It is more than as a bromide I submit this thesis. One has only to survey the literature on Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland to realize, that unlike what my title suggests, it stands as more than simply a generous obeisance to the genre of the coffee table book -- by far the most familiar and numerous form that studies on Louis and Noland assume. Rather, I conceive this dissertation as a fundamental corrective to that literature, because I believe it to be a fresh and original contribution to the social history of American art.

Why? Principally because not one of the individuals under consideration -- Clement Greenberg, Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland -- can be grasped fully or in any complexity without a sustained consideration of the interrelations and tensions existing between all four. For example, any attempts to come to terms with Greenberg alone, in isolation from these other orbits -- which is by far the most common tactic taken in the extant literature -- will ultimately fail to understand the complex of problems and multiple perspectives required in grasping

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[3]Paul de Man, "Reading(Proust)" in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rosseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 71.

the depth and breadth of his own account. Secondly, from its inception, my account was less concerned with partisan politics (say for instance understanding the paintings of Pollock, Louis, and Noland simply against the background of American culture, or the ideological debates and pitfalls surrounding Greenberg's modernist criticism), than with using Greenberg for a historical entrance into the former's painting. And conversely using those paintings as an especially privileged accounting of Greenberg's negotiations with the surrounding culture.

And too, because the tension between metaphor and metonymy sheds a particularly penetrating light on the often ironic, far-reaching, and light-hearted associations upon which one form of a serious, high-minded, and melancholic materialism at mid-century was based. Ultimately, because, the tension between an intra-textual and extra-textual reading permits the re-establishment of the primacy of intention within the interpretive process. Intentionality is the cardinal sin of high modernist painting and criticism. The immediate as metaphor is always a function of an unintentional working with surface-matter. That is, the metaphor of totality, symbolic unity, or wholeness is operative only insofar as intentionality is excluded from those processes constitutive of making surface. Even as part of a wide-ranging critique of consciousness, character structure, and instrumental reason, this paradigm is a deluded one.

What one needs to remember is that a metonymic chain of associations is not only complementary to metaphoricity, but that it is constitutive of it. The fact is that achievement in high modernist painting rests entirely on the repetitious, prosaic, and banal way one builds a surface out of a very particular, concrete, and self-conscious technique. These repetitive and mechanical technical procedures, which constitute any one particular stylistics, makes up a kind of veiled personal history: a web or structure of intention founded entirely upon concomitance, contingent association, and chance encounter or proximity. It is this extra-textual movement which carries the burden of an otherwise occluded subject-matter.

In terms of a practice like Pollock's black and white paintings, Louis' first Veil series, or Noland's Target series, which for all intents and purposes expurgate intention, it seems that an intentional structure can be found lying just under the surface, bound to the individual life lived, and functioning on the level of association. A serious study of high modernist painting must necessarily begin with a bow to the unity and seamlessness that makes surface, only to proceed by what Walter Benjamin described as a "mortification of the work".[4] The task of the interpreter is not to synthesize the work into a whole (as is Greenberg's case), but break it down into fragments, ruined pieces, mechanical parts -- a subject-matter that in the end is allegorical, concomitant, contiguous, thick with the association of ideas and things and acts and faculties.

The kind of work that is involved in uncovering an undervalued history such as this, such as the chain of association that links the body to a surface, to depth, on to the physics of the instantaneous, Jungian complementarity, Quantum theory, the atomicity of light, entropy, dissipation, sobriety, the necessity of a black and white palette, in Pollock's work from 1951 is not your run of the mill kind of criticism exuding decorum or academic restraint. On the contrary, it is all over the map. And rightly so! For it accesses what Greenberg valued most in Kafka's fiction, "a wide open inside a closed and stifling world".[5] An in-between. What Hegel called the "noonday of life" when reason "drowns in its own abyss".[6] A thickly wooded grove of imagination, association, and fantastic movement, apart from the strictures and constraints of one's own predicament, because finally a reflection on one's own predicament.

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[4]Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. J. Osborne, (New York: Verso, 1977), p. 111.
[5]Clement Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka: Some Sources of his Particular Vision", in *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956,* ed. John O'Brian, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 208.
[6]Hegel, *Difference: The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans., ed. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), pp. 102-103.

It is in keeping with the ironies, oppositions, paradoxes, and often absurd inversions of materialism, that a strict concentration on the medium of painting would finally involve a denigration of vision and the sublimation of sound. Because we are dealing with a kind of practice which privileges a principle of articulation between component parts or discrete material entities, the aesthetic is formulated as a kind of wooded hinterland beyond the horizon of representation or discursivity. The gurgling trickling sound of a stream in one of Louis' Veils, the vibration of particles at the atomic level in a Pollock, or the cool sounds of jazz, the exchange of blows in the ring, and the hushed and murmuring sounds of making love in one of Noland's Circle paintings, all exist as a kind of phonic potentiality that is a metaphor of the symbolic plenitude that is experience. As a figure of complementarity the literal appearance of a surface made up of factual and verifiable quiddities is constantly in tension with and absorbed by this totalizing figural possibility.

Even color sounds. For if one takes this most essential feature of the mature painting of Louis and Noland, reducing it down to the essential frequencies which it emits, out of the white light that absorbs each distinct hue into the unity that is the surface, one hears a gentle rustling music that is all sound. Adorno's admiration for a line from the poet Rudolph Borchardt seems especially resonant here: *"Ich habe nichts als Rauschen"* ("I have nothing but murmuring").[7] It is a restatement of that metaphoric equivalence struck between the sensuous aspect of language and its acoustic potential. It is an echo of Greenberg's favorite word in the whole wide world: "dissipate". It is a reminder of a certain pensive mood that surrounds materialism, one always accompanying the intoxication of the aesthetic state. Little wonder that the immediate "which started out more or less as "Trotskyism", turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to

[7]Theodore W. Adorno, "Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel", trans. S. W. Nicolsen, *Hegel: Three Studies*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 89.

come".[8] Little wonder that the immediate still remains today the only hopeful and tempting vision for that theoretically and socially oriented few, of a melancholic disposition!

Before I begin to sketch out the more specific arguments in each chapter, it is worth mentioning that the development of this project over time mirrors a shift traceable in Greenberg's criticism, as well as one implicit to the processes of formalization in the work of Pollock, Louis, and Noland. For if this project began as a conventionally conceived work of social art history it ended up, because of the problems encountered on the level of local interpretation, indeed because of *interpretation,* as an attempt to problematize the tension between experience and its representation that Greenberg, Pollock, Louis, and Noland all had continually to confront. Greenberg's position is a highly complex and deeply philosophical account of the conditions of human consciousness. The student of Romanticism should, I think, recognize it, first and foremost, as a critique of the constitutive nature of consciousness or metaphoricity. In the chapters which follow, I attempt to unravel this complex problem; first, in terms of a general cultural context that would precipitate such a concern; secondly, in terms of Greenberg's own entrance to such issues through the work of Nietzsche and Kafka; thirdly, as a function of more specifically art historical problems which faced Pollock, Louis, and Noland in terms of a mutual antagonism toward abstract expressionism; and lastly, via contemporary debates in American psychiatry and social psychology, all focused on the illusion of the individual, i.e., the contingent or fictional nature of the self. Underlying these concerns, the methodological schema, and the readings proposed, lies a continual recourse to the work of Paul de Man; and specifically, an entrance to that work (the questions surrounding the disunity of the self, the tension between experience and

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[8]Clement Greenberg, "The Late Thirties in New York", *Art and Culture,* (New York, The Beacon Press, 1961), p. 230.

representation, the symbolic and the allegorical) gained through the perspective of T. J. Clark.

The point is, that as a result of this prolonged intellectual development, the weaknesses and faults implicit to my own process of methodological adjustment, readjustment, reading, misreading, and rereading, are, unfortunately, retained in the skeletal layout of the ensuing five chapters. As a whole they move rather awkwardly from the political and cultural circumstances of the period to the more isolated and specific formal concerns one confronts in the individual artist and the particular painting. It is important to realize, however, that if the cultural and political history of the early Cold War was initially to provide a background for readings of Greenberg, Pollock, Louis, and Noland, this simplistic gestalt relation is entirely complexified in the pertinent chapters through what I consider a kind of thematic centering of the dissertation as a whole.

Thus, for instance, in the chapter on Noland's Circle paintings the argument hinges on the relatively banal, though suggestive opposition existing between the formal qualities of "squareness" and "circularity". A similar strategy should be noted in my reading of Louis' Veil paintings which hinges on the simple polarity between "falleness" and "uprightness". That the issue of middle-class conformity -- "squareness" or "uprightness" -- should emerge in these chapters and the chapters preceding as the privileged theme and recurrent trope of the dissertation as a whole is no coincidence. What I have attempted to do is reconstruct a series of very personal perspectives on the modern American moment, wholly founded on stylistics; something which emerges as an entirely prosaic, repetitious, and mechanically consistent set of syntactical strategies for representation. My aim is to isolate what Maurice Blanchot points to as the "writers solitude": "The obsession which ties him to a privileged theme,

> ...which obliges him to say over again what he has already said -- sometimes with the strength of an enriched talent, but sometimes with the prolixity of an extraordinarily impoverishing repetitiveness, with ever less force, more monotony -- illustrates the

> necessity, which apparently determines his efforts, that he always come back to the same point, pass again over the same paths, persevere in starting over what for him never starts, and that he belong to the shadow of events, not the reality, to the image, not the object, to what allows words themselves to become images, appearances -- not signs, values, the power of truth.[9]

For Blanchot the "writers solitude" is a blind spot. It is that which separates experience from representation, the "I" of becoming from an "I" of desire. It is a middle, around which the rest of the text orients itself. "A center which attracts". Floating, dislocated, and always deferred by the pressures of representation, "it is also a fixed center which, if it is genuine, displaces itself, while remaining the same and becoming always more central, more hidden, more uncertain, and more imperious".[10] A center. The chiasm. A crossing. The immediate. A demarcation or interface between the aesthetic and moral realm, where the aesthetic reconstitutes and chemically blends to form the ideological. An unbridgeable gap between opposing realms. An inexplicable, instantaneous, electro-magnetically charged field, whose wiring or circuitry I formulate in terms of an unseemly leap of intention.

If Chapters Two through Five attempt to map such a blind spot and thus relocate "a center which attracts" in terms of very specific approaches to and understandings of metaphoricity, Chapter One, entitled "'A Fabulous Invalid': 'American Capitalism' at Mid-Century (Not a Great Moment at All)" lays a kind of initial groundwork. It provides a general introduction to America in the late 1940s and 1950s by broaching the central questions driving political and cultural dialogue. My intention here is first to give a sense of the kind of dialogues circulating in the culture which high modernist painting and criticism will pick up on, and secondly, to place Greenberg within a number of progressively refined and distinct contexts or frames. I focus on the all-inclusive parameters of what has been called the Cold War consensus, and secondly, a constellation of discourses which most ably describe

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[9]Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 24,

[10]Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, prefratory note, ibid.

the landscape in spite of the hegemonic nature of the former: the "new liberalism". Surveying the superimposition of its varied discourses in political economy, cultural theory, anthropology, and psychiatry, I outline what is a loose project for the grouping as a whole: the notion of "the vital center". A system of checks and balances which was assuring a non-aligned non-ideological politics, by pinpointing freedom in between the extremes of Left and Right.

Using both published and unpublished archival material I argue that while Greenberg is needfully positioned in this general orbit, certain key distinctions emerge which isolate him from its political solutions: distinctions from Greenberg's perspective which amount to the fact that any and all intrusions into the moral realm were ideological ones. Even if the threat of "totalitarianism" abroad provided the terms for a kind of loose association of interests, the threat of consumerism and the rise of a middle class on the domestic front was approached in distinct manners. This is most clearly illustrated by the "new liberalism's" consistent defense of individualism on the one hand and Greenberg's paradoxical embrace of conformity on the other. Equally revealing is the "new liberalism's" various attempts to sustain freedom through a defense of anxiety and the corporate sphere.

What will become a recurrent theme in the dissertation as a whole is first introduced here as Greenberg's paradoxical claim that in the context of post-war "American capitalism" only conformity can sustain a critical practice. What proves especially revealing in this regard are the insights provided by Sullivanian Interpersonal Psychiatry. Greenberg's close and life-long association with members of the Washington School of Psychiatry is important here. For the irony of Sullivan's social psychological mapping of the subject is that anxiety was itself at the root of conformity. In sum, introducing a number of the key perspectives on the problem of middle class conformity under the conditions of postwar capitalism is at the crux of this chapter, while defining the role assigned to anxiety and

distinguishing between various notions and degrees of freedom is the key to the operation.

Chapter Two (the title of which is too long to list here in an introduction as brief and concise as this one), uses Greenberg's rich reading of Kafka as an entrance into a brooding, mid-century version of the symbolic. Kafka's post-exilic vision of the bureaucratic state is a powerful one. His attempts to found a literature on a state of becoming, despite the monstrous inversions that truth, language, or consciousness perpetuate, serve Greenberg as a decisive literary example of how to negotiate separation, isolation, and alienation, i.e., the problem facing the individual in terms of the "schizophrenia (that) is part of the discomfort of our civilization".[11] I key in upon Kafka's notion of "expulsion from paradise",[12] an event which is "final" and "unavoidable", yet because eternal is a repetitious and prosaic action which is in the main delirious and intoxicating. Evidently, for both Greenberg and Kafka, accessing this symbolic mode of becoming was achievable only through an allegorizing of the immediate. In other words, what I focus on, is a conception of the constitutive moment of the self, a materialist version of the transformative which will provide the essential framework for a discussion of the immediate in painting.

In an important sense this chapter rose out of what I consider the mistaken assumption that Greenberg's politics in the 1950s were aligned with the directives of the *Pax Americana*. On the contrary, I argue that Greenberg's attempts to isolate the metaphoric moment of coming into being is the most astute attempt at avoiding cooptation, in the culture. It is a conception of consciousness as a post-exilic event, an attempt to broach the question of the immediate as an "expected", predicted and always-already commodified form of experience. In relation to liberal cultural models, which hinge on a defense of choice, Greenberg's is a kind of despairing and

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[11]Clement Greenberg, "Religion and the Intellectuals: A Symposium", (*Partisan Review*, May-June 1950), in C.G. 3, p. 40.
[12]Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), p. 41.

Romantic politics that concedes the only possibility left for an oppositional critique is a self-reflexive mirroring of that necessity which predestines and predetermines life in the present. In a world in the wake of the collapse of the avant-garde paradigm, it is a position which marks out the slimmest of possibilities.

Paradoxically, it is the "middle-class orderliness, routine, prudence, sedentary stability" of Kafka's "world all middle", which stands as the only stop-gap to these corruption's of history and the desiring subject.[13] It is undoubtedly on this point, that the expectations of the critic or student of Greenberg will be confounded. For in essence Greenberg's call -- long considered the most "tasteful" of critics on the American scene -- is a call to embrace the pessimal limits of a culture, and therein the pessimal limits of one's own taste. It is, it seems, the only viable alternative to counter-act the incessant colonization of the realm of everyday life by capitalism. Such are the indispensable little investigations of an (American) Dog.

Chapter Three is divided in two. On the one hand it is a reading of Greenberg's conception of the decorative; on the other hand a focus on the formal development of Pollock's painting from his abstractions of 1947-1950 to his black and white paintings from 1951. If the close relation between artist and critic provides a motor for the analysis, it also skews the reading in order to plumb what is a fertile common ground. Entitled "Towards a Physics of Reading Greenberg Reading Pollock Relaxing: Entropy as Dissipation in *Sober-Type* Painting", Chapter Three is an attempt to trace the slippery terrain between Greenberg's philosophically grounded materialism, and a "modern" atomistic conception of the transformative, as articulated within Sullivanian interpersonal psychiatry. But also it is an attempt to use Greenberg's vision of the aesthetic as an especially privileged entrance into the subtleties of Pollock's world: his constantly developing grasp of the unconscious; his notions of the expressive problematic; the role of the body; and his general sense of security and anxiety at a moment in history known as the atomic age.

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[13]Clement Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka: Some Sources of His Particular Vision", (*Commentary*, April, 1955), in C.G. 3, p. 205.

To do so, I focus specifically on Greenberg's characterization of the shift in Pollock's working with surface from "a tautness of feeling" or anxiety, toward "a kind of relaxation" or "sobriety".[14] Over top of this trajectory I trace Pollock's own progressively complexifying understanding of the unconscious: a movement away from an exclusive interest in the Jungian archetype toward an interest in gestalt psychology and "synchronicity" (a Jungian conception of the transformative), and finally a complexification of this in terms of a physical and atomistic model of complementarity which founds Sullivanian psychotherapy. I argue that the expressive potential of Pollock's surfaces are in fact sustained by a web of associations which this shifting set of physical and psychological models carry. Physics -- as a kind of veiled background to the psychological insights provided by Jungian theory, gestalt psychology, and Sullivanian psychotherapy -- quite simply, was operating as a kind of locus for Pollock's investigations into the immediate.

What is important to recognize in all of this, is that Jung's dynamic theory of the psyche, Gestalt psychology's insight into the constitutive nature of consciousness, and Sullivan's account of the physical exchanges of energy at the atomic level, otherwise blinded to the subject by the anxiety precipitated by the field relation, are all based in the complementarity phenomenon of Atomic physics. More simply, the visual was an insufficient account of wholeness or totality in the individual and universe. In this respect, the perceptual insights of Gestalt psychology are most important to my argument. As a surface psychology which provided the foundation for any respectable depth psychology, because it zeroed in on the constitutive moment of subjectivity as a perceptual process, Gestalt theory focused on the complementary relation between the universal and the particular, between experience and its representation. Which is to say, that a decorative and Apollonian surface giving off light or emitting electrons (i.e., vibration, frequency,

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[14]See especially Clement Greenberg, "Feeling is All ", (*Partisan Review*, Jan.-Feb. 1952), in *Clement Greenberg: The Selected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 3, Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, ed. John O'Brian, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 102, 105.

or sound of movement on the atomic level) was an entropic dissipatory process that possessed a phonic potentiality.

Chapter Four, entitled "Hangdoggin' in Suburbia, or Plane Drunk in the Time of the Great Flood", traces the practice of Morris Louis from 1947-1954; a period leading up to and including his first Veil series. I argue that at the crux of Louis' shift to abstraction is a negotiation of the structural constraints placed upon consciousness. Using unpublished archival material, I investigate Louis' early interest in the perceptual theories of Hermann Rorschach and his associations with Sullivanian psychiatry. Especially revealing are his graphite studies that constitute what I term as early attempts at localizing kinesthetic movement. As a key protocol of Sullivanian oriented projective technique, disclosing a capacity for "inner creation", "phantasy", "imaginative" and "associative" potentialities, a revealing entrance into Louis' mature work is gained.[15] In relation to the first Veil series, the drawings serve as a cipher for the threat posed by abstract expressionism, the threat posed by what Louis called the "muscular painters", for whom movement was a function of the allegorical gesture or act. For Louis, the motionless painter, physical activity, any and all activity, was antithetical to the symbolic topos of the dream of movement which surface metaphorically animated.

If this empiricizing and psychologizing framework does permit an entrance, or the brief illusion of insight into the fragile, temporal, and privative nature of Louis' vision, it all collapses, I hope, in the end. With Louis one needs to be especially wary of packaging and conclusiveness, the breaks and separations that befit beginnings and endings, the predigested and expected. Indeed, impatience with the slow and languorous transitions and movements of his painting was precisely the imperative against which Louis was forever on vigil. How else might one capture the sensuousness of a moment when meaning is still running, tacky, flowing wet, and sticking to the matter from which it is formed? Like Kafka, whose

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[15]Hermann Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics: A Diagnostic Test Based on Percpetion*, (Berlin: Verlag Hans Huber, 1951), p. 64.

vision stands as an important precedent, the post-exilic condition of the present, succors an imposing series of biblical illusions. I attempt to thematize only a few of these in terms of a hermeneutic frame for understanding Louis' practice as a fall, a flash of light, and by way of the time of the great flood.

The questions provoked by Louis' materialism offer an especially rich framework in this regard. For the acquisitive nature of a consumption oriented society founds the inquisitive imperative of Louis' search for the obscurity which is the lost plenitude and substance of a life lived under the conditions of late-twentieth-century capitalism. Louis' practice is heavy with irony. It is built upon the way little, intentional, controlled stains and particular pours -- and here I mean the successive waves which in sufferance build the whole -- are constitutive of a surface which is a utopian promise, the divine cleansing of the great flood. As a function of the immediate, a mechanical and repetitious fall from grace is ennobled by a paradise regained. Weightlessness, elation, complete intoxication, is constituted through the melancholic and hangdog movements of gravity -- the shameful pace of species, elements, and things cast down at a velocity which is the natural state, the meta-temporal state, of all matter in motion.

If the previous chapter is melancholy, I offer an upbeat and jazzy conclusion. Chapter Five, entitled "Love American Style: Or How to Drive a [Square] Cat Wild, (By Kenneth Noland)", is a bawdy and raucous account of the anal, monumental, and stale Circle paintings of Kenneth Noland. Do not think for a moment, however, that I am dismissive of the high-minded project so often attributed to the repetitive works Noland painted between 1957-1961. Nor, that Noland's paintings are any less saturnine than Pollock's or Louis'. On the contrary, these paintings by Noland represent a moment of reckoning. Situated at the end of the era under study, they are perhaps indicative of a new mood, at the very least pointing to an undercurrent of sexual liberation on the horizon. Showcasing the paradoxical cheerfulness of Greenberg's despair at its most ribald, they turn something like

Louis' simple and strange vision of the twilight of civilization into a series of obscene puns. They are about the new cool, a new post-war American sound for a generation of swingers.

The crucial historical work here, focuses on imbricating Noland's practice in the character-analytic technique of Wilhelm Reich -- a subject which has remained tangential to all serious studies on the artist. With the aid of Reich's bleak version of the therapeutic process -- not unrelated to the structuralist approach of Sullivanianism -- I am able to galvanize a number of apparently unrelated, though recurrent themes in Noland's practice into a consistent project. Repetition, banality, anality, jazz, sex, the phonicity of expression, the corruption of discursivity, and the repressive character type, all become adjuncts to the figure of prosopopeia, the key trope of autobiography.

In sum, I argue that the metaphoric problematic of Noland's Circle paintings can be broken down into a network of connections and associations which stem form the fact of [square]ness. From this altogether prosaic description of the pictorial frame and surface, tuberous signifying chains of contiguity and concomitance extend in all directions, making for the oddest linkages and the most far-fetched of encounters. The [square], which is most obviously related through opposition to the circular nature of the whole, becomes, in the lingo of the Jazznick (which Noland was), a [square]ness that is not cool, a [square]ness that is middle-class and about conformity. Yet because this is quite literally painting about not being [square], painting about discourse as a corruption and expression as a structure of occlusion, it is about music like the cool sounds of jazz, rather than painting concerned with keeping up the good appearances of an anal and repressed middle-class. Circularity, which is most obviously related through opposition to the [square] nature of the whole becomes, in the lingo of the Reichian (which Noland was), a cipher of therapeutic failure, the trace of the unalterable transformative moment crystallized in the transference phenomenon, a concentric structure of deceit upon which the

allegorical form of a character structure depends. It becomes a body within Reich's patented Orgone Box, a box containing a concentric structure of rings that will again give access to a more essential wholeness and totality. Boxing as a therapy against the [square]ness or repression of conformity. Painting as a kind of boxing about swinging hard. A painting that packs such a punch that it knocks your lights out. But in so doing opens your eyes to the infinite pleasures of love. After all, it is about music. Or more precisely, the self-regulating mechanism of the sex-economy: the simultaneous expansion and contraction, exploding and imploding, climaxing and relaxing movement of the orgasm. Surface as a metaphor neither of action, of physics, or of the physical, but simply a rude, beautiful, materialist metaphor of the physical act of making love American style.

Chapter 1

"A Fabulous Invalid": "American Capitalism" at Mid-Century[1] (Not A Great Moment At All)

> The Good Life, its two swimming pools in every backyard, and a jet weekend to Bali. Or is it? Opinions differ. Differing opinions make good horse races and good material for *Life*, week by week. And when a situation affects practically all our readers, a special year end double issue is called for. So this years subject is our new found good life, growing out of our new found leisure.
>
> On one account there is no real argument. The new leisure is here. For the first time a civilization has reached a point where most people are no longer preoccupied exclusively with providing food and shelter. The shrinking work week now gives us about 75 free, waking hours as compared with a bare 55 two generations ago. Almost every employee in the land gets a two-day weekend and a vacation. Furthermore, people have the cash to enjoy their time off.[2]
>
> ("Special Double Issue on the Good Life", *Life*, Dec. 28, 1959)

Clement Greenberg's aesthetic criticism is founded on a theory of the good life. It is not the "Good Life" described by *Life* magazine. It is a version of what Theodore Adorno has described as "the melancholy science ... a region that from time immemorial was regarded as the true field of philosophy ... the teaching of the good life".[3] Greenberg's theory of the good life was developed in opposition to the picture of the nation and world which *Life* magazine's "Special double Issue on the Good Life" describes (Figure 1). Indeed, it was founded upon an emphatic opposition to the dominant representation of life in the United States of America in the late 1940s and 1950s. For if it had taken *Life* until December of 1959 to officially announce it, the "Good Life" had arrived much earlier. In its racy and optimistic mix of globe-trotting imperialism, *Life* presents a nation supremely confident of its place in the world, an America at the height of middle class prosperity and economic growth. Despite issuing from the close of the period we are interested in, the world it reveals is one born in the late 1940s and 1950s. In a sense, this

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[1] "A Fabulous Invalid": coined by one of the editors of *Commentary* with regard to Daniel Bell's book review of J.K. Galbraith's book *American Capitalism,* "The Prospects of American Capitalism: Today's Economists Somewhat Rosier Picture",(*Commentary*, Dec. 1952, v. 14, n. 6), p. 603.

[2] *Life*, (vol. 47, n. 26, Dec. 28, 1959), pp. 2-3.

[3] Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia, Reflections of a Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, (London: Verso, 1974), p. 15.

dissertation, like Greenberg's theory of the good life, is a look backward into the kind of undervalued and forgotten history constitutive of such a moment.

One need only defer to Greenberg's call for "a substantial art", the almost certain "development of a large, bland, Apollonian art" bound up in a tension with the Dionysian.

> The art of no country can live and perpetuate itself exclusively on spasmodic feeling, high spirits and the infinite subdivision of sensibility. A substantial art requires balance and enough thought to put it in accord with the most advanced view of the world obtaining at the time. Modern man has *in theory* solved the great public and private questions, and the fact that he has not solved them in practice and that actuality has become more problematical than ever in our day ought not to prevent, in this country, the development of a bland, large, balanced, Apollonian art in which passion does not fill in the gaps left by the faulty or omitted application of theory but takes off from where the most advanced theory stops, and in which an intense detachment informs all. Only such an art, resting on rationality but without permitting itself to be rationalized, can adequately answer contemporary life, found our sensibilities, and, by containing and vicariously relieving them, remunerate us for those particular and necessary frustrations that ensue from living at the present moment in the history of western civilization.
>
> What did Nietzsche say? He knew in spite of his profession of the Dionysian: *"Zukunftiges.--Gegen die Romantik der grossen 'Passion.'--Zu begreifen, wie zu jedem 'klassichen' Geschmack ein Quantum Kalte, Luziditat, Harte hinzugehort: Logic vor allem, Gluck in der Geistigkeit, 'drei Einheiten,' Konzentration, Hass gegen Gefuhl, Gemut, espirit , Hass gegen das Veilfache, Unsichere, Schweifende, Ahnende so gut als gegen das Kurze, Spitze, Hubsche, Gutige. . . ."* Balance, largeness, precision, enlightenment, contempt for nature in all its particularity -- that is the great and absent art of our age.[4]

Published in *Horizon*, an international journal funded and distributed abroad by the United States Information Service (USIS), Greenberg's article "The Present Prospects of American Painting" seems a profoundly optimistic vision of the "task facing culture in America". It seems to resonate with the kind of triumphal tone all to appropriate to an intellectual organ of America's propaganda machine abroad. "A bland, large, Apollonian art" seems befitting for a Great Golden Age alone. After all, if all one has to face are "those particular and necessary frustrations that ensue from living in the present moment in the history of western civilization", why not? Ultimately "why not", because an Apollonian art, "the great and absent art of our age" was only achievable through what Nietzsche knew "in spite of his profession

[4]Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture", (*Horizon*, Oct. 1947), in John O'Brian ed. *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, v.2, Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 168.

of the Dionysian". The Apollonian was the gravest of tradeoffs. "Those particular and necessary frustrations" were founded upon a fundamental separation, isolation, and alienation. The Apollonian crystallized a fundamental disunity within the self. In other words the Apollonian was central to Greenberg's melancholic theory of the good life. Rather than positioning him in complicity with the rigid structures of Cold War manicheism, the Apollonian -- what Nietzsche knew "in spite of his profession of the Dionysian" -- resonated with the aims of Adorno's "melancholy science", or Benjamin's "theory of mourning".

Although it will take the full five chapters of this thesis to provide an even assessment of the questions surrounding Greenberg's theory of the good life, as a sort of highly provisional beginning, we can say that Greenberg's hopes for a "bland, large, Apollonian art" were recognized by him as somehow inseparable from the kind of aims and objectives that a cultural version of the Marshall Plan, like the journal *Horizon*, was meant to fulfill. In what follows, I argue that "pensiveness"-- what Benjamin characterized as " above all of the mournful" -- is above all characteristic of Greenberg's writing, and as such is constitutive of a writing intended less for the imperial triumphs of the *Pax Americana,* than as a series of Panegyrics for what was to be.

The kind of "pensiveness" that drives Greenberg's theory of the good life is not an easy one to isolate or define. What we can say however, is that Greenberg's theory of the good life was entirely wrapped up in a chronic anxiety about what uses and abuses both modern art and his aesthetic criticism would be put. The point being, that "pensiveness", in Greenberg's writing, is an anxiousness about becoming. It is a concern with a military photograph of the atomic strike at Hiroshima becoming simply no more or no less than a supplement, to other, more mundane snapshots of the happy life of the American citizen (Figure 1). It is a concern for a predicament that could mobilize something like the bitter pessimism of W. H. Auden's 1948 Pulitzer Prize winning *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque*

Eclogue, into a defense of liberal democracy and the importance of a first strike nuclear potential. The significance of "pensiveness" in Greenberg's theory of the good life, was that it provided what was perhaps the only tactic for negotiating a dominant representation of the United States that swallowed up all dissent and criticism whole.

The predicament facing Greenberg in 1947 is described all too well in Serge Guilbaut's book, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art.* What faced an entire generation of American artists and intellectuals in the post-war period was a situation of massive contradictions and "impossible alternatives".[5] "The atomic age", Guilbaut writes, "revealed the powerlessness of the individual; the new situation implied that responsibility and irresponsibility could not be disentangled".[6] It was a paradox neatly summed up by Dwight Macdonald: "The Bomb is the natural product of the kind of society we have created. It is as easy, normal and unforced an expression of the American Way of Life as electric ice-boxes, banana splits, and hydromatic-drive automobiles".[7]

That Guilbaut ends up defending a traditional notion of critique (as in the politics of the journal *Dissent*) as in any way sufficient for such a predicament, remains a mystery. What Nietzsche "knew in spite of his profession of the Dionysian" was that living in the present condemned all representation to the corrupted plane of the ideological. It meant that the truth of experience could only emerge through its oppression, as a structure of occlusion, i.e., through the Apollonian aspect of a mask. This chapter addresses the general aspects of a social, political, and cultural context that would necessitate such a position.

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[5]Guilbaut quotes Dwight Macdonald here. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionsim, Freedom, and the Cold War,* trans. A. Goldhammer. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 107.

[6] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionsim, Freedom, and the Cold War*, p. 107.

[7] Guilbaut quotes Dwight Macdonald here. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionsim, Freedom, and the Cold War,* p. 108.

The tension which Greenberg's aesthetic criticism attempted to mine, was essential if painting, sculpture, and writing, was to embody the experience of life lived in the United States at mid-century. Not merely in terms of a rarefied perspective either, but one that would embody the kind of experience of life lived in all its variation, thickness and complexity. In other words, Greenberg's approach intentionally mined a communality in the experience of the modern, that was wholly unlike that dominant representation of the "Good Life" in the pages of *Life* Magazine. Greenberg's communality of experience actively courted the differences, the variations, and all the many modes of life that existed within the modern arena. His perspective on the period is in this sense unique. In fact, at a moment such as ours now, understanding the complexities of his aesthetic theory becomes a question of expediency. For the problems Greenberg addresses between 1947-1961, are serious ones, still confronting us today.

As a sort of entrance into the period, as well as to provide a framework for understanding the context of Greenberg's theory of the good life, I propose a select inventory of the modern moment, representations of the American experience which I feel underpin the editorial with which we began. Take Vance Packard's national bestseller, *The Status Seekers* (1957), from a few years earlier. Here again we are presented with a vision of America's culture of abundance, but specifically we are introduced to the changing nature of the work force, one breeding a new middle class citizen.

> In the past, the high school diploma was a ticket to admission to a white collar job. Now many millions of American youngsters have the ticket, so there is less prestige to putting on a white collar. Actually, the color of the collar is losing much of its significance as a label. Many steel workers don't wear blue collars any more on the job, they wear sports shirts. And so do supposedly white-collared missile engineers. [8]

[8]Vance Packard,*The Status Seekers* , (New York: David McKay, 1959), p. 34.

What a country. Sports shirts for everybody. Even "white-collared missile engineers" (Figure 2). In 1957, for Packard and others, class strife was becoming a thing of the past. The revolutionary impetus of the socially disenfranchised was apparently being diffused by a totally new systemic framework which encouraged, rather than denied, social mobility. It was a system which provided all the basic necessities of life and more, for everyone. A vast and expanding middle class was evidence to support America's triumphal accession to world power and leader of the free world. Even in face of the successes of the Soviet Space Agency with Sputnik, all indications pointed to American missile engineers keeping their shirts. The model of historical obsolescence Packard's pulp sociology is founded upon, goes far in describing a general optimistic appraisal of the American condition.

Take David Riesman's much more respectable account of the sport-shirt-wearing-steelworker in Gary, Indiana.

> One reason why the steelworkers have few problems with their leisure is that their work today is often quite leisurely and gregarious. It was not like that even thirty years ago when, as we know, they worked tens hours on day shift, fourteen on night shift, and twenty-four hours every other Sunday, and when the work was so hot and heavy that many men, on returning home, lay exhausted on the kitchen floor before they could get the energy to eat and tumble into bed. Now at the big sheet and tube mill in Gary the men often take naps on mattresses they have brought in, and cook meals on furnaces attached to the fiery furnaces; if a new foreman doesn't like the practice, production is slowed down until he does like it. Even the schools train the young people in this kind of comradely slow-down against the teachers and against the system generally, so that I sometimes think of school teachers as foremen who conspire with their pupils, the workers, to conceal the true state of affairs from top management, the principals, and from the parents who are the absentee stockholders and grouse now and again about their dividends. At any rate, since work has now become so relatively lacking in strain -- though it is not nearly so routinized in feeling as it may seem to be to observers of factory life -- the worker leaves the plant with a good deal of energy left, which carries him readily through his leisure hours.[9]

Family capitalism and private property, those two pillars of bourgeois society once sustaining class structure, were considered all but eclipsed by the new economic and social conditions which "American capitalism" and its egalitarian direction were fostering.[10] It was believed that both the upper and lower ends of the

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[9]David Riesman, "Some Changes in Leisure Attitudes", (*Perspectives*, n.5, Autumn 1953,) p. 101.

[10]This type of vision of American capitalism built upon historical obsolescence, is typical of liberalism in the 1950s. See especially Daniel Bell "The Prospects of American Capitalism", in *The End of*

social stratum were being rendered obsolete; the blue collar sector, as well as old money were merging with the new middle class. *Life* magazine's photo essay on the "End of (an) Elegant Private Play Yard" was proof of the pudding.

> When the wealthy Whitney family sold the Cornelius Vanderbilt, Whitney Estate in Old Westbury, L.I. recently, a rare, flourishing example of the opulence that surrounded ladies and gentlemen of the gay old days came to an end. The 530 acre estate is one of the last large strongholds of elegance on Long Island's fading Gold Coast. There the very rich and very few frolicked in a glass-roofed tennis house, swam in pools, played squash and were entertained in the 22 room manor house. Harry Payne Whitney, a son of the estate's builder, William C. Whitney, trained some of America's most famous thoroughbreds at the 68 stall stables and nearby racing track. His polo team trained in his private gym.
>
> The new proprietor, a real estate investor named Norman Blankman, paid $2 million for the property. He does not plan to subdivide it. Instead he hopes to preserve the spirit of the private pleasure garden and turn it into a swank resort club for the new leisure class.[11]

For *Life* magazine, the direction suggested by the democratization of the sport shirt was the promise of a great future and America's future lay in the hands of the middle class suburbanite. With the work week slimmed down to an unheard of 40 hours, the middle class, and by association the vast majority of Americans, were seen as members of a new and emerging suburban leisure class society. In 1955, A. C. Spectorsky had already identified the subspecies, "a new group, a new class, which no sociologist, economist, anthropologist of the past foresaw, and only a few contemporary social anthropologists have even recognized ... The name of the subspecies, Exurbanite; its habitat the Exurbs" (Figure 3).[12]

> The Exurbanite is well-to-do. So, again, are many Americans; but the exurbanite differs in that he is well-to-do no matter what his temporary economic status. Thus, he may be spectacularly unemployed, may be stealthily slipping around corners to pick up his unemployment insurance check, but he is still upper-bracket, still living at the absolute rock-bottom minimum standard of $12,000 a year. Unemployed, free lance, employed, or owner of his own business, he is always well-heeled.
>
> The exurbanite , at his most typical , is an idea man -- as we have called him, a symbol manipulator, that is, he writes, edits, or publishes books, magazines, or newspapers; writes, directs, designs, costumes, or appears in radio, television, motion picture, or Broadway

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Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 75-94. William H. Whyte *The Organization Man.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956). And David Riesman, *Individualism Reconsidered: And Other Essays*, (Glencoe: the Free Press of Glencoe, 1954).

[11] *Life*, (vol. 47, n. 26, Dec. 28, 1959), p. 64.

[12] A.C. Spectorsky, *The Exurbanites*, (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1955), p. 4.

entertainment's; or he is an artist, illustrator, photographer; or he composes popular songs, or commercial jingles; or he conceives, writes, lays outs, or otherwise perpetrates the advertising programs which in turn support the magazines, newspapers, radio, and television media; or he sells the time or space for such advertising. He is, then, a singularly commercial merchant of dreams for the rest of the nation. And in recent years he has even penetrated to America's symbolic heart: the Madison Avenue Approach has invaded the White House, for the purpose of making politics palatable...

These people, God save us all, set the styles, mold the fashions, and populate the dreams of the rest of the country. What they do, will be done, a few weeks or months later, by their counterparts ... What they decree, via such esoteric channels as the "What People are Talking About" column in *Vogue*, will all too often be picked up and actually talked about... What they tell us to buy, by God, we buy. How they tell us to act (even they themselves would never dream of acting so) is a blueprint for our behavior ...They are our nation's movers and shakers for ideas and opinions, for what is fashionable, and what is fun.[13]

This gin and martini sipping crowd were all the rage. With a two car garage, one for the Buick and one for the Volkswagon, this "Rockport" native, along with his sport shirt, the college graduate next door, and the man in the gray flannel suit one seat over in the commuter train speeding into New York, Chicago, or Detroit were all recognized as somehow emblematic of the arrival of a new Augustan age of plenty. What Henry Luce, the editor and publisher of *Time, Life,* and *Fortune,* would call "the American century", had apparently materialized. The question was whether the signs of prosperity were all just an illusion. Remember Tom Rath, Gregory Peck's character in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit?* His dilemma was common. It was the old problem of balancing out the necessity of the "rat race" with the possibility of the "Good Life", and therein, being true to oneself (Figure 4).

"Why do you want to work for the United Broadcasting Corporation?" Walker asked abruptly.

"It's a good company ..." Tom began hesitantly, and was suddenly impatient at the need for hypocrisy. The sole reason he wanted to work for United Broadcasting was that he thought he might be able to make a lot of money there fast, but he felt he couldn't say that. It was sometimes considered fashionable for the employees of foundations to say that they were in it for the money, but people were supposed to work at advertising agencies and broadcasting companies for spiritual reasons.

"I believe," Tom said, "that television is developing into the greatest medium for mass education and entertainment. It has always fascinated me, and I would like to work with it."[14]

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[13]A.C. Spectorsky, *The Exurbanites* , (New York: Berkeley Publishing, 1955), pp. 10 -11.

[14]Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray flannel Suit,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p.11.

Now that's insight. If nothing else, Sloan Wilson's character is entirely conscious of his own motivations; entirely aware of the divergent, possibly even schizophrenic existence that life under modernity presented. Needless to say, the wealth, happiness, and wide dispersion of the "new leisure class" was by no means a complete or in any way truthful representation of the United States in the first decade after World War II. There is a hint of its suspect nature seeping out in each of the accounts above. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* was, always at least, somewhat aware of his predicament (Figure 5). Even the editorial in *Life* magazine smacks of sarcasm. The myth of America as a contented white middle class society teetering on the edge of the Space Age, veiled innumerable social, racial, gendered, and geographical inequalities. There were good things about the new form of modernity, but there was also the very troubling, the rudest of disparities. Take Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* from 1955, or the damning words from Michael Harrington's book *The Other America.*

> Harlem, as well as every other Negro ghetto, is a center of poverty, of manual work, of sickness, and of every typical disability which America's underdeveloped areas suffer. It is on this very real and material base that the ghetto builds its unique culture.
>
> There is, on the very surface of Harlem life, the imminence of the Man.
>
> The Man is white. He has many guises; as policeman, as judge, as rent collector -- as authority made tangible. He is to be feared and hated, for the law is especially swift and hard upon the crimes and vices that grow within these crowded, littered streets. Ultimately, he becomes anyone with white skin. ("Offay", the old Negro slang term for a white, is foe in pig Latin) Because of this, Harlem is a place that is suspicious of all outsiders from the world of white America. It is stunted and sick, and the bread of its poverty has the taste of hatred and fear ... fear is basic to the ghetto. It gives Negro poverty a quality of psychological depth and torment that is unique among all the impoverished people in the United States ... Harlem, for all its brashness, for all the ubiquitous rhythms of rock 'n' roll, is afraid. And for good reason. The white has been the Man, and in many cases he still is ...
>
> This is the home of America's internal aliens. The people participate in the consumption cult of the white world -- the Negro is an "exaggerated American" Myrdal said, and Harlem is Hollywood carried to its logical conclusion the poet Thomas Merton wrote -- yet the Negroes are poor. They do not huddle together around a language and a common memory from overseas, waiting for a break, isolated from the lures of easy life in the magazines and on television.[15]

[15]Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States,* (New York, Macmillan Co. 1962), p. 63-65. It is interesting to note that the ontology of "the Man" becomes a recurrent trope in 'blaxploitation' films from the 1960s and 1970s. See especially *Shaft* with Richard Roundtree "giving it to the Man" and Isaac Hayes singing the trope in the movies title track.

Harrington's account is, of course, other to the dominant representation of the Good Life in the United States of America we are trying to frame. Other and entirely alien to the fact that it was not until 1957 that an African American family would be dutifully admitted into the suburb of Levittown. Other to the obfuscation's and illusions of health and happiness which an unconstrained media forwarded. Other to the most heinous types of nuclear testing, to the wide-spread popularity of McCarthyism and to breaches of human rights, both domestically and internationally.

All this, is I think, what makes Greenberg's theory of the good life a noteworthy account. Greenberg's theory of the good life was an important attempt to out-maneuver the smothering of critique that the dominant representation of America continually achieved. In a kind of macabre way, it belongs alongside other attempts like Harrington's to raise a voice of opposition. For now, though, we are after what is a widely held set of beliefs that contributed, some in more ways than others, to a kind of dominant representation of the United States during the period. To my mind, this America, an America of racial prejudice, sexual inequalities, untoward aggressions, isolationism and xenophobia, localisms, and nationalism of every species, requires a fuller and more complete account. Its construction, after all, was central to America's identity during the period in which we are interested.

Perhaps the only thing to capture the imagination and new mood of the moment better than the phenomenon of the new middle class was the lifestyle they all led in suburbia. Emerging as the jewel of post-war capitalism, the suburb had eclipsed the city and become the new tangible benefactor of a democratizing, progressive, and efficient industrial society. The affluent and prospering stratum of America's new middle class, which populated its manicured streets and modern ranch style homes (Figure 6), was considered at the core of a new frontier order and hailed as the purveyors and benefactors of the American dream. Against a backdrop

of unprecedented middle class prosperity, the high-school diploma, the white collar job, leisure time and the sport shirt seemed within the reach of every American.

The suburb was the great leveler. With an equal emphasis on social mobility, unlimited opportunity, and peaceful coexistence, the new suburban society encapsulated the sustainable future and progress attainable under capitalism. It strategically combated the frontal ideological critique of class structure under capitalism staged by the Communist menace (Figure 7). In William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man,* for instance, the suburban community is pitched on the cutting edge of the progressive democratic constellation. The close-knit kinship of the Old West frontier settlement, and more revealingly the theoretical elaboration of the utopian community, is evoked and considered analogous. Even private property itself had seemingly begun to lose its market value amidst the commune-like closeness. "To hoard possessions is frowned upon: books, silverware, and tea services are constantly rotated, and the children feel free to use one anothers bikes and toys without asking".[16]

To be entirely fair to Whyte, though, he balances this startling account of utopia in the suburbs with the specter of conformity. For Whyte, as much as for Daniel Bell, both editors at *Fortune* magazine, the new strength of the American system was built upon a self-sustaining insecurity and anxiety. All strata of the economic community, from business men, to managers, steelworkers, and missile engineers, were "captive of ideas which cause them to view the world with misgivings and alarm."[17] In other words, corporate America combated conformity by courting anxiety. We will come up against this particular tension again and again. Especially as we begin to zero in on Greenberg's theory of modern art, and its privileging of "pensiveness". For the time being, however, all we need to keep in mind is that the tension between anxiety and conformity will eventually resurface in a less naive, less repugnant form than it takes here in Whyte's extended editorial-

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[16] Whyte, *The Organization Man,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 210.
[17] Bell, "The Prospects of American Capitalism: Todays Economists Somewhat Rosier View", p. 608.

like-book-version of *Fortune* magazine.[18] For Whyte, the tension between anxiety and conformity is simply used as a defense of the corporate sphere as the last stronghold for freedom against the threat of "totalitarianism". In other words, it operates as a crucial mechanism for separating the men from the boys; the solipsistic "yes man" from executive material. This guise is not all that much of an anomaly. Our cursory glance at popular fiction and the media suggests it as a recurring trope in the period (Figure 8). "The hidden terror in big business" was the only way a character like Jackson Pollett (sic) or Tom Rath could stay one step ahead of the game. Mind you, that is why Tom Rath is an "Organization Man", one of the "managerial elite", an executive, a "decision maker", an "exurbanite", or "ideas man", precisely because he is always second guessing the system, by managing his anxiety as it arises.

> The man who drives a Buick special and lives in a ranch type house , just like thousands of other ranch type houses, can assert himself as effectively and courageously against his particular society as the bohemian against his particular society. He usually does not, it is true ... but if he does, the surface uniformity's can serve quite well as protective coloration. The organization people who are best able to control their environment, rather than be controlled by it, are well aware that they are not to easily distinguishable from the other in the outward obeisance's paid to the good opinions of others. And that is one of the reasons they do control. They disarm society. [19]

Here it is again, the "organization man" with the "right stuff" is so clever that he can avoid Hegel's old, but apparently now out-worn philosophical dictum of self-mystification. Luckily, at the end of his book, Whyte provides a sampling of the typical battery of psychological tests that our boy -- all good organization men were ex-G. I.'s -- would be faced with during the job interview. So he can practice responses, just in case (Figure 9).

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[18]Compare the spectre of conformity which*The New Republic* raises in its editorial "Conformity vs. Freedom" of March 9, 1953. Here conformity of a McCarthyist brand "comes to be equated with patriotism and anti-communism". "Editorial: Conformity Vs. Freedom", (*The New Republic*, v.128, n.10, March 9), 1953.

[19]Whyte, *The Organization Man* , p.11.

If the "Organization man" has any future, his wife does not fair nearly as well. Doing the work of gendering to the utmost, conformity in the case of the average woman psychologically debilitates to the edge of neurosis. In other words, she is better off doing the shopping. Let the "ideas man" come up with the products, let his wife stupidly consume. The feminine becomes a type -- a suburban Pasiphae consumed by her passions and emotions, unable to manage them -- not very different from the character attributes of the go-nowhere "yes man". Better off if she just stays home, does the work around the house, and drinks coffee with her neighbors.

Among suburban housewives, it seems, the rule of conformity cannot be separated from experience and viewed in the third person, as in Tom Rath's interior monologue. Thus, neighborly competition goes much deeper than simply a friendly and communal striving for the "Good Life". Rather, it often extends to the heavy "Jonesing" between households to produce a better casserole. Or in Whyte's most troubling vision, it pushes the housewife to the brink of paranoia, where the anxious homemaker in the new suburb is "... so ashamed of the emptiness of her living room, that she smear(s) the picture window with *Bon-Ami*: and not until a dinette set arrived did she wash it off."[20] Constructions of gender and mental health were of course serious, real, and widespread problems. My intent here is not to make light of them, so much as to raise them in a manner that they begin to both problematize those constructions of the "Good Life" that were so pervasive, and to address them in such a way that is as facile and naive as the workings of hegemony itself. If this requires a pursuit down into the same impossible depths to which hegemony goes to insure its "iron rule", then so be it.

The point is, that the spectacular ascendancy of the middle class, its ways, its means, and its locations, captivated the widest spectrum of social and political commentary. Of course these constructions of identity were under contestation, but

[20]Whyte, *The Organization Man* , p. 313.

as the paradigmatic sign for the social body as a whole, suburban middle class experience circumscribed a decisive set of qualities in the context of the Cold War that were necessarily devoid of hierarchies. Often, as in the examples above, this struggle for representation took the most ridiculous forms. Ridiculous, but no less revealing. Certainly there were "Other America's", but it was the makeup of this America which was undoubtedly the fulcrum of cultural politics between 1947-1960.

The championing of the suburbs and its wise middle class was typical of Truman's Democratic platform in the 1948 presidential elections. It is equally true of Truman's four year Presidency. A similar, though intensified, cultural politics would remain central to the Eisenhower campaign of 1952 and Republican policies throughout the two terms of Eisenhower's presidency. The celebration of widespread consumerism, affluence, and the suburban model for leisure -- all focused around the television set and the backyard barbecue (Figure 10) -- was central to the Republican vision and as well its galvanizing potential among disparate voting publics. Indeed, the middle class had swung the 1952 election in favor of the Republicans. Though a military man leading the nation into the second-half of the twentieth century didn't hurt either. It was a landslide Republican victory in the suburbs -- 66% in Levittown, Long Island, and over 69% in Park Forest , Illinois -- that gave Eisenhower his first term in office.[21] While the *Chicago Tribune* attributed the large Republican vote in the suburb of Park Forest "...to the beneficial influence of fresh air on erstwhile Democrats", Whyte again finds conformity lurking at the door step.[22] The suburbs...

> have become the second great melting pot ... As the newcomers to the middle class enter suburbia, they must discard old values, and their sensitivity to those of the Organization man is almost statistically demonstrable. Figures rather clearly show that people from big, urban Democratic wards tend to become Republican and, if anything, more conservative than those whose outlook they are unconsciously adopting ... something does happen to Democrats when they get to suburbia.[23]

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[21]Whyte, *The Organization Man* , p. 300.
[22]Whyte, *The Organization Man* , p. 300.
[23]Whyte, *The Organization Man* , p. 300.

The particular strategies and appropriation of the suburban middle class by the powerful political machinery of the Republican Party goes far in explaining the increasingly hegemonic construction of American identity that this socio-geographic entity came to occupy. But again, the United States had not changed, and was not changing as much as certain Cold War representations were suggesting. Economically and racially disenfranchised communities remained in abundance everywhere. In fulfilling a wide range of ideologically contentious issues, this kind of suburban pastoral vision, many much more simplistic than Whyte's version, focused upon domestic consumerism and prosperity as the sole weapon against anti-communism. Under the guise of the affluent society the American dream under Eisenhower was constructed as fulfilled, ready for export, and potentially damning to communist subversion. The suburban middle class was neatly appropriated as the theoretical rationalization and legitimation of both domestic and international Republican policies.[24] Suburban consumerism was to render the manichean choices of the Third World nations and the communist countries themselves incapable of turning down advanced industrial capitalism and its sensational encapsulation of modernity. As David Howard has convincingly argued, the military industrial complex focused in upon the economic, social, and psychological health of the middle class individual, to offer up the crucial coordinates of a national identity.[25] Consumerism was constructed as morally secure and the American way.

This benevolent and overly optimistic construction of egalitarian developments, during Truman's presidency, or over the two Republican terms, was for all intents and purposes unchanging and generally reproduced *ad infinitum* in

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[24]This platform would continue throughout the 1950s, culminating in the famous "Kitchen debate" in Moscow, in 1958.

[25]See Howard's argument on how the Hard Progressive and the Kennedy administration would coopt this middle class lineage into the late 1950s and early 1960s. David Howard, *Bordering on the New Frontier: Modernism and the Military Industrial Complex in the United States and Canada, 1957 -1965,* (University of British Columbia: Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 1993).

the popular media. As the most dominant construction of the period, it necessarily provides the decisive framework for entering into dialogue with Greenberg. Again, I emphasize the importance of Greenberg's account lies in the fact that he was able to negotiate -- at least in some minor way and perhaps in a way more successful than others -- this complete clamp down on opposition. We are not so much dealing with what has been called a Cold War consensus , as a situation in which any and all critique was swallowed up whole. Certainly political dissidence might have been at an all time low, but nevertheless dissident perspectives did exist. What Greenberg and a number of other liberal intellectuals that are of any interest, were able to do, was keep alive the image of the atomic bomb, as one pole of a dialectical double beat. The paradox of the situation is, I think, all but etched into the pages of *Commentary,* for instance -- a journal boasting an impressive editorial staff including Clement Greenberg as associate editor, Robert Warshow, Reuel Denney, Irving Kristol, and Elliot Cohen. But the massive contradictions of the age were no less kept alive in journals like *Partisan Review, The Nation,* or *Dissent.*

If we are to gain any perspective on Greenberg's particular form of opposition we need briefly to enter into a few of the dialogues circulating within this vital grouping of intellectual journals. They are representative of one of the main trends in critique, and had been among the dominant voices of opposition since the late 1930s. First of all, we need to remember that the moment we are concerned with was the end of a long process of apostasy.[26] It is an apostasy in the intellectual and arts community well documented by Serge Guilbaut. Here is Guilbaut's account of the general grouping of intellectuals and artists that would constitute the core of New York's scene, the same fundamental grouping with which we are concerned.

> ...from compromise to compromise, refusal to refusal, adjustment to adjustment, the rebellion of the artists, born of frustrations within the Left, gradually changed its significance until

[26]See Alan M. Walds excellent analysis of these processes in his book *The New York Intellectuals: The Decline of the American Anti Stalinist Left.* (Chapel Hell: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

> ultimately it came to represent the values of the majority, but in a way (continuing the modernist tradition) that only a minority was capable of understanding. The ideology of the avant-garde was ironically made to coincide with what was becoming the dominant ideology, that embodied in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s book *The Vital Center* . . . Avant-Garde art succeeded because the work and the ideology that supported it, articulated in the painters' writings as well as conveyed in images, coincided fairly closely with the ideology that came to dominate American political life after the 1948 presidential elections. This was the "new liberalism" set forth by Schlesinger in *The Vital Center*, an ideology that, unlike the ideologies of the conservative right and the Communist left, not only made room for avant-garde dissidence but accorded to such dissidence a position of paramount importance[27]

In what follows we will both build upon Guilbaut's claims and problematize them in particular ways. What is great about Guilbaut's book is precisely the fact that it spectacularizes the gritty political maneuverings of its art world players. Thus, much of the criticism leveled at the study misses the point. What is at issue for Guilbaut is the aestheticization of the political. The position and the verve with which he argues his point, that the politics of the "new liberalism" had "not only made room for avant-garde dissidence, but accorded to such dissidence a politics of paramount importance", has to be retained. This is the force of his account. It is what drives the argument at its fiery pace, toward its inexorable conclusion. We can't simply talk about painting in relation to the political any more. They now exist as polar opposites. Of course, painting is just another category of the political, one more realm colonized by capitalism, one more "idea" stolen by the new Babylon, but the implications are that Modern art had realized this, and more. Because, if this is a book about an irrecoupable theft, a book where the subject has become invisible, where the idea of modern art has become part of a "society of spectacle", a culture of glistening surfaces; it is also an account of a diametrically opposed process wherein Modern art flees in the face of its own theft, toward something other than the political, social, or moral realm. We need to accept the weight of Guilbaut's argument, yet at the same time begin to make some more subtle distinctions within the constellation he calls the "new liberalism". In sum, we need to separate out the ideological repercussions of the "new liberalism" from the specific attempts of its

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[27]See Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionsim, Freedom, and the Cold War,* trans. A. Goldhammer. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 3.

key players to remain ideologically neutral. In sum, we have to make the paradoxical claim that political disengagement was, in fact, the only successful form of political critique. Nothing really that new, but a hard-earned lesson nonetheless. It is the paradox of life under liberal democracy and modernity more generally.

The loosely dissident perspective of C. Wright Mills offers perhaps the most interesting entrance in this regard. Though generally not associated with what has been called the "new liberalism", the sociology of Mills stands as a kind of barometer of the processes of de-radicalization and political acquiescence which had devastated the American Left by the late 1940s. In his 1951 book, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes,* Mills offers a critique of the American situation relatively untainted by the dominant spirit of triumphalism (Figure 10). During a period of mounting anti-communism this was not a position easily maintained. In the following passage he characterizes and statistically documents the meteoric rise of the suburban middle class.

> For them, as for the wage-workers, America has become a nation of employees for whom independent property is out of range. Labor markets, not control of property, determine their chances to receive income, exercise power, enjoy prestige, learn and use skills ... Of the three broad strata composing modern society, only the new middle class has steadily grown in proportion to the whole. Eighty years ago, there were three-quarters of a million middle class employees; by 1940, there were over twelve and a half-million. In that period the old middle class increased 135% ; wage-workers, 225%; and the new middle class, 1600%.[28]

In Mills' reading, the new middle class was distinct from its forebears, in that this burgeoning and broad strata was, by and large, salaried white collar employees from the corporate or bureaucratic sector. Though the democratic leveling implicit to Mills' mapping of the new middle class is greeted optimistically, it is not conceived of as constituting a single, horizontal, and monolithic stratum, but rather an ascending pyramidal formation of increasing and surreptitious hierarchy.[29] Like

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[28]C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes,* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 63-64.

[29]Mills writes: "The great bulk of the new middle class are the lower middle income brackets, but regardless of how social stature is measured, types of white collar men and women range from almost the top to almost the bottom of modern society". *White Collar,* p. 64.

other liberal intellectuals, Mills refused to acknowledge the existence of an altogether leveled social landscape, like that topography posited by Truman and Eisenhower. Rather, America's "classless" nature was suspect, and linked to a social and institutional order which encouraged and hinged upon social mobility. Unlike more traditional social orders, always seeking stability through the maintenance of more traditional class lines, the American model had in Mills opinion a social dynamic built in, one veiling its organization of power. Mills attributed the evolution and progressive occultation of class lines to the peculiarities of American bureaucracy and corporate capitalism which had colonized a new axis for stratification hinging on occupation. With this new formalization of power in mind, Mills viewed the American situation and its encapsulation within the suburban and corporate hierarchy as breeding ever more insidious forms of domination. While the American system was providing opportunity, power was simultaneously collecting at a dew point -- which he would later link to and posit as the "power elite".[30]

In general, Mills' critique of the "classless" society as rather a more structured and differentiating one is a common feature of most informed liberal criticism during the period. What is also typical is the assumption that ultimately, capitalism was the only workable model for continued progress under modernity. Which is to say, that the American system was simultaneously debilitating freedom, as well as providing what little opportunity there was for freedom. The irony of this formulation is crucial. Indeed, such ambivalence and paradox is at the very heart of the "new liberalism". Such was the predicament in Daniel Bell's mind that warranted the adoption of John Kenneth Galbraith's term "American capitalism".[31]

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[30]See C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956).

[31]It was a stage of capitalism distinct from its precursors, that was apparently proving the "secular stagnation theory" of Keynesian economics wrong. By 1952 it seemed to most that America's new form of capitalism, rather than working "to calcify" society, as it had in the past, actually worked to promote change, and that at a dynamic pace, equal only to technological innovation in the techniques of production. Daniel Bell, "The Prospects of American Capitalism: Todays Economists Somewhat Rosier View", (*Commentary*, Dec. 1952), p. 603. A substantially altered version of this essay appears in *The*

The same predicament that would also warrant the knighting of "American Capitalism" as that "Fabulous Invalid", by the editors of *Commentary.*

For now, what we can say of the various tendencies of the "new liberalism" is that freedom was inextricably related to repression. Those processes contributing to uniformity and cultural leveling were the same complex of forces that were solidifying elites at the upper echelon of the social hierarchy. If there is a shared theoretical standpoint in the grouping it is founded upon this ironic, double edged movement.[32] Distinct from the position of the Republicans and from Truman's Democrats, its spectrum of positions embraced the phenomenon of the suburbs, the middle class, and consumerism in only the most highly qualified of manners. Dispensing with the wholesale conflation between consumerism and freedom, one sees instead a focus upon certain highly circumscribed and positive functions only just sustained by consumerism. Rather than entirely dismissing the processes of social and cultural leveling, we are faced by an ironic model tensioning the constraints and limits of the new middle class with only the slimmest possibility for emergent and aspiring taste groupings to coalesce from within the same dynamic. In sum, we are dealing with, a very complex and astute accounting of modernity, one certainly warranted and justified by the aporia of life under "American capitalism".[33]

1947 and 1948 were crucial years for establishing a loosely unified framework within liberal circles. 1948 saw the publication of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom,* a book that Guilbaut has argued serves as a kind of ideological keynote for the constellation. It delineated the altogether changed post-

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End of Ideology: On the Exhaustian of Political Ideas in the Fifties, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[32]Jurgen Habermas has criticized the constellation on precisely these grounds. He writes its project hinges upon two decisive and interconnected propositions: "on the one hand, anti communism, understood in terms of the concept of *totalitarianism,* and on the other, anti populism, based on the *theory of democratic rule by elites.*" Jurgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians Debate.* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989), p. 24.

[33]The gracious and hard criticism of Daniel Bell at an early stage in the writing of this and the next chapter provided me with endless proof of this complex and astute accounting.

war climate and attempted to secure the center of the American political landscape. With the lines of the Cold War being drawn in Eastern Europe, the prospect of a Truman presidency, the crushing defeat of Wallace and the communists, the constant reminder of the Republican right, Schlesinger's "Vital Center" crystallized a number of diverging positions at an opportune moment (Figure 11). Balance was central to *The Vital Center's* political economy. It pinpointed freedom equidistant from the extremes of communism and fascism. The only alternative to the "radical evil" and fanatical grip on the individual that these forms of "totalitarianism" posed was a critical and distanced perspective, one advocating a sort of parenthetical isolation, analogous to a party position in the epicenter of the political fray.[34]

The key was an economic system that was both self-regulating and self-adjusting. For Schlesinger, a free market in a mixed economy provided the most constructive parameters for freedom. A system incorporating checks and balances, as such, could stem the "totalitarian" impetus leading toward the eventuality of single class oppression. In the American situation, for instance, it would potentially block any alliance forged between government and industry.[35] For Schlesinger and others, if capitalism was to operate fairly, it needed initial and indirect ground rules to run productively and smoothly.[36] In other words, freedom was thought sustainable only when the economic base was separate from the political power of the state. Schlesinger writes:

> In every system, as history has finally taught us, the tendency of the ruling class toward oppression can be checked only by the capacity of the other classes for resistance. And resistance requires essentially an independent base from which to operate. It requires privacy, funds, time, newsprint, gasoline, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom from fear; it requires resources to which its own access is secure and which remain relatively inaccessible to the ruling class. Resistance is possible, in short, only when the base is clearly separate from the state. Under a system of total state

[34]Hannah Arendt uses the term "radical evil" to describe "totalitarianism" in her book. Hannah Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Meridian Press, 1958).

[35]A model tending toward a completely free market with the autonomy of the corporate sector assured, as backed by some Republican ideologues, was equally inadequate.

[36] This suggested a system of rough guidelines subject to and allowing federal intervention for social and welfare legislation. The state apparatus was to "aim at establishing conditions for economic decisions, not at making all the decisions. It should create an economic environment favorable to business policies which increase production and then let the free market carry the ball as far as it can." Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1949), p. 182.

ownership, the sinews of resistance are doled out to the opposition only by the charity of the ruling class.[37]

Apparently in Schlesinger's program for the "Vital Center", the pluralism of social interests could be assured only through the balancing of tensions internal to the system. The problem, and Schlesinger knew it, was the meteoric rise of a middle class. In the few short years since the war the growth of the middle class was undermining the nature of resistance and freedom. Since the middle class had in effect acceded to economic power, its other disparate forms of influence had to be stripped. The implications of this theorization are clear: middle class consumerism and popular culture are equated with a populist and totalitarian impetus. With the middle class' accession to a position of economic importance as well as political influence, the mechanisms of power were turning toward a corrupting "totalitarian" course. In general, the politics of the "new liberalism" would be directed at conservatizing attempts to stem the increasingly pervasive power of this new middle class. For the "new liberalism", the analogy between the dynamics of Stalinist Russia and the processes guiding the post war United States were all too clear. The cultural leveling and mounting populism of a consumption-oriented middle class and the ascendancy of that class, both politically and economically, was clearing the way for ruling class oppression: a middle class, ruling class oppression.

The same year as Schlesinger's book appeared, David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney published *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character.* In many ways it was a book dealing with the same questions that Schlesinger was attempting to articulate in the political sphere, the difference lying in Riesman's social and psychological orientation. *The Lonely Crowd* was a study concerned with the failure of classical liberalism's own project for the individual, and given the general parameters delineated above, whether this project

[37]Schlesinger , *The Vital Center,* p. 150-151.

was itself salvageable any longer. No surprise then, that in *The Lonely Crowd* Riesman delineates a social-psychological reading of American society focusing specifically on the tension between anxiety and conformity in the new middle class individual. Riesman treats conformity as the fundamental building block of all societies. His assumption: "that character is socially conditioned ... that there is some observable relation between a particular society and the kind of social character it produces ... Since the social function of character is to permit conformity, it appears that the various types of social character can be defined most appropriately in terms of the modes of conformity that are developed in them."[38]

Expurgated of all class analysis, the universal constant affecting all human relationships is the "vague disquietude of lonely individuals."[39] In each of three stages of societal development which Riesman breaks the historical development of capitalism into,[40] this "vague disquietude" manifests itself in a different form of conformity or social bond. In the inner-directed society, a character structure given over to inner-direction governs social relationships: "the source of direction for the individual is "inner", in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized, but nonetheless inescapably destined goals".[41] In distinction to the character type of "inner-direction", shaped by the structures of an earlier stage of entrepreneurial or mercantile capitalism, "American capitalism" was producing an "other-directed" character type. This "other-directed" character, typical of the new middle class, did not possess the same inheritance of pre set goals, i.e., goals "implanted early in life by the elders". It could not. Life was moving too fast in the post war economy. Whether it was the result of the corporate transfer, consumer obsolescence, or simply the information overload, stable and long-term

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[38]David Riesman, with Reuel Denney, and Nathan Glazer *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1950, p.6.
[39]Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, p. 13.
[40] Linked up with demographics, Riesman identifies 3 modes of conformity: the society of high growth potential, or tradition-directed society; the society of transitional population growth, or inner-directed society; and lastly the society of incipient population decline, or other-directed society. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, p. 9.
[41]Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, p. 15.

relations or connections between people were seemingly disintegrating. The only way bonds of conformity could be established in this predicament was vicariously through the peer group.

> What is common to other-directed's is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual -- either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends and the mass media. This source is of course internalized in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early. The goals toward which the other-directed person strives shifts with that guidance: it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life.[42]

"Other-direction" was the principle characterological response to America's new economy of abundance. The psychological mechanism dominating the "other-directed" character was an internalized "radar sensing device". In *Time* magazine's cover story on Riesman, the difference between "inner-directed striving" and "other-directed striving" -- where "only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others" -- is perfectly illustrated (Figure 12). Without the guidance of the "inner-directed" character's "gyroscope", conformity and belongingness were in a continual state of renegotiation. Social bonding (now) depended on a kind of high-tech guidance system. What ever vicarious and simulated bonding occurred, was (now) determined in a manner similar to the blips on a radar screen. "Other-direction" acknowledged the progressive functionalism implicit to modernization; it registered the intensified constraints of consumerism, the work place, and the heightened effects of the mass media.[43] Riesman notes:

> With the growth of monopolistic competition, the way to get ahead is not so much to make a better mouse trap but rather to package an old mousetrap in a new way, and then to sell it by selling oneself first. People feel they must be able to adapt themselves to other people, both to manipulate them and be manipulated by them. This requires the ability to manipulate oneself, to

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[42]Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, p. 22.

[43]Daniel Bell's notion of an internalized panopticon is similar. Both grapple with the individual's mechanism of internalization -- the relations of the corporate and industrialized environment become the structural parameters for personality formation. See Bell's "The Prospects of American Capitalism".

become a "good package", to use a phrase current among personnel men. These pressures are, of course, not confined to business, but operate also in the professions, in government, and in academic life.[44]

Riesman's "radar sensitive types", such as the corporate manager, gained value and direction in life from the ever-changing whims of the peer group, continually responding through approbation and acquiescence to the psychological forces that surrounded him. With no fixed set of internalized parameters to live by, Riesman's account was a reformulation of Freud's original conception of the super ego. In fact, Riesman thought that "American capitalism" had rendered the latter account obsolete; the super-ego having been replaced by a rather more diffuse, obscure and temporal form of socialization.[45] This presented an absolutely decisive shift. For if the super ego had at one time been the encapsulation of authority which the ego would rebel against, as well as develop and mature in response to, resistance and individual autonomy were (now) being undermined. Autonomy and creativity was being drained from the individual by the very conditions of modernity.

Contemporary society, especially in America, no longer requires and rewards the old enterprise and zeal. This does not mean the economic system itself is slowing down: total production may continue to rise; but it can be achieved by institutionalizing technological and organizational advance, for instance in research departments, management counsel, and corporate planning staffs. The invention and adoption of new improvements can be routinized, built into the system, so to speak, rather than into men who run the system. Therefore, the energies of management turn to industrial and public relations, to oiling the friction's not of machines but of men. [46]

But this is not all that Riesman is about. The logic here is not nearly so gloomy as I have suggested: his was a defense of individualism after all. In a sense, Riesman was focusing on the progressive debilitation of freedom, in hope that some new possibility for freedom was being sustained. The crucial assumptions here rest

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[44]Riesman, "The Saving Remnant: An Examination of Character Structure",(*The Years of the Modern*, 1949), in *Individualism Reconsidered: And Other Essays*, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1954), p.104.
[45]Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, p. 44.
[46]David Riesman, "The Saving Remnant: An Examination of Character Structure" (1949). reprinted in *Individualism Reconsidered*, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1954), p.104.

on his concern for motivation and goal orientedness. Perhaps the original assumption proceeded along these lines: if goals and directions are continually changing, how and why was a motive remaining intact? If "other-direction" was rendering the individual susceptible to propaganda, advertising, and all those other insidious forms of persuasion worked on the individual by the mass media, the corporate world, and capitalism, it seemed plausible that a new mechanism for freedom within this structural relation might be isolated.[47] It seems that while progressive instrumentalism was the fateful destiny of modernity, the moment was equally propitious.

Riesman's book was a best seller. It captured perfectly the mood of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Some read it as hard hitting sociological criticism; others as mildly pessimistic; others still, as the ravings of a one time "fellow traveler". Some, like those authors quoted earlier, would have lapped it up for its mapping out of a new genre; and undoubtedly there were those, like that emerging middle class that Riesman was trying to define, who found in it a kind of bedside breviary, the "self-help" they had long been waiting for, and a celebration of "themselves" as leaders in a new dawning epoch of corporate capitalism. Among liberal intellectuals, Riesman's great appeal was that his psycho-social reading of American society had unearthed a tactic for sustaining a kind of individualism and utopian thinking in contrast to and amidst the pervasive and oppressive conformity of the surrounding culture. It buttressed the "new liberalism's" larger political project and gave a certain cultural resonance to its terms. It was not identical to *The Vital Center's* platform for a democratic rule by elites, but its individualist based ethos was close.

Whether Riesman saw his salvaging of the individual, in terms of a politically viable solution identical to Schlesinger is, I think, highly unlikely. Though what we can say, is that in Riesman's general method of negotiating the

[47]Riesman's work comes out of various traditions. If the Freudian inheritance of a notion of the mutability of the instincts is important, then one should note the debt to Max Weber's study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

same complex of problems that Schlesinger faced, a fairly cohesive set of concerns emerges which focused on the tension between individual agency and the pressures of the surrounding culture. Or more to the point, a tension between a character structure which was mutable, and a kind of "motorial reaction" that drove character to perform patterns of behavior which were independent of structuring by capitalism. We might say that if pessimism was housed by a character structure, some hope was pinned on the transformative moment that inevitably drove motivation toward beliefs, decisions, actions and practices.

The more fleeting and temporal label of this permanent and predictable vection from the individual to the social was the emotional economy. Emotion was constitutive of a structural relation between the individual and the surrounding culture. For Riesman, it was predicated on a kind of inertial or mechanical trajectory from the individual toward the social. It was the structural parameters of the emotional economy that defined the specific bonds of conformity in the "other-directed" society. The crucial assumption being, that if the disparate workings of capitalism could re-equip and redefine ones relation to the world, then that rechanneling or retooling maintained some meta-historical constant that might open up the pragmatic possibility for a new kind of individualism.

Toward the task of reviving this possibility Riesman introduces the conception of "the nerve of failure". Its designation, calling up contemporary fears of rationality, offered an avenue for the continuance of the project of modernity, through a problematizing of reasons totalizing imperative. It was a strategy for continuing to place one's faith in the makeup of a utopian impulse, while accepting the finite limits of the Enlightenment project. It was a strategy for the individual to sustain the possibility of creative thinking, in face of the moral authority and conformity of the middle class. Here is Riesman giving the whole problem a suitably graven description.

> The "nerve of failure" is the courage to face aloneness and the possibility of defeat in ones personal life or one's work without being morally destroyed. It is, in a larger sense, simply the nerve to be oneself when that self is not approved of by the dominant social ethic of society ... (It) is needed only for really heretical conduct: when one renounces even the company of misery and takes the greater risk of isolation -- that is, the risk of never rejoining the company. [48]

The "nerve of failure" advocated a direct confrontation with the "vague disquietude of lonely individuals".[49] It purposely tried to access the psychological complex of disquietude or anxiety upon which the social order was built, that made and forced its individuals to form bonds and relations. Rather than claiming to break these bonds, instead, it proposed a method to understand their structural terms. The motive force of anxiety was, in a sense, the path followed if one was to understand conformity. With the choice for anxiety, the conscious decision to "leave the company" of others would conceivably lift the pressures to conform off one's shoulders. As the principal hedge against the threat of progressive functionalism, the "nerve of failure" localized judgment as the anxiety-ridden choice for difference. Against a background provided by "totalitarian" man abroad, and the evolution of a kind of home grown "totalitarian" man stateside, true freedom was characterized by continually confronting the choice for anxiety.

Riesman's kind of understanding, was a response to the very real pressures shaping the individual in modernity. Whether coincidental or not, he had hit upon a kind of locus for a great many cultural issues and dialogues. Indeed, the tension between anxiety and conformity constituted the poles of what is perhaps the most crucially recurring axis for defining freedom during the early Cold War period. It is a tension that Greenberg was well aware of and one will ultimately take us to the core of the contradictory nature of Greenberg's aesthetic. If, within the constellation of discourses with which we are concerned conformity functioned as a kind of shibboleth for everything threatening in the nature of "totalitarianism", everything problematic in the corporate structure, anxiety offered a countervailing

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[48]Riesman, "A Philosophy for Minority Living:The Jewish Situation and the "Nerve of Failure". (*Commentary*, vol. 6, no. 5, Nov. 1948), p. 413.
[49]Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, p. 13.

force. Consider the example of Schlesinger again, now that we know that the fear of "totalitarianism" his politics harbors was a cipher for a more general anxiety about conformity itself.

> The final triumph of totalitarian man has been the creation of man without anxiety -- of "totalitarian man". Totalitarianism sets out to liquidate the tragic insights which gave man a sense of his limitations. In their place it has spawned a new man, ruthless, determined, extroverted, free from doubts or humility, capable of infallibility. And on the higher echelons of the party, infallible. Against totalitarian certitude, free society can only offer modern man devoured by alienation and fallibility.[50]

For Riesman, as well as Schlesinger, freedom hinged upon the risk and mobilization of anxiety incurred through facing individual choices. Rather than an abandoning of choice, a relinquishing of that problematic -- an "Escape From Freedom", as in Erich Fromm's book title of the same name, to the safety of the group[51] -- the constellation of discourses making up the "new liberalism" advocated an embrace of uncertainty. "Freedom", Schlesinger continues, "has brought with it frustration rather than fulfillment, isolation rather than integration. 'Anxiety' writes Kierkegaard, 'is the dizziness of freedom'; and anxiety is the official emotion of our time ... Most men prefer to flee choice, to flee anxiety, to flee freedom."[52] The free man, the historically self-conscious individual, had necessarily to embrace his own uncertitude. In this often quoted passage Schlesinger links up the concept of freedom precisely to the anxiety of isolation, to an unlimited spectrum of choices presented to the individual when cut off from one's company and faced with "the risk of never rejoining the company". Though the positions we have been discussing operate on a number of different levels, though they differ in nuance, emphasis, and subtlety, there is a crucial interconnectedness hinging on this one single polarity. The tactic for pursuing freedom through the bracketing of one's own personal anxiety is a shared axiom encountered again and again.

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[50]Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom.* p. 56.
[51]Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom,* (New York: Farrar and Reinhardt, 1941).
[52]Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom.* p. 52.

We do not want to give any one person to much credit in all of this remaking of liberalism, however. Riesman's study on the American character, like Schlesinger's work on the political landscape, was part of a fairly consistent set of issues, "compromises", "refusals", and "adjustments", that were the result of wide spread processes of apostasy. Discourses ranging from politics, sociology, anthropology, and the arts, to psychiatry and the physical sciences were all effected. Such is the case with the interdisciplinary perspective of The Washington School of Psychiatry. If not the fundamental perspective on the problem of anxiety and the individual the researches of the Washington School certainly represented the richest accounting. Operating mainly as a teaching facility, it had two institutions that bore its name -- one in Washington D. C., the other in New York City. Its publication, *Psychiatry: The Journal for the Operational Statement of Interpersonal Relations,* was a joint venture of the two locations, its faculty, and a wide spectrum of contributors. On the faculty and editorial committee were Harry Stack Sullivan, Erich Fromm, Frieda Fromm-Reichman, and Ernst Schachtel. Its perspective on human nature commanded a great deal of respect during the period. It should be noted that Riesman's work was generated from within its parameters: he was an intimate of both Erich Fromm and Harry Stack Sullivan. In addition it should not be surprising to hear that Herbert Marcuse would first deliver his book *Eros and Civilization* as a series of lectures at the Washington School in 1951, for a number of its faculty also held prominent positions at the New School for Social Research. In other words, the Washington School of Psychiatry was both a journal and institution of some substance, as well as a vital intellectual milieu.

The general orientation of the School was liberal. It was founded upon certain universalist tenets of the Enlightenment, and participated in the general modernizing, revamping, and revitalizing of psychiatry and psychology in the United States. More than anything, the clinical based psychiatry of Harry Stack

Sullivan set the tone for research. It depended heavily on models borrowed from the physical sciences, specifically research surrounding field theory and Quantum mechanics. Countering mystical and vitalist trends, Sullivan's Interpersonal Psychiatry would claim that the most essential problems of human nature were ultimately solvable in terms of attempts to objectify experience through the principles of atomic physics, a world of movement and dynamics, of physical systems in which causality was often obscured by field relations. The theory of human nature that Sullivan and the others would sketch out during the course of clinical and therapeutic work during the 1930s and 1940s was at the core of Riesman's understanding of character. Indeed, it underpins much of the psychological insights that the "new liberalism" offered up. Within an institutional context its interdisciplinary approach had become more and more influential in the years leading up to, during, and after World War II, a period during which its presence can be increasingly noted. With its perspectives informed by psychoanalytic, sociological, anthropological, and cultural researches, by the late 1940s, it was the dominant paradigm for understanding mental illness in the United States. Highly cognizant of the threat posed by "totalitarianism" and with a penchant for individualism, its liberal tone and its clinically proven methods, the interpersonal psychiatry of the Washington School was enjoying a period of phenomenal success.

At the same time, Sullivanian methodologies were also becoming one of the key tools for understanding cultural differences and tensions. Interpersonal and international relations were conceived of as inextricably tied to psychological concerns relating to the specific limits and constraints placed on character by any one cultural circumstance. For the likes of Sullivan, the Eastern Bloc psyche had a logic as firm and substantive as that of any other cultural mode of experiencing the world.[53] Indeed, from about 1946 on, Sullivan's interests begin to shift more

[53]In other words the Soviet mentality is not vilified or problematized as a political phenomenon, as in Schlesinger's reading, as much as it is dealt with on its own terms, in a method akin to the

exclusively toward questions of cultural difference -- an orientation that would progressively dominate research with the mounting tensions of the Cold War. By 1948 Sullivan's work was operating under the rubric of UNESCO, more specifically the "UNESCO Tensions Project", which coordinated a number of studies on the escalation of international tensions. The "Projects" task was a daunting one: "to stimulate and coordinate independently conducted and financed research into social tensions, both within and between countries, and to link such work to the research conducted by UNESCO".[54]

The non-ideological imperative of Sullivan's research is significant. It is one more indication, among others, of a genuine concern and belief in the possibility of a non-partisan or non-aligned politics. Though Sullivan's problematization of aggression, nationalism, and international tensions represented an extreme example, it ably illustrates a pervasive orientation within the "new liberalism" more generally. Of course there were varying ideas on what kind of positioning actually constituted non-alignment. The spectrum ranged from something like the facile and aggressively anti-communist mapping of the problem by James Burnham (Figure 8), to perhaps something like Greenberg's more carefully conceived contemplation on national character in his 1956 essay, "American Stereotypes: *Review of Cousins and Friends*".[55] One need only survey the spectrum of positions represented by the American contingent in the Congress for Cultural Freedom to note the diversity on the question of freedom.[56]

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anthropological work of Margaret Mead in Samoa. Mead was well versed in the teachings of Sullivanian psychiatry.

[54]Richard Blum, "Research Projects in International Tensions", (*Bulletin of the Research Exchange on the Prevention of War*, v.13, n.5, May 1950), p. 43.

[55]See Clement Greenberg, "American Stereotypes: *Review of Cousins and Strangers, Comments of America by Commonwealth Fund Fellows from Britain, 1946-1952.* edited by Gorley Putt, in CG, v.3, (*Commentary*, Oct. 1956), pp. 265-270.

[56]See Sydney Hook's account in "The Berlin Congress ofr Cultural Freedom", (*Partisan Review*, v. 17, n. 6, Jul.-Aug. 1950), pp. 714-722.

Take David Riesman's review of the first book published by the "UNESCO Tensions Project", *Tensions That Cause War*, from 1950.[57] Riesman aligns himself with both Sullivan's contribution and that of another contributor to the project, Max Horkheimer. In the same breath, Riesman undermines Horkheimer's moral pessimism by placing faith in the individual; and conversely, snatches interpersonal psychiatry from the grips of cultural relativism, by accepting the political tenets of Horkheimer's critique of mass culture. In a sense he balances Horkheimer's "gloomy" totalizing view of the modern social structure with Sullivan's own stoic faith in the individual. If Riesman's position can in the end be reduced to such a balancing act -- one in which the possibilities for the individual in the new managerial economy, whether in America or the Soviet Union, was still alive -- Greenberg's more pessimistic position can not.[58]

Still, the general locus of issues and insights that the likes of Riesman and Greenberg potentially found in Sullivanian Psychiatry cannot be dismissed out of hand. The fundamentally pacifist and non-aggressive methodology of field theory, something completely antithetical to the jingoism of the period, offers important insight into Greenberg's particular perspective and that of others. The kind of pessimistic retreat into the aesthetic realm that one should argue for in Greenberg's case, or conversely Riesman's optimistic research into new areas of cultural practice, were both imperatives not wholly exclusive to interpersonal psychiatry. On the contrary, the specific interests and concerns of each was deepened by the kind of insight which interpersonal psychiatry offered up.

Almost all of the figures we will take up in the ensuing chapters had at least some form of contact or association with Sullivanian understandings. Clement Greenberg had been involved in Sullivanian therapy and Sullivanian intellectual circles from as early on as 1946. In the early 1950s, Jackson Pollock would also go the Sullivanian route for the treatment of alcoholism; and on Greenberg's

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[57]David Riesman, "Tensions, Optimisms, and the Social Scientist", (*Psychiatry*, v. 13, n.4), p. 522.
[58]I discuss both Riesman's and Greenberg's arguments in more depth in Chapter Two.

recommendation, no less. Morris Louis and his wife, Marcella Abner Brenner, were also connected with the Washington School. Marcella worked at the Washington location for a time, and later, during the mid to late 1950s, would receive a Ph. D. in Sullivanian oriented educational psychiatry. David Riesman's family were close friends with Sullivan himself. His mother was one of Sullivan's own patients.[59]

This kind of interconnectedness between the intellectual groupings we are trying to reconstruct and that of Sullivanian culture should not be surprising. For anyone concerned with the fate of culture under capitalism, no less than the fate of the individual in a context of widespread conformity, interpersonal psychiatry offered a kind of haven: some in terms of conceiving high culture as a therapeutic to life under capitalism, and others in terms of considering modernist art and literature, the provider of a different order of experience from that life. Sullivanian therapy was especially popular among segments of a literate and artistic culture. It was indeed, *de riguer* for the "coming of age" of many East coast intellectuals, writers and artists. Typically, it followed upon one's more "frivolous" forays into Jungianism, Freudian therapy, or Psychodrama. The question confronting us now, is how this type of understanding, resonating initially in the more intimate context of intellectual and therapeutic circles, and then in a succession of expanding horizons bounded by the Democratic Party, the nation itself, and lastly the international tensions of the Cold War, is functioning more specifically in regard to Greenberg's position?

Perhaps we can begin by saying that Greenberg's interest in Sullivanian theory revolved around its structural mapping of the personality, which was particularly assimilable to his own more philosophical framework based in Kant. Moreover, Sullivan's was a physical and dynamic theory of the unconscious which accommodated Greenberg's own materialist notions of the symbolic as a

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[59]In addition, Riesman was to co-author a chapter on Sullivan's interpersonal method for a book by Erich Fromm. Fromm, being a co-founder of the School with Sullivan, when it had broken off from the more orthodox American Psychoanalytic Association in the early 1940s.

transformative sphere. As in the political and sociological discourses we have discussed, anxiety occupies the crucial place. It amounted to the physical evidence of a dynamic process that transformed matter into meaning; it was the trace of an otherwise veiled emotional economy.

For Sullivan anxiety is at the crux of the individuals relation to the social, functioning as the crucial motor for developmental progression in the infant and the central mechanism determining character structure or personality. Anxiety founds the instantaneous structural relation through which the subject comes into being. The social relationship is above all governed by anxiety. Ironically if it is fundamental to the entrance into the social, its role in the individual's interaction with the social is one of confabulation. It is in this respect that anxiety is important to Sullivan's developmental model. For the anxiety relations established with the significant other during infancy found what Sullivan describes as a "relatively fixed pattern of energy transformations".[60] This early channeling of anxiety will become a physical circuitry or wiring that will determine all successive experiencing.[61]

> Infants can be seen to show much the same interferences with their behavior when the person who cares for them is anxious, angry, or otherwise disquieted, as they do when they are frightened by painful events. Something which develops without a break into a tension state of later life that "feels like" fear, but has some very significant differences from *fear*, is thus seen to be capable of being *induced* in the infant by *interpersonal influence* which works through some obscure linkage between the infant and the mothering one. . .
>
> The first of all learning, the initial discrimination in the previously all-encompassing, vague, and undifferentiated world of the infant, is called out to avoid recurrence of the extremely unpleasant tension of anxiety which is, and always continues to be, the very antithesis of anything good and desirable. I am sure that the first rudimentary personification that anyone achieves is one that may be named the personification of the Bad or Evil Mother, the manifestation of whose presence is the undergoing of anxiety. . .

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[60]Harry Stack Sullivan, "Tensions Interpersonal and International: A Psychiatrists View". *Tensions That Cause War*, p.93

[61]In this sense, the therapeutic process as conceived of by Freud is altogether problematized. Indeed the notion of therapy or therapeutic improvement itself comes under scrutiny. One way of beginning to distinguish Sullivanian therapy from Freudian psychoanalysis is that Sullivanian psychiatry or therapy priorizes the formative role of environment and the total personalities conflictual relations in that environment. An environment activated by the interpersonal field and precipitating anxiety, over and above those relations dictated by the more traditional conception of the Oedipal triangle.

> The child, as it were, learns to chart a course by the anxiety gradient. Simple performances which would relax the tension of some needs have to be made more complicated in order that one may avoid becoming more anxious. Before he is very many months of age, the child will be showing full-fledged sublimation, in the sense of quite unwittingly having adopted some pattern of activity in the partial, and somewhat incomplete, satisfaction of a need which, however, avoids anxiety that stands in the way of the simplest completely satisfactory activity.[62]

"Chart(ing) a course by the anxiety gradient was fundamental to Sullivan's model.[63] The infant's ability to avoid the experience of anxiety and the deep anxiety of "anxiety neurosis", will become the relatively enduring "pattern of energy transformations", that is constitutive of any one individual character structure or personality. Sullivan calls this "pattern of energy transformations" the "self-system". As "an extensive organization of experience within personality,"[64] the "self-system" was the physical and quantifiable trace of the transformative. As an enduring pattern of tension "reductions" or "energy transformations" it was absolutely revealing of the deeper constitution of the subject. In effect, the "self-system" performed a constructive negotiation of the interpersonal relation only in a negative sense. By providing a safety net to prevent the individual from plunging into the unalterable "anxiety neurosis" or "uncanny" fear peculiar to the infant's experience of utter unmanageability the processes of sublimation it could offer were, as Sullivan notes, only the "illusion of personal individuality".[65]

This tension at the core of Sullivan's theory of personality should be duly noted. For the "self" is in essence conceived of as a fiction. Though the "self-

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[62]Sullivan, "Tensions Interpersonal and International: A Psychiatrists View", pp. 94-96.

[63]In the prototypical case outlined in the above passage, anxiety in the infant is prompted by an emotional disturbance in the significant person, or mothering one. It emerges as a precipitate of sorts that tries to successively stem any evolution toward the catastrophe of "uncanny emotion" or anxiety neuroses. At this early stage anxiety is debilitating in the sense of the fear felt as *Not-Me*, but is productive in the sense of an adaptive capacity related to *Bad-Me*. It is this early channelling of anxiety which becomes the physical pattern known as the "self-system". See Sullivan's "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and in Life" , *Psychiatry*, (1948), v. 14, n. 1, pp.1-13; And chapter 1, "The Meaning of the Developmental Approach", in *The Interpersonal School of Psychiatry*. (New York: W.W . Norton and Co, 1964).

[64]Sullivan, "Tensions Interpersonal and International", p.90.

[65]The illusion of increased self-esteem, and the feeling of satisfaction produced by the machinations of the self-system, actually mitigated against inferential analysis - the true pathway to self-esteem and satisfaction. See Sullivan's paper of the same name, "The Illusion of Personal Individuality", (*Psychiatry*, 1950, v. 13), pp. 317-332.

system" participated in the building of a nascent conception of self, it could only offer an unconscious reconciliation of anxiety. The individual is always left with only the illusion of reconciliation, a valueless "self-esteem". For Sullivan, both psychoses and neuroses were anchored to this problematic relation. While the dissociative processes of schizophrenia represented one extreme form of a disabled "self-system", conformity represented the other pole. Conformity was the result of an over-active "self-system". The irony in Sullivan's reading is clear: During a moment when historical forces were structuring desire, only the functioning of an increasingly debilitated ego, i.e., an illusory "self-system", could salvage the vestiges of individual autonomy.

In general, Sullivanian therapy set itself the task of augmenting a process that in the context of the United States had apparently been rendered static. Because the Sullivanian approach tried to stage experience "within personality",[66] it could only aid the patient in understanding or recognizing those scenarios or dramatic encounters that potentially precipitated the vertiginous fall from "Bad-*Me*" into the dissociative depths of *"Not-Me"*. [67] In fact, Sullivanian therapy did not really provide a cure; and in so doing, raised and confronted the problem of therapeutic efficacy itself. The best therapy could ever do was to provide or "have" in retrospect, as Sullivan suggests, "the experience from which we might profit". After all therapeutic practice could not change the "pattern of energy exchanges" that defined the "self-system". Neither could it replace the dominance of any one particular "self-system" with a more developmentally mature form. Rather, it could only

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[66]Sullivan, "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and in Life", p. 10.

[67]The emotion of *Bad-Me* is felt and assessed in the third person from an objective position, while the emotion associated with "severe anxiety", if not dissociated, i.e., sublimated by the "self-system's" dramatic approach, engulfs the individual in a paralyzing fear -- "an uncanny emotion, chilly crawling sensations, and the like, often meant by the words 'awe', 'dread', 'loathing', and 'horror'". Sullivan, "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and in Life", pp. 10-11.

provide the individual with the experience processed by the debilitated self in the past tense.[68]

Therapeutic failure is built in to Sullivanian Psychiatry. The patterning of the "self-system" is an immutable and inescapable physical fact. Because the transformative was a contingency of one's cultural circumstance, it was a crystallization of tensions in that culture, and hence sustained the kinds of social and aggressive behavior any one single culture was built upon. For Sullivan, the study of anxiety offered a glimpse into certain impersonal, if highly charged and particular laws, governing the subject. If Sullivan's work for the UNESCO Tensions Project was founded in precisely this kind of investigation into the constitutive moment of the subject, Greenberg's theory of the Good Life was as well. For the subject of any "melancholy science" worth its weight, is necessarily the illusion of freedom and the capacity to act the notion of the individual sustains. "He who wishes to know the truth about life in its immediacy", Adorno writes, "must scrutinize its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses ... Or perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer."[69]

In October 1950 Clement Greenberg outlines the dilemmas of the ideological in terms of his theory of the Good Life. Published in *Commentary*, his point of departure is the politics of the minority situation. The general orientation of his essay, "Self-Hatred and Jewish Chauvinism", places him very much in the general orbit of the dialogues we have been describing. After all, it seems that for Greenberg, the constitution of the free individual hinged on a rigid opposition to the "mass manifestations" and illusory loyalties of populism and conformity.[70] However, I

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[68]See Sullivan's articles "The Theory of Anxiety and the Nature of Psychotherapy", *Psychiatry*, v.12, n.1, Feb 1949. "Towards a Psychiatry of Peoples", *Psychiatry*, v.11,n. 1, Feb, 1948. "

[69]Adorno, *Minima Moralia, Reflections From a Damaged Life*, p. 15.

[70]In Greenberg's argument both moves toward Zionism or its corollary anti-Zionism takes on the threatening posture of "totalitarianism".

think it is important to realize at the outset, that while Greenberg's particular position is bracketed by the various positions within the "new liberalism", it is crucially distinct from them in a number of ways. Most significantly, the way in which Greenberg despairingly viewed the plight of the individual. Indeed, one might fruitfully circumscribe his argument to the irreparable aporia existing within that slim and dangerous zone that he fondly localizes as the "personal and spontaneous expression of myself."[71]

Summarily dismissing "anti Semitism", Greenberg broaches the tricky subject of a Jewish nationalism"-- a plethora of viewpoints spanning from a "militant, aggressive" wing, to a simply "Positive Jewishness".[72]

> Jewish militancy has its enlightened as well as its obscurantist side, nevertheless, and I myself am all for applying a measure of militancy here as well as in Israel. Modern anti-Semitism, being what it is, gathers momentum instead of expending itself when it goes unresisted beyond a certain point. I believe that it is best coped with in this country, once that point is reached, by direct personal action on the part of individual Jews, and it would be all to the good if our new Jewish nationalism could move us to take such matters as Joe McWilliams into our own hands instead of calling the policeman. I also believe that this would contribute importantly to the lessening of our self-hatred.
> Then it's a question of dealing with anti-Semites by individual force? It is -- and more. It is also a question of releasing that pent-up, frightened, and festering aggressiveness which supplies the fuel for rabid nationalism, and shifting the emphasis of militancy from the mass, where it runs the danger of becoming chauvinist and irresponsible, to the individual. Jewishness, insofar as it has to be asserted in a predominantly Gentile world, should be a personal rather than mass manifestation, and more a matter of individual self-reliance. This does not mean overlooking one's fellow responsibility to one's fellow Jews, but it does mean making Jewishness something other than a product of herd warmth and an occasion for that herd conformity out of which arise the ugliest manifestations of nationalism -- as we saw in the German case.[73]

If militancy as a "mass phenomenon", "that pent-up, frightened, and festering aggressiveness" was one side of a more general problem, the other side of the problem for Greenberg was as much "the spontaneous expression" of one self, focused in "direct personal action". How ever we understand the specific coordinates of Greenberg's position in 1950, it was a radicalized one, and in the context of the discourses we have been discussing, a radically pessimistic one. The

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[71]Greenberg, "Self Hatred and Jewish Chauvinism", (*Commentary* , v. 10, Oct. 1950), in C.G., v. 3, p. 57

[72]Greenberg, "Self Hatred and Jewish Chauvinism", p. 52.

[73]Greenberg, "Self Hatred and Jewish Chauvinism", pp. 52-53.

problem was both simple and staggering. It was a question of the impossibility of ethics under modernity. While Greenberg would advocate an acceptance of what he calls "a personal and spontaneous expression of myself", he would entirely deny that advocacy any validity with its entrance into the moral realm. It seems that the dilemma with which Greenberg was ultimately faced, was one in which even "a spontaneous expression" of one's self was no better than, was in fact equal to militancy as a "mass phenomenon".

In face of the "new liberalism's" overwhelming critique of the mass manifestation, it is important to recognize the consequences of Greenberg's position. For he is not merely suggesting that one follow one's emotions -- "a personal and spontaneous expression of myself"; that kind of irrationalist justification that was typical of all sorts of obscurantist positions in the culture. One needs only recall Greenberg's extended dialogue with F. R. Leavis on the moral content of Kafka's fiction.[74] Or think of the tirade Greenberg wages against Phillip Wylie's *An Essay on Morals* .

> This, perhaps, is what the contemporary village atheist really looks like in print -- sad decline of the provincial iconoclast, of the little shoemaker who used to read Schopenhauer and Nietzsche! Only in this awful age could half-bakedness sink so low, only in this age could such half-bakedness reach print in anything but subsidized editions.
> Mr. Wylie claims that man can solve his present difficulties only by freeing his instincts from the domination of the ego. The ego means churches, institutions, Communism, most public issues, etc., etc., all of which man ought to repudiate in order to realize himself and the fact that he is, to start with, only an animal.[75]

In other words, while a "spontaneous expression of myself" avoided the traps of conformity peculiar to the "mass manifestation", it was equally a "crabbed" and "half-baked" imperative to proceed upon, because ultimately determined by the transformative which was in the last analysis entirely culturally determined. It seems that individual actions or beliefs are themselves *always-already* possessed of

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[74]See "How Good is Kafka" (*Commentary*, Jun.-Aug. 1955) in C.G. 3, pp. 212-216. I take up the issue of Greenberg's reading of Kafka in Chapter Two.

[75]Greenberg, "Pessimism for Mass Consumption: Review of An Essay On Morals by Philip Wylie, CG, 2, pp. 158-159.

the threatening posture of a military state apparatus or the "pent-up, frightened, and festering aggressiveness" of a mass. In fact, the ideology of the "new liberalism", a politics reduced down to the level of the individual, solved nothing.[76]

Remember, at the time of his article's publication, Greenberg was an associate editor at *Commentary*. It was one of the most highly regarded liberal publications. In all quarters of the nation! Take *Time* magazine's revealing demographic breakdown of its readership, from only a couple of months after Greenberg's article appeared. *Commentary* has "begun to be known as one of the best magazines in the U. S.. It now has 20,196 circulation and a wide influence. Among its readers in 66 countries, none scan it more closely than the State Department. Again and again the department has picked up articles for distribution around the world, either because they have so ably stated the position of the democratic world, or so clearly exposed the fallacies of totalitarianism."[77] Of course, Greenberg knew the State Department read his articles, of course he knew that his articles were being distributed around the world. What could he do? The predicament facing the individual in America in the 1950s was an unsolvable ethical and moral dilemma. Greenberg recognized this all too well.[78] Whether it involved the co-optation of America's kitchens in the ideological struggle against Communism in Moscow; the wholesale flogging of the "good life" in the third world; or indeed, the mass conscription of every single cultural artifact, painting, car-care product, article for *Commentary*, the limits placed on representation under the conditions of modernity were absolute.

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[76]Riesman's use of the phrase "true moral insight" is in this sense a world-a-part from Greenberg's understanding. Riesman's position is closer to Erich Fromm, who accepts the moral implications of happiness as productive in some sense. As Fromm notes, this productive orientation, in relation to societies' negative incapacitating impact, rests with man's "ability to take himself, his life and happiness seriously; on his willingness to face his and his society's moral problem. It rests upon his courage to be himself and to be for himself". Erich Fromm, *Man For Himself: An Inquiry Into the Psychology of Ethics*, (New York: Reinhardt and Company, 1947).

[77]Editor, (*Time*, Jan. 29, 1951).

[78]Though it would never probably really hit home, until he found out that *Commentary* was itself being funded by secret moneys channeled through the C.I.A., via the USIS, with the full knowledge of Eliot Cohen.

In John O'Brian's thoughtful and bold introduction to *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956 ,volume 3,* the matter of Greenberg's "acquiescence to the *Pax Americana* " is clear cut.[79] What we need to argue for is a complexification of this through a dialectical reversal: "acquiescentia in se ipso". For O'Brian, Greenberg's acquiescence is part of a shift which begins to gain momentum in the late 1940s, only to surface full force with Greenberg's 1953 essay, "The Plight of Our Culture".

> The Transfiguration in Greenberg's thinking was an about face. In the space of a couple years, pessimism about the culture of modernity had given way to an optimism ... Greenberg's aspirations were founded on a reconsideration of the possibilities for cultural progress in American society under advanced industrialism... Like other contributors to *Commentary* holding to a sanguine view of American culture -- David Riesman and Daniel Bell, for example -- Greenberg was enthusiastic about the new managerial elite who had risen to power in the United States ... Democracy and capitalism, so they thought, which already were demonstrating what might be accomplished in the realm of middlebrow culture, were the necessary combination to defeat totalitarianism. The turnaround in Greenberg's thinking, his unsticking of the Trotskyist label, was complete. In subsequent writings, his former emphasis on modern arts' adversarial capacity for disaffirming the dominant values of bourgeois society became muted, if not silenced altogether. [80]

O'Brian has managed to capture the progress of a very subtle, almost spectral shift in Greenberg's opinion. Certainly it is not one warranting the characterization of an "about face", from "pessimism about the culture of modernity" to "optimism"; nor is it one that would plausibly have undermined Greenberg's commitment to a modernist art founded on refusal; neither is it a shift that would ever have made Greenberg think "Democracy and Capitalism ... which already were demonstrating what might be accomplished in the realm of middlebrow culture were the necessary combination to defeat totalitarianism"; nor one that would make him "enthusiastic about the new managerial elite who had risen to power". Firstly, Greenberg's pessimism about the surrounding culture had become altogether intensified; secondly, modernist art remained the only thing that kept new experiences alive;

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[79]John O'Brian, "Introduction", *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956* , (Chicago, 1993), pp. xxix

[80]John O'Brian, "Introduction", CG, 3, pp. xxix - xxx.

and lastly, "totalitarianism" and middlebrow culture were insolubly linked to the same insidious processes that were constitutive of conformity. Yet there is still the trace of a shift that exists in Greenberg's writing, if only the effervescent trace on the surface of that writing. The best of Greenberg's writing is always driven by this paradoxical relation. While on the surface we might detect a glimmer or hint of hope and possibility, it always exists on top of, alongside, or amidst a forest of the deepest and most heartfelt descriptions of an "awful age", an age when only "half-bakedness could sink so low".[81] This tension is a difficult one to capture. The shift which O'Brian detects and which he feels makes the American moment for Greenberg so thick with possibility -- thick to the extent that it leans in the direction of future imperial triumphs -- is in fact a realization and acceptance on Greenberg's part of an inevitable and solemn movement toward the corruption and falleness of the ideological in any encounter with the moral realm.

I think the evidence for Greenberg's own "theory of the Good Life" hinges on his membership in the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF), and specifically his letter to Freda Kirchwey of the *The Nation.* What I want to argue for, and it should already be clear, is that Greenberg's role on the ACCF and his letter to Kirchwey for *The Nation,* despite their apparent political ramifications, indeed, in glaring light of their political and ideological ramifications, were in no sense intended as a direct foray into the political or ideological. Rather, they were a foray into the cultural sphere in order to preserve a very particular form of non-ideologically aligned intervention. In a sense, we are trying to position Greenberg as part of a kind of cultural wing of the "new liberalism", a sub-grouping of radicalized positions, including David Riesman and Dwight MacDonald, who categorically refused aspects of Schlesinger's political engagement in Democratic process. Of course Greenberg's letter had political resonance. It started a minor political fire storm. But in Greenberg's mind it was intended solely for the purposes of

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[81]Greenberg, "Pessimism for Mass Culture", CG, 2, p.158.

sustaining some minimal conditions against the pressures of conformity. Greenberg's letter begins ...

> I find it shocking that any part of your -- and our -- magazine should consistently act as a vehicle through which the interests of a particular state power are expressed. It makes no difference which state power: the scandal lies in the fact of commitment, and *The Nation* should thereby betray its claim to be a journal of independent and principled opinion. The operation of J. Alvarez del Vayo's column along a line which invariably parallels that of Soviet propaganda is something that I protest as both a reader and a contributor.[82]

A first point to make here is that Greenberg's sentiments are not strictly "anti-communist", as much as they attempt to be altogether strictly "non-partisan" (though, of course, they fail). It is not so much "Soviet power" which Greenberg is concerned with as it is any form that "State power" assumes or takes on. "It makes no difference which State power". Greenberg's concern, in other words, is as much that dominant representational strategy conscripted by state power. In this respect Greenberg's specific charges against *The Nation's* foreign editor, del Vayo, may also be considered in the context of his activities on the ACCF. Framed within these parameters, the allegations become fairly consistent with the kind of "non-partisan" politics upon which the ACCF were supposedly founded -- that type of balancing which was typical of the "new liberalism" in general. It was in conjunction with the ACCF's mandate that Greenberg had joined as a founding member on December 14, 1950. In fact, Greenberg's interest in the mandate of the ACCF complemented his strategy which we have been trying to unearth: his more specific understanding of materialism. In this sense, the ACCF's mandate for sustaining freedom by maintaining the widest possible cultural spectrum offered a kind of venue to voice his particular tactic of "pensiveness". From Greenberg's perspective, the consistently pro-Soviet line of del Vayo's editorial policy was curtailing this spectrum. Complicit in a "tissue of lies", del Vayo's views were aiding an already

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[82]Clement Greenberg, "To the editor of *The Nation* ", (*The New Leader*, 19 Mar. 1951), CG, 3, pp. 78-79.

leveled cultural landscape.[83] His column was no better than a Soviet version of *Life* magazine; it had "become a medium through which arguments remarkably like those which the Stalinist regime itself advances are transmitted in a more plausible form to the American public".[84]

As an organization, the ACCF were firm in their general conviction of trying to sustain a space for cultural freedom outside of the barriers of ideological and political partisanship. Though closely knit around this central concern, the means to achieve freedom was the hot topic. The minutes of the Executive Committee sessions are, if nothing else, a testament to this. Though ultimately it would prove the downfall of the Committee, it does provide us with material for distinguishing the more subtle positioning's of its members, the disparity of their views, and finally, the illusion of non-ideological alignment they were all under. It is uncertain whether Greenberg was in attendance at any of the Executive Committee meetings in 1951 and early 1952.[85] However, we do know that he was present at the founding in 1950; at the Planning Conference of March 1, 1952; and at the Administrative Committee meeting of March 19, 1952.[86] In addition, we know that he was present at the Executive Committee meeting of April 16, 1952, by invitation of the Committee; and that at the October 27, 1952 meeting he, along with Daniel

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[83]Greenberg's letter was refused publication in *The Nation* and in late March appeared in the liberal labor *New Leader* . Greenberg writes: "Since he began writing in *the Nation* about a decade ago, Mr. del Vayo has defended every step in Soviet policy and, just as unfailingly, criticized or evaded every argument and step opposed to that policy ... To be sure, Mr. del Vayo says, Russia is not always blameless, yet somehow he always calls upon the West to take the first step -- and make the first concession -- to assure peace. ... evidence furnished by his own words show that his column has become a medium through which arguments remarkably like those which the Stalinist regime itself advances are transmitted in a more plausible form to the American public". Greenberg, (*The New Leader*, Feb, 1951).

[84]Greenberg, "To the editor of *The Nation* ," p. 81.

[85]In the Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting for June 6, 1951, listed as present are: Sol Levitas, Sydney Hook, Daniel Bell, George Shuyler, William Phillips, Elliot Cohen, Norbert Muhlen, Peter Klugen, Melvin Lasky, Josef Czapski, Max Yergan, and James Burnham. Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting for June 6, 1951, (ACCF Papers, Col. 23, Box 7, Fold. 4, Jun. 1951). Tamament Library Archives, NYU.

[86]See Minutes December 14, 1950, (ACCF Papers, Col. 23, Box 7, Fold. 4, Dec. 1950); Minutes Planning Conference, March 1, 1952, (ACCF Papers, Col. 23, Box 7, Fold. 4, Mar. 1952); Minutes of Administrative Committee Meeting, March 19, 1952(ACCF Papers, Col. 23, Box 7, Fold. 4, Mar. 1952).

Bell and Sydney Hook, were nominated to the Executive Committee.[87] Finally, we know he submitted his resignation in absentia to the Executive, at the Meeting of April 8, 1953.

Within the ACCF's wide spectrum of interests -- for it had no consistent line -- Clement Greenberg and perhaps Dwight Macdonald were the most careful not to advocate political intervention.[88] Greenberg's hesitations would, for instance, have been in opposition to Elliot Cohen's calls for more direct and engaged activities. With regard to the Congress for Cultural Freedom's -- the ACCF's parent organization -- June 1952 convention in Paris, Cohen, the chief editor of *Commentary*, while conceding that the "primary aim of the Congress (was) not to mobilize the works of artists", added that " the main activity of the Congress must be to make demonstrations, to take principled stands, and to involve European intellectuals".[89] Perhaps James Burnham and Sol Levitas -- political convictions aside -- could also be usefully placed within the Committee's increasingly vocal grouping which pursued a more engaged posturing.[90] Greenberg's resignation from the Committee in April of 1953 was undoubtedly a function of this increasing trend toward political intervention, but was as much a function of the mounting anti-communist orientation of the Executive. As we will see, in the majority of cases the two trends were linked.

At the time of Greenberg's nomination to the Executive Committee in March of 1952, the tensions between these issues among members was balanced, if only through polarization. By early 1953, however, the more activist and anti-communist voices had gained sufficient momentum to warrant Greenberg's resignation. It appears that by this time the mandate of the ACCF had shifted

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[87] Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting for April 16, 1952, (ACCF Papers, Col. 23, Box 7, Fold. 4, Apr. 1952); Minutes of Membership Meeting of the ACCF, (ACCF Papers, Col. 23, Box. 7, Fold. 4, Oct. 1952).

[88] See Michael Harrington's "The American Committee for Cultural Freedom", (*Dissent*, v. 2, n. 2, Spr. 1955), pp. 113-121; And Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s.*

[89] ACCF Minutes Executive Committee Meeting, (ACCF Papers), p.1.

[90] See Sol Levitas statement ACCF Minutes Executive Committee Meeting, June 6, 1951, (ACCF Papers).

sufficiently toward harder forms of political engagement and toward the Right, that distinctions between partisanship on the one hand, and anti-communism more appropriate to that of McCarthy on the other hand, had begun to blur. This polarizing is all to clear from the Minutes of the Planning Conference of March 1, 1952. James Farrell, Dwight MacDonald, and Greenberg face off against Karl Wittfogel and William Phillips on that most persistent and nagging of issues, whether to prioritize the fight against McCarthyism, or continue to fight against Communism. For Greenberg, Farrell, and MacDonald, the threat of Communism in the United States was insignificant in comparison to the threat of conformity itself. With a few qualifications I will make in a moment, Farrell sums up the position.

> The main job in this country is fighting McCarthyism. The effects of McCarthyism on culture may soon be alarming, and real intimidation already exists in colleges and small towns and among intellectuals. The Stalinist menace is largely licked in America, although not on the world plane. But we are seeing the development of a group of McCarthyite intellectuals. Over the summer the Committee should work out a plan for opposing McCarthyism in culture and for sending speakers to other parts of the country. The most effective way of influencing European intellectuals is to show how we are defending cultural freedom in our country.[91]

Greenberg's and MacDonald's support for Farrell's statement is clear. Both equally saw the problem of Stalinism in America as "largely licked". In addition, they considered Stalinism as distinct from Communism in its obeisance to the rule of conformity. Like McCarthyism, Stalinism was considered a unique product of twentieth century conformity. While both felt that there was no "middle ground regarding McCarthyism", Greenberg made it clear that there were distinctions to be made "between Communists and fellow-travelers", i.e. fellow-travelers and Stalinists were both a result of conformity in the cultural landscape.[92] However, Greenberg's qualification of Farrell's proposition is the clincher. Always wary of the means to achieve objectives he adds: "It is easy to attack McCarthyism, but the

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[91]James Farrell, Minutes Planning Conference, ACCF, March 1, 1952, p. 1.
[92]Greenberg, Minutes Planning Conference, ACCF, March 1, 1952, p. 5.

problem is how to qualify our attack. (We must) clarify whether we are an educational or a publicist committee."[93]

For Greenberg, communism was not the crucial threat. The threat was the make up of the cultural sphere itself. If the problem of the cultural sphere did ground his anti-communist sentiment, it was also something which would drive him increasingly to an extreme aesthetic position leading up to his resignation from the ACCF in 1953. In this respect, Greenberg's understanding of the problem was in subtle distinction to the more aggressive forms of anti-communism that would begin to dominate the ACCF up to and after Greenberg's resignation in 1953. Like Riesman, though, who was always lingering at the margins of the ACCF, Greenberg placed a consistent, however shallow faith in the balanced pluralism that American capitalism promoted.[94] For Riesman, the threat posed by conformity was countered by the structural diversity of American capitalism, which provided a kind of impediment to the growth of the "totalitarian" mentality. It was the formation of American capitalism itself which naturally selected the best possible direction for freedom and character, filtering out those unwanted authoritarian tendencies. Riesman writes:

> Any sufficiently large society will throw up a slate of psychological types varied enough to suggest possibilities in many different directions; if America is not fascist, for example, it is not for want of sadists or authoritarians. There are plenty of these to staff the more benighted jails and mental hospitals, or to compete for the post of sheriff in many Southern communities; it is the institutional and judicial forms -- and their own limitations -- that make it difficult for these men to coalesce into a political movement. To be sure these protections for liberty would collapse in the absence of men of appropriate character to run them; but our point is that, within wide limits, in a large society institutions evoke within individuals the appropriate character.[95]

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[93]Greenberg, Minutes Planning Conference, ACCF, March 1, 1952, p. 2.

[94] It would seem Greenberg, unlike Schlesinger, considers totalitarianism's extremes as subtly different. Thus he prefers the ACCF as an educational committee -- one that distinguishes between McCarthyism and Communism, seeing the former linked with conformity as the greater of the two threats. "Minutes: Planning Conference. ACCF, March 1, 1952". This would position Greenberg closer to Riesman.

[95] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* , p. xxii.

While an institutional armature provided impediments to the growth or mobilization of any particular form of totalitarianism, the burden for freedom was still placed only on the individual. Greenberg's, Farrell's, and MacDonald's prioritizing of McCarthyism as a threat was because it could potentially alter the political spectrum enough to marginalize the center, and thus derail the already tenuous project for a non-alignment from its delicate balance. Greenberg's attack on del Vayo and the media in 1951 should thus be seen in light of his simultaneous and concerted attempts to stem the progressively more strident "anti-communism" of members like Daniel Bell and James Burnham on the one hand, and remain at a distance from the activism of Eliot Cohen and Burnham on the other hand. Given Greenberg's consistent resistance to the rightward trend toward increased "anti-communist" activities and the continued purging of "fellow-travelers" between March 1951 and his resignation from the Committee on April 8, 1953, we can say that the threat of both Stalinism and McCarthyism were conceived of less in political terms than as a function of conformity. In such a context all that could be done was to protect the spectrum of cultural diversity. As it was the only thing that could determine what a non-aligned center might be constitutive of. At the March 19, 1952 meeting of the Administrative Committee Greenberg would frame the problem faced by Artists Equity in precisely these terms.[96] Though the minutes from the meeting are laconic, the difficulty of finding a middle ground that was exempt from any "official" or "programmatic" art is clear.

> Clem Greenberg: Artists equity controlled by fellow-travelers. Very powerful. Had auction at the Whitney. Thinks it reprehensible that fellow-travelers had such a hand in picking the jury.
>
> Daniel Bell: It's not our purpose to give a clean bill of health to issues. It would be entry to art world to have group of artists of our own who are modern and yet vigorously anti-communist.
>
> Greenberg: On one hand is Equity with a lot of influence and smelly politically. On the other hand is Dondero who uses the latter fact as attack on modern art which is real danger to free

[96]In the Executive Committee Minutes April 16, 1952, Greenberg notes: "Artists Equity is a Stalinist organization. Never said anything about it because all respectable opinion is against such doings. Situation similar in lots of places." Greenberg, Executive Committee Minutes April 16, 1952, (ACCF Papers), p. 5.

culture. Need for clarification on 57th Street. There question is, "Should we spring to defense of embattled equity people or not".

Bell: We should have programmatic statement. Attack any kind of official art. Let people in Artists' Equity have litmus paper test. Do you subscribe to statement like this, a statement which would point out that its critics are stupid and philistine -- don't understand modern art. Stalinists who agree with us are the non hook. Might organize Painters Council. Clem secretary. Their statements would go out over signature of Sidney and Clem. We would invite artists to join who would then be able to take stand on issues like Dondero attack. Clem will submit list. We should get declaration of principles on Modern art, conditions of free art, nature of official art. Would have effect both on Dondero and Artists' Equity. Discussion groups might also discuss question of firing, rights of a guy to a job, Red Channels, Feinberg Act, the government's position. [97]

Greenberg would undoubtedly have begun sinking into his chair with Bell's rephrasing of the problem in terms of a programmatic statement, becoming positively ill-at-ease or paralyzed again with the inevitable return to the question of communism and the setting up of "Painters Councils" to stem the flow of "Red-Channels". But in early 1952 this is already what he was up against, at the onset of his nomination to the Executive body. As a whole we can assume that in respect to "anti-communism" and civil-liberties in general, Greenberg's perspective on the orientation of the Committee was especially sensitive. For example, it would not be until March 16, 1955, that Arthur Schlesinger would lodge any formal protest against the ACCF for losing "track of its objectives".[98]

I find myself increasingly puzzled by the criteria of membership. I had assumed that we were writers, artists, professors, intellectuals -- people who have made, or hoped to make, some contribution to culture and therefore an especial stake in its protection. I find now that all sorts of people are being invited to membership with no visible cultural qualifications. I do not want to comment insidiously on individuals; but I am baffled as to why anyone would think that Judge Morris Roberts, for example, should be a logical member of the ACCF. Surely, we stand for something more than anti-Communism per se; and I doubt whether we would feel -- even those among us who have succumbed to what seems to me the absurd theory of the immaculacy of the McCarren Committee -- that service on that committee automatically gives a man cultural stripes. Names like Judge Morris, Senator Wiley, and others, seem to me to have no more business to be in the ACCF than you or I have to be in the American Society of Sanitary Engineers.[99]

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[97] "Minutes of Administrative Committee Meeting, Mar. 19, 1952". ACCF Papers, Col. 23, Box 7, p. 4.

[98] Arthur Schlesinger to James Burnham, March, 16, 1955, (ACCF Papers).

[99] Arthur Schlesinger to James Burnham, March, 16, 1955, (ACCF Papers).

Or take Riesman's communiqué to Sol Stein in February, 1954. "There is a real lack of balance here -- an over-preoccupation with Communists at home and abroad without any preoccupation with "anti-communists" (including some of my best friends!) at home and abroad".[100] Whatever the precise reason for Greenberg's resignation in April 1953, the direction the ACCF was moving toward was clearly and acutely antithetical to his own understanding of non-alignment. In the few months prior to resigning, this disparity of opinions and priorities is nowhere better emphasized than in the distance between him and Daniel Bell. In January of that year the perfunctory recognition of a "spinning of wheels", is all too evident in Greenberg's tone. After his suggestion for an Asian edition of the *New Leader* or some other "good magazine" that is not an "official hand out" is dismissed by the floor, Greenberg raises a less conciliatory option -- as much it seems to assert his distance from the body as to aggravate and forestall any decision by that body. "...if a magazine should be published for Asia, it should be edited under the direction of the International Secretariat, even if sponsored by it. It should be edited purely by Asians in the way they see fit to do it. Our Asian friends should be asked to organize an ad hoc committee to issue such a magazine."[101] The stark contrast with Daniel Bell's next proposition for an action against the Voice of America is stunning.

> The Committee (should) approach a dozen experts in Russian affairs and psychological warfare, proposing that they sign a letter directed to Eisenhower, Dulles, Jackson, et al, stating that in their opinion the investigation of the Voice of America was damaging America's strategy in the Cold War. It was agreed that this was a feasible suggestion and that Mr. Kristol should secure the cooperation of the other members of the committee in order to carry it out with all possible speed.[102]

The aggressive tone of the Cold Warrior concerned with the nations freedom all but drowns out Greenberg's own version of a kind of non-partisan

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[100]David Riesman to Sol Stein, Feb. 24, 1954, (ACCF Papers).
[101]Greenberg, Executive Committee Minutes, January 30, 1953, (ACCF Papers), p.1.
[102]Daniel Bell, Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, March 16, 1953, (ACCF Papers), p. 1.

internationalism sensitive to colonialism.[103] With the political priorities of Bell and others having gained complete dominion, there was little else for Greenberg to do but resign. Undoubtedly the tenuous line between cultural and political intervention he himself was walking became a concern itself. Maybe an understatement. But in the context of the extant literature arguing for Greenberg's complicity in the Cold War, I think, a necessary corrective. We need to continually remind ourselves, that this line was always recognized by him as a tenuous one. After all, "pensiveness" was built into Greenberg's writing as a prediction and foreknowledge of just such a crossing.

Perhaps the crucial question, then, if Greenberg did resign, is what did he resign himself to? Certainly it wasn't to that rule he so detests and ascribes to T. S. Eliot in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* ; "that rule established in the 18th century according to which the eminent man of letters begins to feel in middle age that literature is not enough, and aspires to some larger power over public opinion".[104] No, that complex of moral issues was precisely at the root problem of his membership in the ACCF.[105]

In Greenberg's opinion the members of the ACCF continually mistook the effects of capitalism for its causes. For, in a sense, Greenberg's criticism of the directives increasingly taking hold of the ACCF were not far removed from his critique of Eliot. Both had failed to accommodate the new predicament of American capitalism and the uniqueness of its cultural spectrum. They were equally stuck in a

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[103]It is not my intent to villify Bell. I use his position only as a barometer through which we can gauge Greenberg's own negotiations during the period. Let's give Bell the benefit of the doubt, give him the last word. In a letter dated January 21, 1994, he was kind enough to address the problems inherent in an early formulation of the "new liberalism". "Greenberg's criticism, David Riesman's sociology and my political views are all different political trajectories. Riesman and Greenberg never "broke" from the ACCF. They were never wholly involved. Riesman became more detached and Greenberg (as with his attack on Freda Kirchway) more political." Needless to say, this is not quite the same history the minutes of the ACCF reveal. Daniel Bell to Shep Steiner, January 21, 1994.

[104]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 124.

[105]In the minutes of the Executive committee Daniel Bell voiced this concern: "The ACCF's proper concerns were the political consequences of cultural events, not the cultural consequences of political events." From Greenberg's perspective, however, Bell's overestimation of the Communist threat and his interventionist moves would have contradicted this statement. Executive Committee minutes, Oct. 19, 1954, (ACCF Papers).

model that viewed culture as superstructural, excluding it from "political, social, religious, and economic institutions".[106] As John O'Brian suggests, Greenberg's amendment posed culture and base as "inextricably tangled".[107] In other words, culture was not contingent upon the political or social spectrum, rather it shared in its kind of necessity; it was but one of the operational guises that an iron-rule of necessity was insuring. In Greenberg's model, culture is transformed into an "inner structure", that alongside "the outer, social, structure".[108] In a sense, we are forced to confront the fact of a complete aestheticization of politics, culture, and society. All aspects of the moral realm become functions of the spectacular logic of a "Fabulous Invalid".

The kind of terrain or area that Greenberg would resign himself to is no surprise for those knowledgeable of the history of art in the period. In Greenberg's case, and as well in the case of the editorial circle around *Commentary*, this meant refuting the identifiably causal relations upon which a Marxist-derived notion of freedom and/or individuality rested. It meant a complete divorce from the contingencies of the political, and instead a self-reflexive engagement with the nature of ones own contingency and conformity. The repercussions of this kind of positioning were clear to most. It represented a complete sell out, a total and unequivocal drift toward the same politics of indifference and complacency which ruled the country. Thus Irving Howe, defending his attack on conformity and specifically his criticism of *Commentary*, in response to a letter of protest leveled by *Commentary's* editor Robert Warshow.

> The letter adequately represents, however, the feelings of those intellectuals who in the past fifteen years have steadily drifted away from political and cultural radicalism, who have abandoned the values of opposition and dissent, and have accepted, more or less, the basic drift of a society that is shaped by war economy. Thus, in *Commentary* one can read that America is capitalist, but Good; or a mixed economy, but Good; or even socialist, and therefore certainly Good; or a sort of great big small town, but damned Good. Yet the people who write and sponsor such things feel outraged when told that they are conforming to the social and cultural drift of

[106]Greenberg, ibid, p. 127.
[107]Greenberg, ibid, p. xx.
[108]Greenberg, ibid, p. 131.

> American society. They want to do it, all right: but not to hear about it. A splinter of the past seems to prick their conscience, so that nothing infuriates them so much as attack from the left ... I used the rather loose phrase "conformity" instead of a more precise political one simply because I wished to emphasize that my complaint was not that certain intellectuals had abandoned this or the other ideology but that they had abandoned the traditional idea of keeping a critical distance from state power any state power ... My complaint against *Commentary*, for example, was not that it had ceased to be socialist: it never had been that; but rather that it has become an apologist for middle class values, middle-class culture, and the social status quo, and that on the issue of civil liberties it has squirmed, evaded a played possum.[109]

Howe's assessment is, I think, a fair one of the kind of problematic tensions one has carefully to balance with regard to Greenberg. For in a sense "pensiveness" was above all, characteristic of an acceptance of conformity. In a sense Commentary had allied itself to the middle class. Whether it had "abandoned the idea of keeping a critical distance from state power, any state power" is another story. For Howe does seem to misrepresent certain tensions and oppositions we have been discussing in Greenberg's specific case. For one thing, he concentrates on conformity to the exclusion of anxiety. We also know that civil liberties were indeed a priority for *Commentary*, and certainly for Greenberg. The problem stemmed not so much from the "issue of civil liberties", as much as how to establish some barometer or litmus test for their adequate implementation in the moral realm.

Still, on a certain level, Howe is both right and wrong; the contradictory nature of the position we are trying to understand represented both sides of the coin. For the fact remains that for Greenberg, America was capitalist, "but Good". It was "a mixed economy, but Good; or even socialist, and therefore certainly Good; or a sort of great big small town, but damned Good." The point is, that for Greenberg, America was good and bad, that life under modernity was good and bad, that "American capitalism" was very much a "fabulous invalid". The point is, that Greenberg's theory of the good life cuts to the core of a set of illusions about the individual, about the inevitability with which ones good intentions are *always-already* a contingency, and about the inefficacy of individual action.

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[109]Irving Howe, "Protest and Rejoinder", *Partisan Review*, v. xxi, n.2, Mar-Apr, 1954, pp. 238-239.

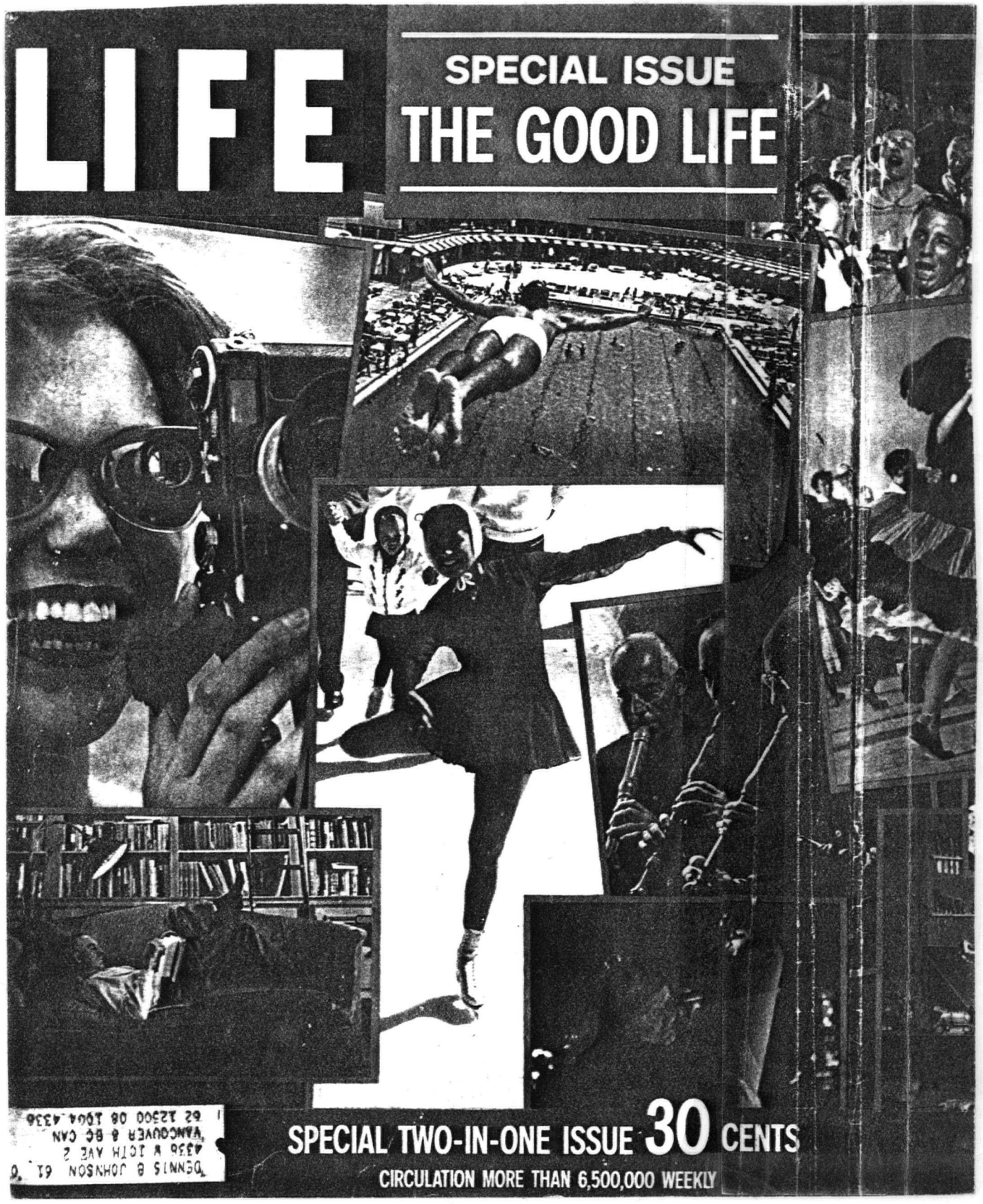

Figure 1 "The Good Life ... Or is it? Opinions differ. "Life, v. 47, n. 26, Dec. 28 1959, cover page.

Figure 2 Many sports shirts, for the many moods of Pop. Inset C shows Pop wearing "snappy Mu Mu ... south Sea print". "Picture Pop in McGregor Sportswear". *Life*, v. 34, n. 23, June 8, 1954, p. 19.

Figure 3 Martini sipping ... gray flannel suit wearing ... up-and-coming symbol manipulator. A. C. Spectorsky, *The Exurbanites.* Drawing by Robert Osborn. New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1955, title page.

Figure 4 "You know ... We think very highly of your husband Mrs. Rath." Gregory Peck smiled wirly to himself. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit.* MGM, 1956.

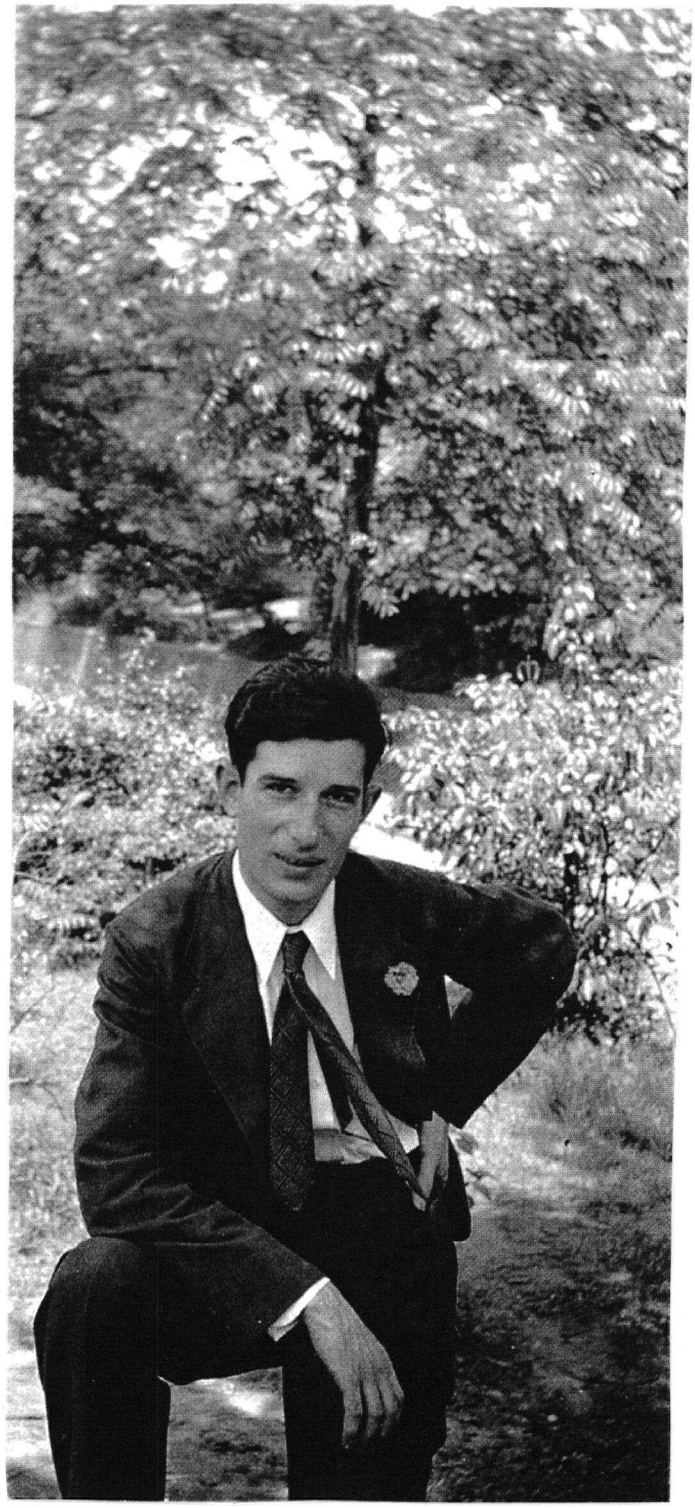

Figure 5 A teaser: Morris Louis wearing suit in question. Diane Upright. *Morris Louis: The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985, p. 59.

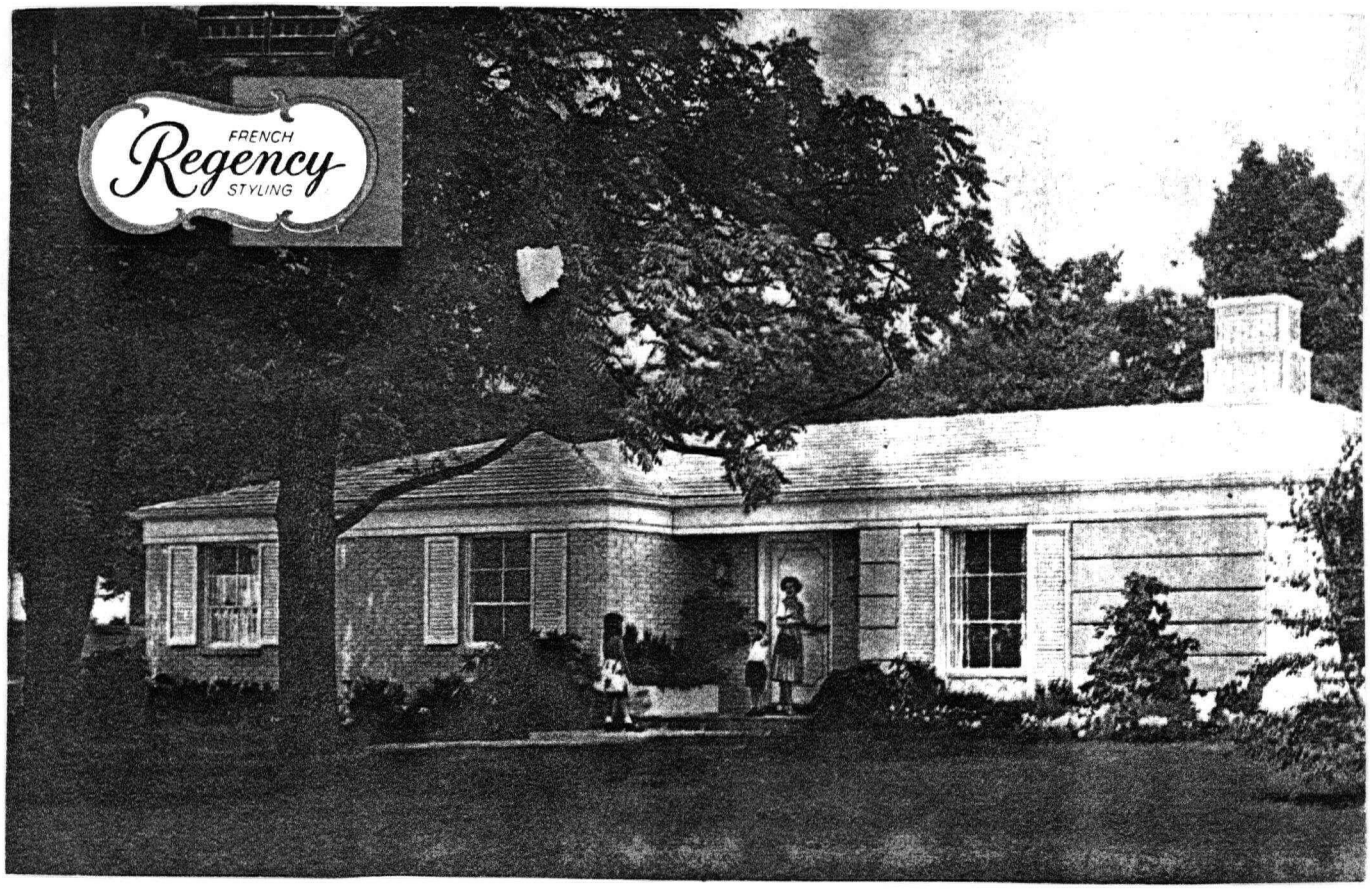

Figure 6 Its a dream come true... ranch style. *Life*, v. 43, n. 17, Oct. 21, 1957.

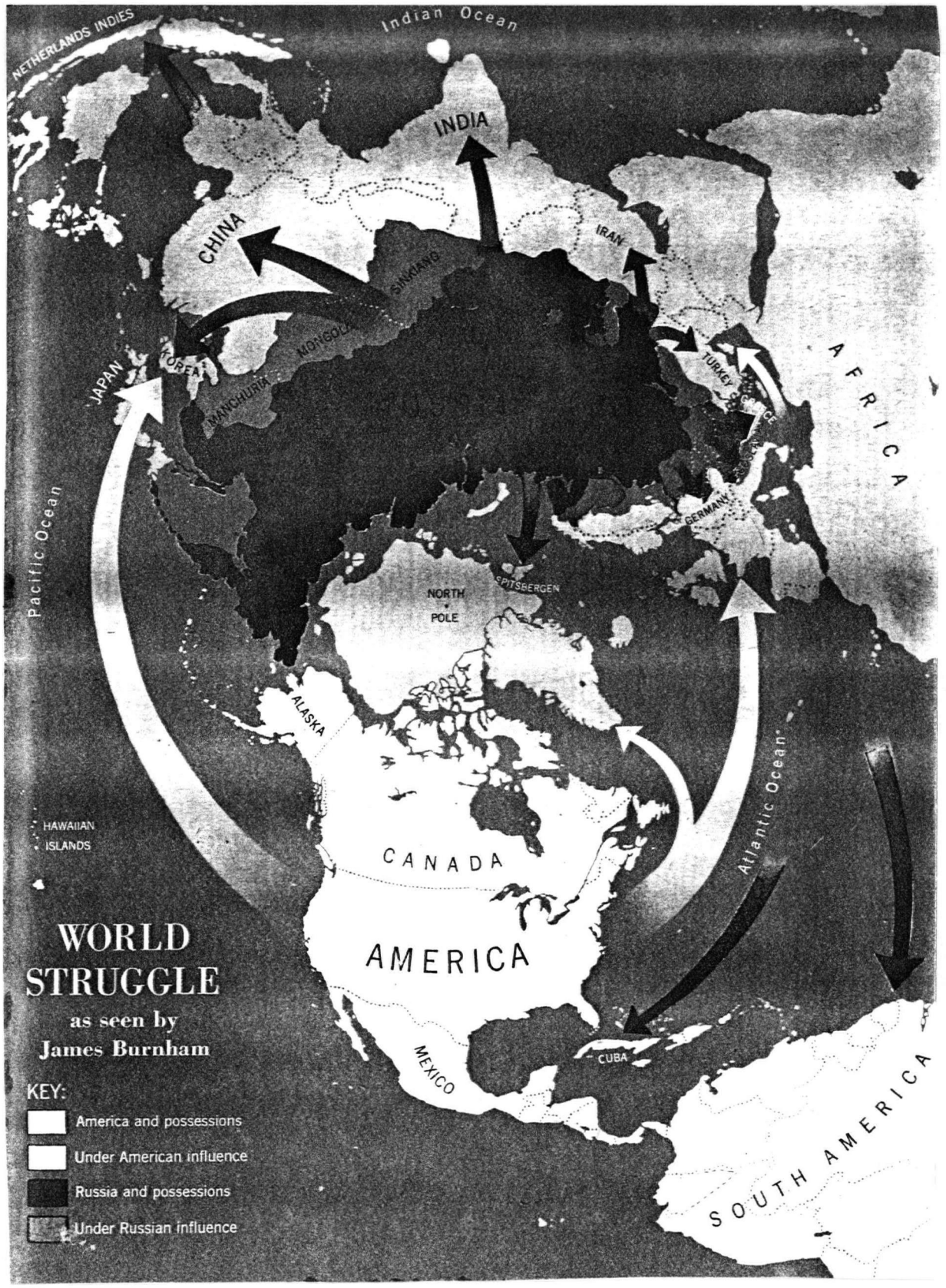

Figure 7 "World Struggle as seen by James Burnham". *Life*, v. 22, n. 13, Mar. 31, 1947.

Figure 8 "The story of Jackson Pollett(sic), the boy wonder of merchandising, whose obsession with getting ahead changed him from a likable young man into a tyrant who climbed to power over people he had knocked down. Jackson put business before all else -- friends, marriage, and integrity -- until the day when crushing drive wasn't enough to get him what he wanted". J. Harvey Howells: *The Big Company Look.* New York: Doubleday and Company, 1958, dust cover.

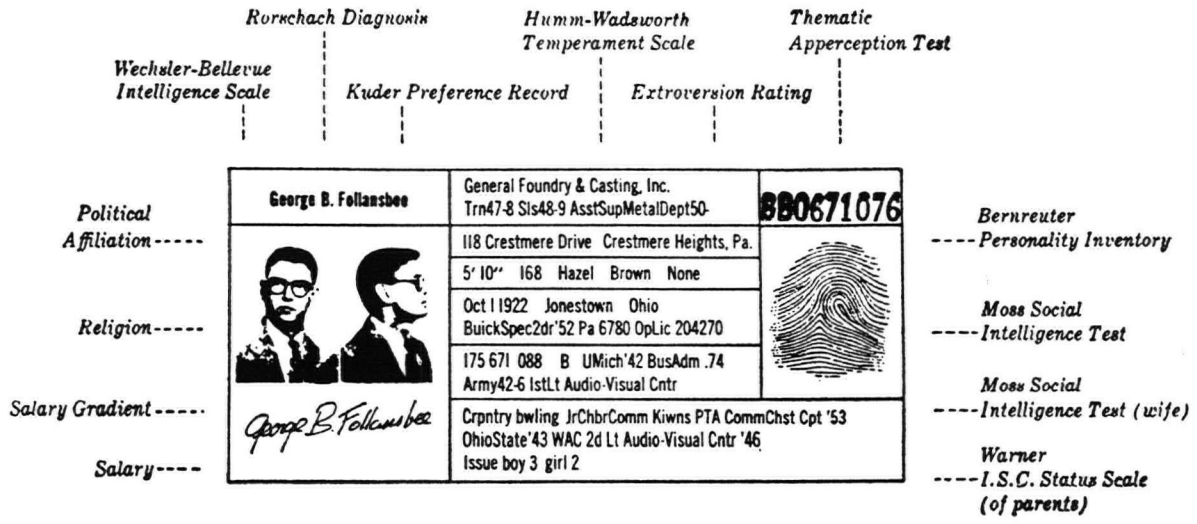

Figure 9 "The Universal Card" for Personality Testing. William H. Whyte, Jr. *The Organization Man.* London: Jonathan Cape, 1957, p. 177.

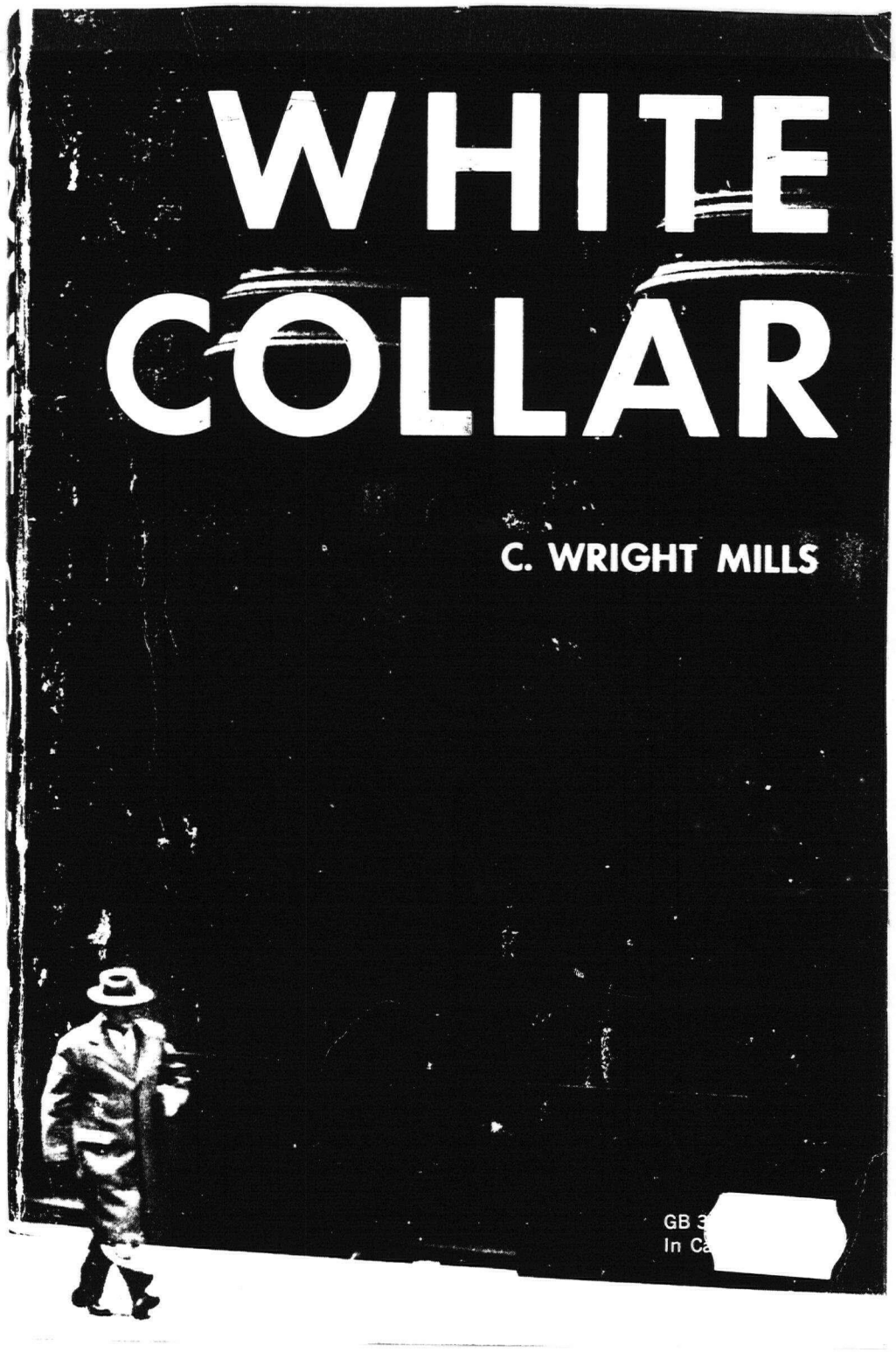

Figure 10 White Collar Worker. C. Wright Mills. *The White Collar: The American Middle Classes.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1951, dust cover.

Drawing by Bertrand Zadig

Not Left, Not Right, But a Vital Center

The hope of the future lies in the widening and deepening of the democratic middle ground.

By ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER JR.

THE nobles, walking into the French Assembly of 1789, took their traditional place of honor on the president's right. The Third Estate grouped itself defiantly on the left. Thus arose the division which, at first a question of protocol, was soon converted into a question of politics and emotion. As parliamentarianism reached its height in the simplicities of the nineteenth century, when the Right meant those who wished to preserve the existing order and the Left

At the same time, new complexities were overtaking the Left. The declarations of the Rights of Man, the spirit of

certain basic respects—a totalitarian state structure, a single party, a leader, a secret police, a hatred of political, cultural and intellectual freedom; fascism and communism are clearly more like each other than they are like anything in between. This dilemma drove Prof. Irwin C. Poole to an inspired suggestion. Right and Left, he said, should be con-

Figure 11 "Not Left, Not Right, But a Vital Center. "New *York Times Magazine,* Drawing by Bertrand, Zadig April 14, 1948.

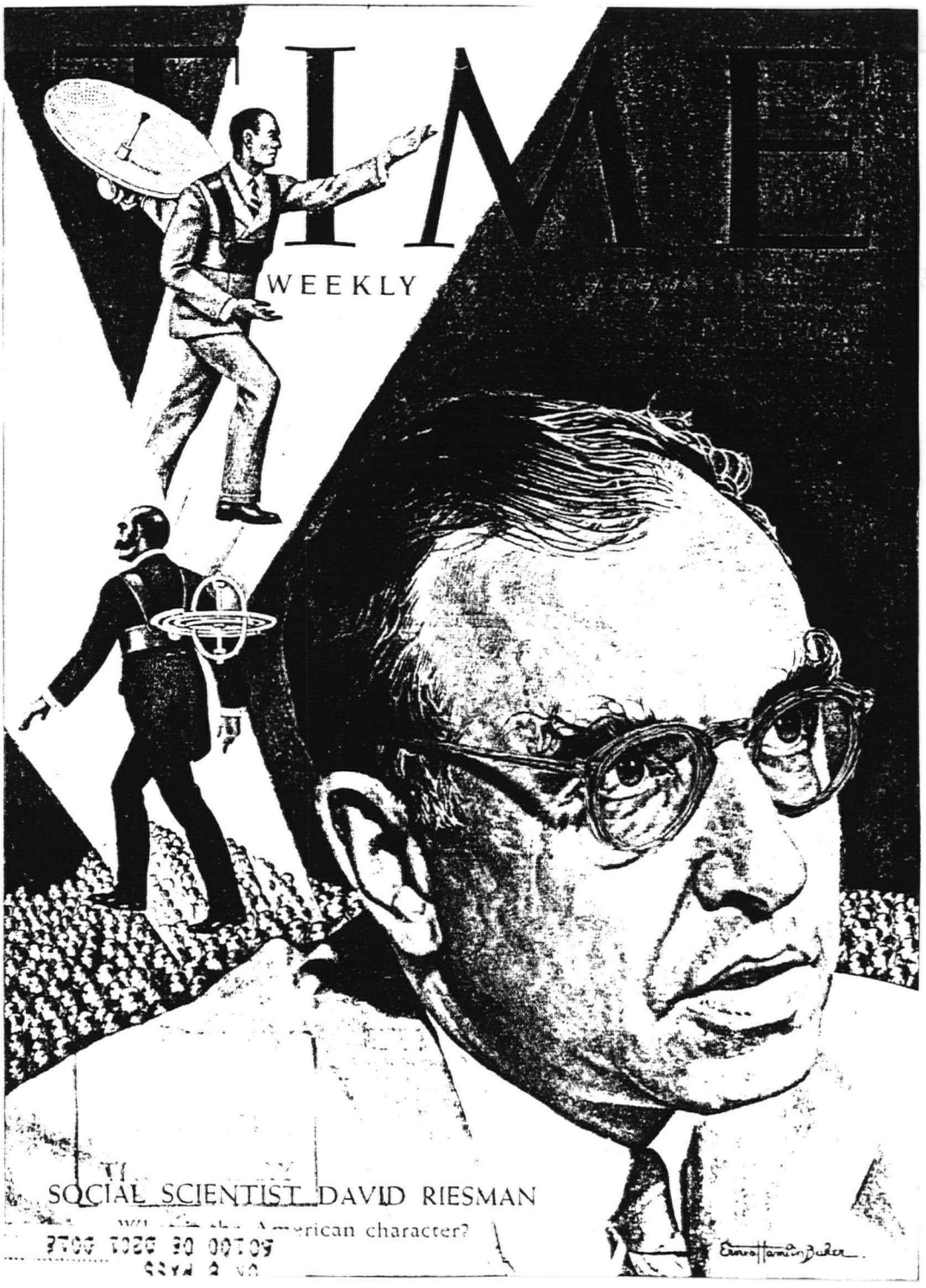

Figure 12 The anxiety sensing "radar sensing device". "What is the American Character?"..."Social Scientist David Riesman". *Time* magazine. Drawing by Errol Baker, October 19, 1954.

Chapter 2

Shedding New Light on the Dog-Day-Afternoonday of Life: Or how Clement Greenberg Built a Fence Against History Out of the Suburban Night of Mere Reflection

> Processes of logical thought constitute much of the "action" in Kafka's fiction, and the story is often the inefficacy of that thought, and nothing more. No one has ever made thought so vivid as an object rather than subject. And no one has succeeded so well in capturing its processes for the ends of imaginative literature.
>
> As it happens, there is a precedent for this kind of vision, but one that lies outside Western tradition. The treadmill of routine, permanence, and pattern, with scrupulous thought as its constituent and enabling principle, to which Kafka's heroes look for their safety bears many resemblance's to what is envisioned in that all-important department of post-Biblical Judaism called *Halachach.* Halachach is the rational derivation -- and derivation upon derivation -- and application of Jewish religious law on the basis of the precepts found in the Pentateuch. Law, or Torah, extended or elaborated by means of Halachach, inside and outside the Talmud, sanctifies as much as possible of human existence by fixing it in routines whose observance pleases God. Life is consecrated by being subjected to repetition...
>
> Though Gentile history has finally brought Kafka emancipation, it still remains Gentile, therefore essentially dangerous to the Jew, emancipated or not. For the safety alone -- no longer of safety as an increment of salvation -- he must still seek his refuge in a version of a Halachic order and immobility. However, being irreligious now, he cannot build his "fence" against history on the original divine ordinances, but only out of the most general and self-evident features of the traditionally Jewish way of life: middle-class orderliness, routine, prudence, sedentary stability, application to daily tasks -- and chronic anxiety about the future that leaves little room for sentiment about the past.
>
> (Clement Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka: Some Sources of His Particular Vision, 1955)[1]

Thus Clement Greenberg, in 1955, writing on his favorite author and framing his praise of Kafka in what are strange terms. As perplexing as the matter of fact telling of fantastic events which transpire in Kafka's fiction. As surprising as that eerie conjunction between the uncanny and the everyday continually forced in Kafka's fiction. That Greenberg should frame his appraisal of Kafka's writing in terms of the repetitious lifestyle of a middleclass seems a mystery as great and impenetrable as the impersonal and oddly mechanized forces which drive the officer in "The Penal Colony" to perform the protocols of a needless execution, scrupulously maintain the working order of the apparatus, and finally stage his own death in good conduct using that apparatus.

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[1]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka: Some Sources of His Particular Vision", (*Commentary*, April, 1955), in C. G., v. 3, pp. 204-205.

Strange terms for an appraisal of Kafka's fiction coming from the likes of Greenberg. Strange, because this careful and attentive criticism was coming from someone acutely aware of the problem of conformity. Strange, because it was being articulated by someone who had almost singlehandedly defined the avant-garde project in his groundbreaking essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch". Strange, simply because Greenberg exalted Kafka's fiction precisely for its pedestrian air, its "repetition", its "middle class orderliness" and its dependence on the "treadmill of routine, permanence, and pattern".

Strange terms indeed for a defense of Kafka's fiction. Yet, it is a strangeness which comes from a recasting of the mood of Kafka's fiction. There is a kind of languor and slow monotony to Greenberg's text that is forced right up to the surface. It is as if only a mirror reflection of Kafka's style can speak to the depths that style plumbs. Like a mere reflection of Kafka's style description itself moves the narrative. Like a dream Greenberg's essay begins out of nowhere, at mid-sentence or mid-thought if you will. Not only is there the sense that the fact of beginning has involved some consternation and even a struggle of abstracting and conjuring meaning, but that this beginning coincides with a process already well underway. The ending is no less revealing. While there is a literal finish, nothing has been resolved. It seems thought can only ever agonize over its inability to grasp ultimate meaning. The last sentence, like the first, can only play catch up with a process that is always anterior to it.

Then, too, there is the precedent of Max Brod's biography, which seems an important point of departure in itself, a point which Greenberg's text especially privileges. Not surprisingly, Brod's contemplation also focusses upon the "strangeness" of Kafka. He writes:

> The strangeness of Kafka's person and writing is only apparent. In fact, one should add, anyone who finds Kafka singular and attractive on account of his bizarrerie has not yet understood him. Kafka traced to their source the individual and the inobvious with such love and preciseness that things came to light which one had never before suspected, which seem strange indeed and yet are nothing but true. Such, too, was his way of looking at a moral duty,

> a fact of life, a journey, a work of art, a political movement -- never bizarre, but only very exact, keen, right, and in consequence different from everyday talk, in consequence, perhaps, also quite often (though not perhaps always) unsuitable for what one calls "practical life".[2]

For both Greenberg and Brod, Kafka's "strangeness" is "only apparent". For if Brod finds its source in a "love and preciseness" for the "individual and inobvious", for Greenberg it hinges on the fact that "at the same time, the ultimate and immediate, the exceptional and the everyday, the crucial and the incidental, intersect everywhere and at every moment."[3]. In Brod's case such insight was founded upon an intimate acquaintance with "Kafka's person and writing". In Greenberg's, it is founded upon a mutually shared recognition for the irrevocably fallen state of consciousness. Greenberg, like Kafka, "traced to their source the individual and inobvious", in order to give some, any, substance to "what one calls practical life". The strangeness of Kafka's writing, far from being a "bizarrerie" veiled a kind of deep necessity; it forged a link between the falleness of a life lived in all its everydayness and another plane of being otherwise suppressed by consciousness. If the strangeness of Kafka's fiction revealed consciousness to be an isolated, fallen, factual, event, it also cast a dark light on an otherwise silenced, ultimate, exceptional, and crucial history.

Thus with Greenberg's text we are presented with a sort of floating fragment in which a kind of integrity and factual completeness does battle with a meaning and pace that can only be a function of a greater whole or a larger clock work, now unfortunately missing. The relation with Brod's text provides only one such example. Take Greenberg's passage with which we began. Coming roughly at the middle of his meditation on Kafka it epitomizes an equivocation between necessity and contingency. The low drumming insistence of its halting sentences and its Halachic order does not drive the repetition in the text as a whole, nor stand out in relief as the motor in itself. Rather, it seems only one brief surfacing of a

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[2]Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), p. 52.
[3]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 203.

tautological movement, one candid glimpse of a machinery that is part of a larger causal universe. If there is any sense of autonomy or self determination in the text, it is for the most part undermined by the sinking feeling that larger more incomprehensible forces are at work.

Undoubtedly the "action" of Greenberg's text, which mirrors that of Kafka's fiction, is at the crux of the matter. Its slow monotony is I think an effect that Greenberg wanted and even troubled himself over. After all, it was an effect that warranted the use of a kind of mannered stylistics which was Kafka's signature. It was an effect, if we are to believe both Brod's and Greenberg's argument for strangeness, that went to the core of Kafka's achievement. The "action" of Greenberg's text is at the crux of a complex of issues which go to the core of Greenberg's notion of the aesthetic. The "action" of Greenberg's or Kafka's writing was to encapsulate more inscrutable forces and processes at work, in history and in the physical universe. Processes and forces if larger and more inscrutable than the individual and particular, did nevertheless make up the individual and particular. "Action" encapsulated the instantaneous teleological process that precipitated the inevitable fall into the everyday. It was that movement upon which consciousness was based and which consciousness had to negate or silence because constitutive.

Betweenness is the crucial description to keep in mind here. For the "action" Greenberg is interested in is a movement between what he calls the "immediate data of a nakedness", which can only be some direct contact with sensation or experience and that "derivation -- and derivation upon derivation", which is consciousness or representation.[4] In fact the "action" we are interested in, is a kind of instantaneous physical or material circiutry that exercises a nullifying effect on that which it normally precipitates: consciousness. It is the transformative moment of the symbolic. A diachronic movement, between matter and meaning, contained

[4]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 204.

within a synchronic event. It is what Hegel called the "noonday of life". The "night of mere reflection" when reason drowns "in its own abyss".[5]

Much of the strangeness in Greenberg's text and Kafka's writing more generally comes from the fact that one is dealing with a situation in which language is itself inadequate to the job of conveying what both men are in fact most interested in representing. The kind of movement we are interested in lies on the level of content rather than form. That is the dreamlike quality of Kafka's style accessed something other than mere appearance. It encapsulated a process which the symbolic realm of movement described. For Greenberg, the "action" of thought reflecting on its own nature was the key metaphor of a unity and wholeness otherwise lost to those living under the conditions of industrialism.

Kafka himself was uniquely aware of this dillemma. Take, for instance his short parable "Paradise". It was included in a collection of works that Greenberg helped translate with Willa and Edwin Muir in 1947.[6] I think it more than ably describes the kind of movement Greenberg is interested in. Man is tensioned off in a kind of force field between the matter and plenitude of Paradise on one hand and a state of blessedness in Heaven on the other hand. He can know or touch neither pole, but rather "lives continuously" between poles without any secure purchase on things as they are.

> He is a free and secure citizen of the world, for he is fettered to a chain which is long enough to give him the freedom of all earthly space, and yet only so long that nothing can drag him past the frontiers of the world. But simultaneously he is a free and secure citizen of Heaven as well, for he is also fettered by a similarly designed heavenly chain. So that if he heads, say, for the earth, his heavenly collar throttles him, and if he heads for Heaven, his earthly one does the same. And yet all the possibilities are his, and he feels it; more he actually refuses to account for the deadlock by an error in the original fettering.[7]

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[5]Hegel, *Difference: The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy.* trans. and ed. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), pp. 102-103.
[6]It is also reprinted as #66 of "Reflections" in Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings,* (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), p. 41.
[7]Kafka, ibid, p. 31.

Man, it seems, is trapped between matter and meaning, as unable to take hold of any real physical substance as he is unable to grasp any absolute meaning. His condition is betwixt and between; it is a condition of pure experiencing, the predicament of a purely sensual order. Unfortunately, this in-between space "He" inhabits is only a symbolic one. For "He" as a subject constituted through consciousness is forever exiled from this condition of plenitude. Consciousness as a state of falleness or sin is an irrevocable condition. "Expulsion from paradise is in its main significance eternal. That is to say", Kafka continues ...

> although expulsion from Paradise is final, and life in the world unavoidable, the eternal nature of the occurrence (or, temporally expressed, the eternal recapitulation of the occurrence), nevertheless makes it possible not only that we might remain in Paradise permanently, but that we may in fact be there permanently, no matter whether we know it or not.[8]

Man's condition is thus both a "presentness" in the world which he can never know, and that which makes this "presentness" something of the past, which he can never experience or feel, because a consciousness of the world. What is decisive in Kafka's formulation is the temporal expression that this permanence exhibits. It is conceived of as an endless series of expulsions. Which is to maintain that "man" lives in a succession of instantaneous moments of expulsion whether he knows it or not. For Kafka consciousness is not to be conceived of as "the eternal recapitulation of the occurrence", but something following upon the occurrence that obscures the "action" of an "eternal recapitulation". Consciousness, is the static form, or teleogical event precipitated by a repetitious expulsion from the paradise of the symbolic. On the other hand, the "eternal recapitulation of the occurrence", is the vection or "transformative" moment when matter is in a state of becoming meaning. The time of this "action" is a delirious one. The repetition of this "action" is eternal. For Greenberg as much as Kafka consciousness disguises the

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[8]Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), p. 41.

truth of a permanent living in Paradise by claiming presentness in the world for its own.

What is at stake in Kafka's conceptualization of the "eternal recapitulation of the occurrence" is the nature of consciousness or personhood itself. By breaking consciousness down into the product of a repetitious coming into being, the self is no longer conceived of as fluid or continuous. Rather it is a discontinuous and periodic sucession of static events that veil or hide the fluid and continuous "action" of a temporal existence. Man is less possessed of the "divine knowledge" of repetition, than full with it or consumed by it to such an extent that he is blinded to its operation. For Greenberg like Kafka, "life is consecrated by being subjected to repetition". For the monotonous time of the eternal action is a time before and other to a mechanical, eleatic, and historical time. This chapter focusses on why a fence against history, an enclosure or kennel for the symbolic, could only be built out of "middleclass orderliness, routine, prudence, sedentary stability", in sum conformity, the very bain of modern existence.

We can restate the crux of the problem as Greenberg saw it, by saying the problem in postwar United States and the problem in modernity as Kafka had so ably stated it, was the making of meaning itself. In the post-exilic world -- a world without the fixed and stable relays that once governed the religious symbol's transformative moment between matter and meaning, the particular and the general, or the individual and the universal -- the making of meaning was itself an unframeable problematic.[9] Whether framed by the bureaucratic depthlessness that was the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Kafka's Prague, or the moral disorder of American culture, truth was itself no longer a function of the conditions of subjective experience. It was now dictated by an extrinsic law. Kafka's dilemma was the American dilemma. For if consciousness was itself an illusion, how was it possible to convey truthfulness. The occurrence or transformative principle was

[9]My understanding of the materialist problematic here, is deeply indebted to T. J. Clark's reading of Benjamin and de Man.

itself so consistent, eternally secure, so totalizing, and so complete, that it rendered an outside, a birds-eye view, or a third person perspective impossible. There was only an inside, thick and heavy with the drumming insistence of repetition"... a wide open inside a closed and stifling world."[10]

From Greenberg's perspective Kafka more than any other writer captured the paradox of this "world all middle". His fantastic stories were attempts to problematize the unframeable nature of truth by wrapping it in a veil of repetition, conformity, and prosaic routine. How does one explain away the predictable manner through which a matter of fact telling can only produce marvelous and uncanny phenomenon -- phenomenon which inspite of their exceptional character are in the end all very normal, all very fitting for the "claustrophobic" parameters of a "world all middle". Only in a world in which the vection of matter into meaning is itself an unframeable problematic can the monstrous transformation of Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphoses* take place. The fact that it makes any sense at all is a testament to the mundane prosaic form of the telling. In Greenberg's mind, Kafka's own "claustrophobia" was shot through with all the tensions of Riesman's society of conformity, Bell's view of corporate bureaucratization, and that more general intensification of capitalism complicit in the colonization of leisure and the "good life". Kafka offered one resonant example of the struggle against conformity, one that neatly embodied Greenberg's pessimal form of individualism. I think we need to get a clearer picture of all this. Certainly it is difficult terrain to map out, but it is nevertheless a terrain that will prove absolutely central to understanding why repetition provided any hedge against conformity.

If we are to appreciate the full resonance of Greenberg's perspective we will need to place it in some kind of context. We need to return to 1953, to a moment just two months after Greenberg's resignation from the ACCF. More specifically, to

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[10]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 208.

Greenberg's criticism of T. S. Eliot and the essay from which this criticism comes: "The Plight of Our Culture". It is an exceptional text. A text, I think, that if we are attentive to in all its subtlety will give us a springboard to understanding the logic of Greenberg's cultural politics; the way in which Kafka's vision of "a world all middle" articulated the problematic of conformity in America in the 1950s and suggested some slim possibility in the face of it. Probably conceived and written during and just in the wake of his resignation in June and July of 1953, all the headaches, problems, and criticisms of the ACCF Executive are heaped, as it were, on to Eliot's "threadbare piece of journalism".[11] I don't think the conflation between the positions of Eliot and liberalism was accidental either.

> Eliot has done as much as anyone in our time to expose the superficialities that have accompanied the popularization of the ideas of the Enlightenment, of Utilitarianism, and "scientism" -- but by criticizing a kind of sensibility, not systems of ideas. Nor does his quarrel seem in the beginning to have been with the ideas of liberalism as such, or with any set of ideas, but with the deadness of sensibility wherever he found it, on the right and left, in church and out; and if he found it more often on the left, it was not so much because he wanted, at first, to find it there. Only later, when he began to deal publicly with non-literary matters, did he fix on liberalism as the main enemy, and adopt a consciously "anti-modern" religious and political position. But it was then, too, that his own sensibility showed the first symptoms of the same ailment he had diagnosed. His cure turned out to be a variant of that malady, and he, too, became an ideologue, remaining fixed, with no further understanding, in his original disgust with "modernism". And as he has gone on flogging the same old tired horse -- omitting in his criticism of the Enlightenment to distinguish between the root ideas and their vulgarization -- he has become less and less able to distinguish between insight and banality in the notions he himself advances.[12]

The shift in Eliot's criticism that Greenberg here traces is a complex one. It operates against many orientations, with many themes in mind, and works on as full many levels. Eliot really serves only as a casting off point. But Greenberg's injunction against what he represents is no less powerful for this. We might say that what Greenberg lays out is a mounting insistence that modernity is not a value in itself but rather exists increasingly in Eliot, as a set of values independent of a modernity. A set of values extracted from a golden age -- that of "Periclean Athens,

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[11]Greenberg,"The Plight of Our Culture", (*Commentary*, June and July 1953), in C.G. 2, p.126.
[12]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 123 - 124.

the medieval West, Elizabethan England, Renaissance North Italy, seventeenth-century France" -- is used by Eliot as a standard to gauge the collapse of this one.[13] Eliot's recourse to "the assumption, familiar by now, that our culture is in decline" forefronting the essay would seem to attest to this. If in Eliot's opinion the golden age of modernity was over, from Greenberg's American perspective this was not at all the case. Not because it is over or not over as such, but ultimately because modernity for Greenberg was founded upon a set of altogether more intangible and meta-historical quality's, not unrelated to the action of Kafka's scrupulously historical writing. It only confounds Greenberg all the more that in the beginning Eliot had some contact with this dynamic. His force early on was as "a great reformer of sensibility", his concern was in "criticizing a kind of sensibility, not systems of ideas".[14] Not "the ideas of liberalism as such, or with any set of ideas, but with the deadness of sensibility wherever he found it."

For Greenberg the notion of one's own present, one's own modernity, was inextricably related, to a questioning of ones own sensibilities, or as in his reading of Kafka "to resolving the portents given him by his sensibility".[15] In tension with "systems of ideas", the experience of modernity is defined in terms of a self-reflexive act that can only seek an absence in discursivity. Liberalism and Eliot, which is to say the entire spectrum of positions representative of liberal democracy, placed to much emphasis on the corrupted surface of the present, rather than the absence that was depth. However good or bad the American moment was, or was going to get, the experience of it was still foundational in defining modernity. The tension here is bound up in the same paradoxical structure that Greenberg had recourse to in his 1948 article "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture". What was it again that Nietzsche "knew in spite of his profession of the Dionysian?" If the experience of modernity was to be captured it inevitably involved a contradictory

[13]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 129.
[14]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 123.
[15]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 123.

embrace of that through which absence was manifest.[16] The irony of this situation is premised on the fact that an embrace of the American moment, if a critical one, was actually as full and hard a negation of the present moment possible. Or as Paul de Man puts it: "The modernity of a literary period is defined as the manner in which it discovers the impossibility of being modern."[17]

The burden of Greenberg's argument hinges upon popular culture and especially the expansion of a "middlebrow" culture therein. For Greenberg, "culture in decline", as in T. S. Eliot's pessimistic and romantic definition, did not sufficiently capture the intricacies of the modern moment, especially as encapsulated in the American condition.[18] Increased prosperity, higher levels of education, and aspiring levels of cultural appreciation among a broad populace had to be acknowledged as positive progress in any cultural model, despite the apparent processes of cultural leveling involved. The question asked was whether American capitalism was really promoting the kind of uniformity which Eliot feared. At the heart of Greenberg's essay is the supposition that it was, but not quite in the form Eliot perceived it. What was at issue for Greenberg was not the "leveled" uniformity of culture -- this was a contingency - but rather uniformity of a more fundamental nature. Regardless of the occultation of class, the pervasive breaking down of hierarchies, the rationalization of corporate and industrial process, differentiation and the construction of difference was being promoted. For Greenberg, however, this new differentiation was less a sign of resistance than a symptom of an intensification of capitalism itself. It was an aestheticization of capitalism's older form; a displacing and formalizing of the relative positions of an inside and outside in that form. The traditional Marxist categories of base and superstructure had become one, rendering everything middle, rendering all as

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[16]Any one position which failed to realize this tension fit within the terms for a wholesale dismissal; being less "reactionary than it is irrelevant, and their own half-suppressed realization of this has the effect of driving its adherents to but further extremes of irrelevance". Greenberg, ibid, p. 125.

[17]De Man, "Literary history and Literary Modernity", in *Blindness and Insight,* p. 143.

[18]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", v. 15, p. ?

though seen through a veil, a depthless Kafkaesque tissue of appearances without any substantive causality. It seemed that the power of capitalism had increased, thereby rendering everything a function of its structural necessity. It would have been speculation along these lines that led him to rally to the cause for cultural diversity in the ACCF at its inception, and equally one that would have warranted his resignation.

For Greenberg, the massive expansion of "middlebrow culture" was a perfect example of these processes of obfuscation. "Middlebrow culture" was an infinite category, it was the most graspable form of a "world all middle" -- "a wide open inside a closed an stifling world". Evidently the distinctions between mass culture and high culture, as understood in his 1939 article "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", had by mid century become altogether diffuse. Greenberg writes:

> The middle, for a variety of reasons, has become the crucial level as far as social power is concerned, and deserves special attention ... There is a vast distance between high culture and lowbrow -- vaster, perhaps, than anything similar in the past -- but it is covered without apparent break by the infinite shadings and gradings of middlebrow culture, which is defined roughly by the fact that, though its audience shrinks from the trials of highbrow culture, it nonetheless refuses to let its culture be simply a matter of entertainment and diversion on the lowbrow order. Middlebrow has to do in one way or another with self-improvement, and is born almost always out of the desire and effort of newly ascended social classes to rise culturally as well.[19]

"Middlebrow" culture's utter weight in American culture had, it seems, capped off a century of gathering momentum. To the extent that through the efficiency of American industrialism, the middle classes material position, its political power and its optimism, had peaked; its culture -- "middlebrow culture" -- had become the crucial culture as well, "where the fate of the whole is decided".[20]

If we are to understand Greenberg's thoughts on "middlebrow culture", we need to survey the general context from which his remarks emerge; specifically those positions in the ACCF his own position was formulated against. Generally

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[19]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our culture", v.15, p. 564.
[20]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our culture", v.15, p. 564.

speaking "middlebrow culture" was integral to diversity. It was the essential byproduct of the merger between plural democracy and capitalism. The problem of diversity as articulated in the essay is in many ways a logical progression from a loosely shared set of assumptions Greenberg held in common with other members of the ACCF. Take Dwight MacDonald's perspective.

> A statistically significant part of the population, I venture to guess, is chronically confronted with a choice between going to the movies or to a concert, between reading Tolstoy or a detective story, between looking at old masters or at a T. V. show; i.e., the pattern of their cultural lives is open to the point of being porous. Good art competes with Kitsch, serious ideas compete with commercialized formulae -- and the advantage lies all on one side. [21]

Or for that matter Daniel Bell's comments for the keynote address of the ACCF's 1955 Milan Conference. Again diversity is used as a similar structural mechanism, however in this context for substantiating the integrity of American culture.

> In the United States, more dollars are spent on concerts of classical music than on baseball. Sales of books have doubled in a decade. There are over a thousand symphony orchestras, and several hundred museums, institutes and colleges are purchasing art in the United States today. Various other indexes can be cited to show the growth of a vast middlebrow society. And in coming years, with steadily increasing productivity, the United States will become an even more active "consumer" of culture.[22]

Of course there are differences between Greenberg's account and these other accounts and certainly more so with regard to Bell's perspective than MacDonald's. What little grasp on the predicament of things and relations middlebrow's diversity offered for Greenberg is used by Bell to dispel criticism of America as a mass society. For Bell, the levels of middlebrow culture is put to the task of doing a different work altogether. By positing American culture as a healthy and open one, rather than Kafka's "wide open inside a closed and stifling world", diversity alone was determining the freedoms inherent. As one went higher on up the ladder of

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[21]Dwight MacDonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture", (*Diogenes* , n. 3, Sum. 1953), p. 4.

[22]Daniel Bell, "America as a Mass Society", delivered Sept. 1955, see *The End of Ideology*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1960), p. 33.

"infinite shadings and gradings" the freedoms implicit become more wide open, only to fulfill the traditional terms of American Liberalism's faith in the individual. Bell's ACCF address functions in the European context in terms of a kind of civilizing mission, a type of imperialist and colonial mission based in the defense of an emerging corporate order that Greenberg would ever be on vigil against. But this difference aside, in some broad sense "middlebrow culture" furnished the "new liberalism" with a schema of relations which offered some bite or hold on the world that seemed just on the verge of collapse. In the context of the Cold War it provided a diversified range of cultural phenomenon, an altogether complex and varied field of phenomenon, that offered some minimal distinctions between it and the complete cultural leveling under "totalitarianism". While Bell found some real efficacy or mechanism for freedom inherent in this diversity, MacDonald was more skeptical and Greenberg more skeptical still. This is not to say everyone involved in the ACCF, including Greenberg, was not concerned for the plight of popular culture or the individual. They were, and Greenberg was.

In sum these constructions of diversity were strategic to a hegemonic American representation, but functioned in different ways for different positions. For Bell, diversity seems to have provided evidence for the graspable translation of differentiating publics. While it might have seemed to be a "mass society" from a European perspective, popular culture offered itself up in a sufficiently infinite variety of forms to suggest some kind of struggle toward heightened selfhood. Bell's basic position would loosely define the Democratic platform in the ensuing years but it already had a firm footing in the ideological ramifications of the more general position he represented. It was the same new managerial class that the "new liberalism" counted on and in part mobilized behind Adlai Stevenson and the Democratic party in the 1952 presidential elections. In Lionel Trilling's case for example, the pyrrhic victory of the Stevenson campaign was that it had confirmed the existence of a progressive and increasingly powerful economic faction moved by

the power of ideas: "not-- content with mass culture as we now have it, because for its very existence it requires new ideas, or at least the simulacra of new ideas".[23]

For his part, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. saw the inadequacies of this type of formulation fairly clearly. From his perspective it was, in fact, precisely the kind of polarization that Trilling wanted to see that had precipitated the Stevenson loss to Eisenhower in the first place. Rather than a middlebrow election, the candidacy had become a race between the "high brow" or "intellectuals" and the "people". What the press had affectionately termed the "egg-head vote" in Connecticut primaries with "Ivy League connotations" had transformed into a voter connoting an "A. B. Degree, button down collars, tweeds and flannels, perhaps pipes and crew haircuts, with a lively but amateurish interest in the intellectual life, and a capacity to read without moving one's lips".[24] And ultimately in the hands of the Republican right to "a person of intellectual pretensions, often a professor or protégé of a professor ... superficial in approach to any problem ... feminine ... supercilious ... surfeited with conceit ... a doctrinaire supporter of middle-European socialism ... a self conscious prig ... a bleeding heart."[25]

Schlesinger's article, "The Highbrow in American Politics", published in the Spring of 1953 only one month before Greenberg's article, is especially illuminating with regard to the climate of opinion that "The Plight of Our Culture" hails from. For Schlesinger concludes with a warning against the intellectual who chooses to "escape" or "reject" politics in favor of "contemplation and withdrawal", who decides to "flee it all and become a Yogi".[26] In the grim atmosphere left in the wake of the Stevenson loss the obstacles and objectives of Greenberg's article become all to clear. His ironic position is not conceived of as a disavowal of the political at all,

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[23]This position would continue to dominate the political directives of the "new liberalism" throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s , under Schlesinger and with the Kennedy administration. Trilling, "The Situation of the American Intellectual at the Present Time", (*Perspectives*, April 1953), p. 35.

[24]Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "The Highbrow in American Politics", (*Partisan Review*, Mar. Apr, 1953, v. XX, n. 2), p. 157.

[25]Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "The Highbrow in American Politics", ibid, p. 159. Schlesinger quotes Louis Bromfield an advisor to McCarthy.

[26]Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "The Highbrow in American Politics", ibid, p. 162.

but in fact represented the only solution left to sustain some notion of the oppositional. Much of the force of Greenberg's text rises from this paradoxical tension. He had to both defend his resignation from the ACCF, and the editorial policy of *Commentary* more generally, from all corners of the intellectual scene. But all this is as yet unsubstantiated. We need to address the specific coordinates of Greenberg's position in the context of the surrounding culture. In what terms was Greenberg thinking "middle class orderliness", "the treadmill of routine, permanence, and pattern", really offered any avenue for the founding of a "substantial art"?

David Riesman's analysis of conformity is the most instructive here. It offers a sounding board for a kind of individualist ethics through and against which we can define Greenberg's own negotiations. While a critique of consumer culture is foremost in both accounts, Riesman finds the infinite variety of forms is as much a function of specific choices made by individuals and the taste groupings to which they belong.[27] Such was the optimism of Riesman up until 1957.[28] Freedom or autonomy were firmly grounded in an individualist ethics; they were a capacity to out-maneuver the dominant mode of conformity through self-consciously directed choices. Confronting the burden of choice as such involved a continual

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[27] Certainly the choice for "good art", as MacDonald saw it, was a difficult choice with "the advantage (lying) all on one side", but there was at least the choice and this was enough to warrant the limited form freedom had assumed in MacDonald's theories.

[28] While at one time the parvenue of culture was the great hope emerging from the suburb, in Riesman's reassessment of leisure in his 1957 paper "The Suburban Dislocation", the situation is bleak indeed. With the demographic shift from the urban core, where the taste group has at least some hope of remaining intact, to the suburban periphery, where differentiating publics are homogenized, all hope Riesman had at one time entertained in 1948 is lost. Having introduced the problem of homogenization in the suburb he continues:"All this brings with it an increasing decentralization of leisure. Just as the suburban churches tend, within the boundaries of the "three faiths", to an amiable syncretism, ignoring doctrinal or liturgical differences, so too the other leisure activities of the suburbs tend to reduce the specialized differentiations possible in the metropolis. What I mean here can be illustrated with reference to music. A metropolis has enough music lovers to organize highly differentiated groups: Mozart lovers may split off from Bach lovers and would never encounter lovers of Wagner, while in the suburbs the music lovers -- if they are to support communal activities at all -- must in some measure homogenize their tastes and hence create a local market for "classical music". Indeed they will be exposed to a good deal of community pressure to support the musical activities of their friends in return for having their own enterprises supported." Riesman, "The Suburban Dislocation",(*The Annals*, v.314, Nov. 1957),
pp. 132 -133.

rationalizing or working through otherwise internalized choices, those guided by a significant proportion of motivation or drive. This two-stage mechanism in the difficult choice for high culture, i.e., "the burden of being one's own arbiter of taste" was basic to Riesman's individualism, basic to the tactics involved in the "nerve of failure".[29] As we will see Greenberg's cultural model is vastly different. In his much more pessimistic assesment of the situation choice itself had been rendered entirely obsolete by the totalizing nature of the American economy.

Because conformity is conceived as both a limit and a possibility it allows for a construction of difference only in retrospect. For Riesman the repercussions of this new hierarchization of difference founded upon choices made in the realm of leisure were crucial. It provided a framework in which an ever heightening continuum of personal choice was solely responsible for distinguishing between the "infinite shadings and gradings" of "middlebrow culture". For Riesman, freedom is a function of both emotional drive and the conscious choice to defer the forgers settled and repetitious ways. In the end this focused in on the element of sophistication possessed by the consumer and keyed an ascending scale of engagement, moral certitude and hence heightened autonomy, from the comic book to the popular movie, and on up to the ever rarefied realm of high culture and "good art".[30]

This two-fold process, involving motivation and drive on the one hand and self-conscious choice on the other, is fundamental. It depended on both an anxietyless and instantaneous desire in the first place, followed by the anxiety of a second conscious and more difficult choice. Simply put, the individual's inherent striving for the "good life", is continuously disaffirmed, as instantaneous desire, which had in turn to be continuously upstaged and kept afloat by a conscious choice for difference. Because freedom had no relative currency in the culture other than as an individual choice founded upon and made against an individual desire,

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[29]Riesman, "The Ethics of We Happy Few"(1948), p. 50.
[30]Greenberg's model is vastly different as we will see.

Riesman's articulation makes an important distinction over Bell's defense of freedom through cultural diversity alone. For Riesman, freedom was precipitated by the difficult choice for ever higher, ever more "avant-garde" forms of consumption. Typically his model focused on the suburban taste group where a continual movement toward the sophistication of taste -- a propensity for Bridge over Canasta and Poker, the addition of oregano to an otherwise ordinary casserole -- seemed to encapsulate a new dynamic within social organization. Since instrumental reason was the guiding principle of the work place and the public sphere, possibility lay in the private lives and negotiations of individuals. It seemed to Riesman that the only way to register the gains made in the "good life" was in relation to individual leisure pursuits and the effective, productive use of leisure time. Take Riesman's conclusions from a sociological research project on gourmet-one-ups-manship, in what he describes as a typical "wealthy, upper middle class suburb".[31]

> I do believe that discoveries are being made on the frontiers of consumption. Take the American diet, for instance. Once upon a time, and still in many quarters, this was in charge of the nutritionists, the exponents of a balanced meal, adequate caloric intake and colonic outlet, and plenty of vitamins. These good people bore the same relation to food that recreationists do to leisure: they want to be uplifting, salubrious, wasteless. But now, among the better income strata at any rate, their work is done: it is incorporated into the formulae of bakers, into the inventories of chain stores, the menus of restaurants and dining cars. We have, as I sometimes like to put it, moved from the wheat bowl to the salad bowl. In consequence, in the suburb I have been describing, and elsewhere throughout the country, there is an emphasis, which was once confined to small sophisticated or expatriate circles, on having the right responses to food. Save for a few cranks, the housewives are not concerned with having enough wheat germ but with having enough oregano, or the right wine -- and more than that, with having the right enjoyment of the wine. In the middle of the shopping center of this suburb is a store which stocks a stupendous array of delicacies, spices, patisseries, delicatessens, European gadgets for cooking; the casserole replacing the melting pot.
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> As I have indicated, the residents of this suburb are anxious about food and their attitudes toward it. They want to be knowledgeable about it and want to enjoy it, but they are not yet easy going in the matter. Among men particularly, the demand that one must enjoy food, and not simply stow it away, is relatively new, and again these pioneers are awkwardly self-conscious. (Let me make clear in passing that I am not talking about old-fashioned conspicuous consumption. I am not talking about the hostess' fear of making a gastronomic *faux pas,* or fear that her children's table manners will disgrace her; no doubt these fears still exist, although greatly muted, in the group I am describing. No these parents are afraid that they are missing some taste experience, which in turn reveals the lack of a basic personality attribute). We are observing

[31]David Riesman, "Some Observations on Changes in Leisure Attitudes", *Perspectives* , n. 5, autumn 1953, p. 102.

these families, it appears, in a time of transition, when they have left old food conventions behind and are exploring, without settling on, new ones. They are, in effect, paying the society's costs of research and development.[32]

The implications of Riesman's model are clear. It allows for the possibility of a transcendent consumption-oriented individual, and indeed, it is driven by the various stages of subjectivity marking the progression toward that autonomy.[33] He constructs all variety of leisure practices as potentially active and participatory as long as they involve the anxiety of "missing some taste experience". For Riesman, the new image of the autonomous American individual was a consumer whose intellectual conceptions and decisions, while held back by the individual emotional economy, were grounded in the consciously based assessment of what constitutes a valuable experience given the particularity of that emotional economy.[34] Freedom, it seems, could be explored only by confronting the ultimate similarity and conformity of middle class culture head on. Precariously balanced on the razor sharp hedge of the suburban lawn, where individuality was only a formal freedom amidst the standardized lawns, houses, and lifestyles, the autonomous individual had to surpass the easy drive for relaxation and conformity by making very particular decisions to out-pace the control of character structure. To achieve the "good life" the autonomous individual had to choose themselves out of a collective claustrophobia.[35] For Riesman, every confrontation between the individual and society had to be dealt with in these terms. If freedom was to be sustained, the easy choice for conformity would have to be forsaken in favor of anxiety.

What is interesting here above all, is the ambivalent or perhaps dual role taste is being assigned in the circumstances of the new culture. While it is driving

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[32]Riesman, "Some Observations on Changes in Leisure Attitudes", ibid, pp. 105 - 106. It is worth comparing Riesman's assessment from here with his reassessment of the situation in 1957. See Riesman's "The Suburban Dislocation".

[33]I refer specifically here to Theodore Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's construction of the viewer in *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* . trans. J. Cummins, (New York: Continuum, 1988).

[34]It is worth noting the analogy to Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* here, for what its worth.

[35]Riesman, "The Ethics of We Happy Few", *Individualism Reconsidered* , p.48.

distinction, it is also called upon to perform the limiting operation of an anterior function. In Riesman, taste is providing the common locus point for defining the culture as a whole, and providing the terms of its breakdown. In effect two kinds of taste are being employed: one that is a function of reason, that happens after the fact as it were, and a more fundamental kind, but a taste just the same, that determines with unwavering inevitability the pressure to conform in the first place. The taste particular to this more fundamental level, a taste that shapes desire, had become the new lynch pin for sociability in America in the postwar period. It was providing the crucial first term for a new drama of social bonding based entirely in experience, that was only later and in quick succession to be followed by a reason driven taste. In so far as there was any center or locus to social life for Riesman, it is bound up in this two-fold process: an emotional economy's propensity for conformity, for experiences and ideas already digested and already given a socially palatable or acceptable form; and secondly an anxiety ridden choice for difference. The constancy and predictability of this two-fold operation, while only having a bearing on the individual, is posed as structurally identical in the culture as a whole. Freedom or autonomy is negotiated in every case after individual desire is manifest, and the limits this placed on conformity was accepted. Experiencing life in the 1950s for Riesman, was all about the way emotion was transformed into action or meaning by character structure, that "relatively fixed pattern of energy exchanges"; i.e., how the trace of the emotional economy, linked up with and gained some purchase on the world. If there was anything within the dynamic array of forces that offered some bonding agent within the social matrix of American life in the 1950s, it was the conformity or constancy of desire.

In the case of Riesman or Erich Fromm, and perhaps Sullivan less so, there is always some possibility of slippage within this culturally determined framework of conformity. They were, after all, some of the most celebrated figures of therapeutic culture in America in the 1950s. Character structure is only "relatively fixed", a

relative fixity which in the end amounted to the possibility of pushing the "frontiers of consumption". Once the right amount of oregano and the fullest experience of that oregano is found and dispersed among a taste grouping, it is only time before it is internalized and socialized within the grouping. With this new ground zero established, two dashes of oregano or whatever it is, paves the way for the next gastronomic leap for man. Or is it mankind? By 1957 Riesman's entire problematization of taste would come crumbling down with the launch and success of Sputnik. It would prove a crucial moment for the country as a whole. In one fell swoop a decades worth of rationalizing and bolstering of democratic freedoms was instantly deflated. At any rate, this was later on. In 1953 Riesman earnestly believed these processes were boosting the middle class to new levels of sophistication and freedom.

Greenberg himself was never so guilty of any such optimistic boosterism. In relation to Riesman's position Greenberg's politics are entirely more circumspect. As in Riesman, popular culture in all its varieties and its publics is related to the mechanisms of a culture industry, but in Greenberg's critique there are certain subtleties, which in the end, add up to a vastly different mapping of the cultural crucible. Notably absent in Greenberg's model of the social is any sense whatsoever of possibility which an individual based psychology might hold for ethics or moral questions. Let's take his less than idyllic yet still optimistic opinion of the museum going public, who conceivably read Tolstoy instead of detective novels.

> The middlebrow in us wants the treasures of civilization for himself, but the desire is without appetite. He feels nostalgia for what he imagines the past to have been, and reads historical novels, but in the spirit of a tourist who enjoys the scenes he visits because of their lack of resemblance to those he has come from and will return to. A sense of continuity with the past, a continuity at least of truth, of enduring relevance, belongs to a genuine culture almost by definition, but this is precisely what the middlebrow does not acquire (the fault is not entirely his own). He might be able to do so, eventually, by exerting humility and patience, but these he is somehow never able to muster in the face of culture. In his reading, no matter how much he wants to edify himself, he will balk at anything that sends him to the dictionary or a reference book more than once. (Curiosity without energy or tenacity is a middlebrow trait wherever and in whomever it appears.) Towards his entertainment, no matter how much he wants it to be

"significant" and "worthwhile", he will become recalcitrant if the "significance" is not labeled immediately and obviously, and if too many conditioned reflexes are left without appropriate stimuli. What the middlebrow, even more conspicuously than the lowbrow, wants most is to have his expectations filled exactly as he expects to have them filled.[36]

It is revealing that Greenberg addresses the problem of middlebrow culture in the first person. He writes: "the middlebrow in us wants the treasures ... but the desire is without appetite", and later with a similar economic qualifier attached, the same emphasis; "curiosity without energy or tenacity is a middlebrow trait wherever and in whomever it appears." What does this mean? Certainly it is distinct from Riesman's notion of autonomy, wherein freedom is the combined product of a precise targeting of the satiable "good life" by the emotions, which in turn is negated by the choice for anxiety. Here, rather, it seems treasures are wanted, but the want doesn't pack any punch, nor does it seem directed or targeted at any specific form. At a glance it seems that the emotional economy for Greenberg both is and isn't involved in such choices. I have a hunch that the problem, as it is here delineated, will take us to the core of Greenberg's theory, a space where an economy of the emotions operates within a kind of capsule form, as a question of hermeneutics itself; where an instantaneous window on the world is called upon less to do a specific work in the culture than empty out some space in that culture. It is central, in sum, to his reinvention of the aesthetic in the wake of the collapse of avant-gardism. To explore this possibility we must first accept the vehemence with which he denounces liberal cultural theory in general. While the crucial point of friction is the question of individual possibility, he begins his critique premised on conformity. For Greenberg, the colonization by capitalism was so extensive and so pervasive that it had been internalized in all of us. It structured "desire" and "curiosity" to such an extent that on some level, it provided a set of limits or constraints under which any and all negotiations transpired. We can read Tolstoy or visit the museum or art gallery, as Greenberg phrases it, only "in the spirit of a

[36]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", pp. 136 -137.

tourist". Which is to say, again, given the extensive nature of capitalism's colonization of realms of experience, "desire" or "curiosity" are *always-already* a commodity. If similar to Riesman's view of conformity, the conclusions Greenberg draws are constitutive of a much more pessimistic view; they providing the foundation of a kind of apocalyptic history of consciousness.

The crux is Greenberg's notion of desire "without appetite", or "curiosity without energy or tenacity". To address the problem we need to take a detour through the materialist philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. His definitions of "desire" and "appetite" are, I think, crucial to Greenberg's own. If Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) always pops up in more obscure materialist projects or in references to secular metaphysics, it should be less surprising that we invoke his problematization of things human, in reference to Clement Greenberg. If Tolstoy wasn't, Spinoza, an exiled Sephardic Jew from Amsterdam, would certainly have been on the recommended reading lists of both the theologically oriented circle of the *Contemporary Jewish Record*, where Greenberg was an assistant editor just after the war, and indeed the more secular oriented journal, *Commentary*, where he was an editor for almost a decade afterward. With theologies' truth content always located in its imaginative coherence, Judo-Christianity has always provided the soundest hermeneutic departure for the evolution or extrapolation of poetics. It is in relation to the conception of "conatus" -- "that each thing exemplifies an inherent tendency towards self-preservation and activity" -- that Spinoza defines the terms "desire" and "appetite".[37] In the Scholium for Proposition 9, Part III, he writes:

> When this conatus is related to the mind alone, it is called Will (*voluntas*); when it is related to mind and body together, it is called Appetite (*appetitus*), which is therefore nothing else but man's essence, from the nature of which there necessarily follow those things that tend to his preservation, and which man is thus determined to perform. Further, there is no difference between appetite and desire (*cupiditas*) except that desire is usually related to men in so far as they are conscious of their appetite. Therefore it can be defined as follows: desire is "appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof."

[37]Spinoza, translators remark, *The Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley, (Indianapolis, 1992), p. 108.

> It is clear from the above considerations that we do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it.[38]

We need to think the relation between Greenberg and Spinoza here; the relation between the way Greenberg sees middlebrow culture in terms of desire "without appetite", "curiosity without energy or tenacity", and the way Spinoza raises the issue of the emotional economy, its integrity and activity in association with the "adequate idea" on the one hand and its state of loss with regard to the "inadequate idea" on the other hand. If we can, we lay the groundwork for the remainder of the chapter. In other words, we can talk about the symbolic, i.e., the way "desire" with appetite, or "curiosity" with energy and tenacity might negotiate the predicament of modernity, wherein Kafka's "free and secure citizen of the world" is chained between heaven and earth, yet lives in a continual state of expulsion. This would go to the core of how emotion is carried into the world as a sub-set -- no, a null-set -- of the empirically oriented processes of consciousness. By paying attention to this distinction, the content of the immediate, as a movement into infinite depth, is thickened and given a certain substantiality that paradoxically lends appetite to desire, or energy and tenacity to curiosity.[39]

For Spinoza the character of the "inadequate idea" is the crucial issue at stake. It is forever the function of the way something we "endeavor, will, seek after and desire" is *always-already* predicted or expected by extrinsic forces. Spinoza's concern is important, not least in terms of the inherent secularizing drive of the Enlightenment for a materialist based understanding of the human essence, but also in terms of the pressures placed on a notion of the individual in the context of a surrounding culture. There is a similarity struck here between the conditions of a nascent form of mercantile capitalism in the wake of the collapse of monotheism, and that of the plight of the individual in the consumer economy with the threat of

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[38]Spinoza, *The Ethics*, ibid, p. 109.
[39]Greenberg, " The Jewishness of Franz Kafka: some sources of his Particular Vision". p. 203.

totalitarianism. We can only summarize.[40] For Greenberg, conformity is associated with a conception of the extrinsic factors Spinoza relates to the ontology of the "inadequate idea". Whereas negation of the surrounding culture is equated with a 'kind' of individualism sustaining the inner necessity of the "adequate idea". The former "inadequate idea" can be conceived of as the contemplation of an external object, while the latter "adequate idea" would be the converse: a contemplation of the object internalized. The object internalized is not a concern for judging "a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it", but rather a situation in which the same imperative is "endeavoring to persist in its own being".[41] By turning consciousness inward it is made the agent of a self-reflexive contemplation on its own substance. In this instance following Spinoza, we can say consciousness reflects upon its own substance or "the object of the idea".[42] Further, we can see, the kind of despairing politics this actually represents, as consciousness in the present can only be a function of an extrinsic law. For our purposes here, it is sufficient that we speak of the necessity of the "adequate idea" and the contingency of the "inadequate idea"; the necessity of the desire with appetite, and the contingency of the desire "without appetite".

Even in the best possible world, desire can only ever be a contingency, consciousness can only ever be a function of the present. As such, desire can only be given appetite by a self-reflexive contemplation on the immediate. If this does provide some complete object, though ultimately unknowable object, the moral realm can only ever provide an "incomplete object".[43] When confronted by

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[40]The relevant passages in Spinoza would include pp. 49-53, 58-62, 70-79, 86-87, 92-101, and all of Part III, especially Propositions I through X, Spinoza, *The Ethics*, (Indianapolis, 1992).

[41]Spinoza, ibid, p. 109.

[42]Spinoza, ibid, p. 71.

[43]Greenberg speaks to the problem of a-relationality most fully in his discussion of work and leisure. He writes: leisure "is determined by the kind of work, or necessary activity that sets it off. Leisure -- even for those who do not work -- is down at bottom a function of work, flows from work, and changes as the nature of work changes"("The Plight of Our Culture", p. 144.). In a similar manner "play" is highlighted because of its utter uselessness and brazen opposition to the "sake of exclusively practical, 'objective' aims"("The Plight of Our Culture", p. 150.). It is like art "for the sake pure and simple of states of mind" ("The Plight of Our Culture", p. 150.). The logic would seem to proceed along lines

middlebrow culture, the individual is always at a disadvantage. Because character or personality is structured by the rule of efficiency which capitalism provokes, the meaning made of any experience in the present can only be a contingency of that present. Conformity for Greenberg is the iron rule. Complete and utter conformity in every individual case is the law. There is no favoritism here as in Riesman's penchant for an upper middle class. The sport-shirt-wearing missile engineer is accorded the same pride of place as the intellectual or the connoisseur of art. Everyone, absolutely everyone, is in the same boat. Futhermore Greenberg leaves no room for therapeutic possibility. For Greenberg, consciousness was totally corrupted; it offered no shareable or common language whatsoever for a just or moral sociability. Such was the case in seventeenth century Amsterdam, and nineteenth century Prague as well.

Ultimately, what is at stake here is the problem of metaphoricity. As an entirely repetitous transformation of matter into meaning, or experience into representation, metaphoricity -- as a symetrical chiasmic inversion[44] -- was the founding moment of the entrance into the social realm. As far as the process of metaphoricity goes, it is safe to assume that while Greenberg accepted it as a first principle of relatedness to the world, it was understood as an entirely problematic and corrupt relation to the world. It was of the order of Kafka's continual expulsion from Paradise; something achieved instantanteously in a process so fluid and continuous that the substitution of one world for another, is rendered invisible. The flash of signification it offered was an already engineered connection between matter and meaning. The metaphor is*always-already* a function of the extrinsic

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proposed by Ronald de Souza: "Some things can be valuable, and some useful, but only what is useless can be purely valuable" (Ronald de Souza, *The Rationality of the Emotions*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), p. 150.). In other words, the value of play is found in its absolute failure to meet the requirements placed on it by the "rule of efficiency". Like the good museum or gallery visit, it is not in any sense an achievement, but rather an activity with no use value. It is simply a means to no end. The value of the museum visit and the value of "states of mind" are utterly irreconcilable to the moral realm.

[44]Rudolph Gasche, "Reading Chiasms", in Andrez Warminski, *Readings in Interpretation: Holderlin, Hegel, and Heidegger.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

forces of the present which subverted and distracted subjectivity, which were constitutive of subjectivity. Yet for Greenberg, like Spinoza who would willing stop at mid-sentence and tell us of a dog barking in the street below, metaphoricity was essential in accessing the quotidian, the prosaic, and the routine.

It was no doubt for precisely this reason that Kafka stood as such a paradigmatic figure. His fiction thrived on a seeming awareness of the inversions and distortions of the metaphoric problematic. It was possessed of an ability to render the monstrous and obscene as really quite normal. Indeed, how tedious and common that Gregor Samsa should undergo a metamorphosis into a dung beetle today. How necessary that the officer in the Penal Colony willingly flail himself alive on the apparatus. How banal that the world should bomb Hiroshima and now stockpile armaments in preparation to annihilate more and other populations. How common our anxiety of nuclear reprisal and how necessary our suspicions of the racial minority. For Greenberg, the banality with which obscene prejudice, nationalism, and violence was treated as part of the everyday was deeply troubling, but all the more so illuminating as to the nature of truth under the conditions of modernity. The intentional string of monstrous catachreses that made up Kafka's fiction seemed necessitated by modernity. How else could consciousness as a catachresis (a monstrous inversion) of experience be framed if not by forcing misuse to an extreme.

Nietzsche had stated this just as ably. "What is truth" he asks?

> A moving army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms, in short a summa of human relationships that are being poetically and rhetorically sublimated, transposed, and beautified until, after long and repeated use, a people considers them as solid, canonical, and unavoidable. Truths are illusions whose illusionary nature has been forgotten, metaphors that have been used up and have lost their imprint and that now operate as mere metal, no longer as coins.[45]

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[45]Friedrich Nietszche, (Schlechta, 3:314), quoted in Paul de Man "Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche)", *Allegories of Reading*, (New Haven, 1979), pp. 110-111.

Nietzsche's "moving army of metaphors" embodied the predicament of life under modernity. It was a militaristic restatement of Kafka's notion of the "eternal recapitulation of the occurrence", that must have seemed especially resonant to an intellectual such as Greenberg. Irreconcilable experience was continuously made and recruited into the service of meaning. Difference was continuously forced into signification, only to fulfill the "conditioned reflexes" and "expectations" which Greenberg recognized as the truth of middle brow experience, the future that inevitably awaited experience. Truth in modernity was always dictated by the extrinsic law of the moral realm. The transformative moment always involved the exchange of a coin for the "mere metal" of a buck nickel. Like the lifestyle of Spectorsky's "exurbanite" who "undergoes the shock of sudden change as a regular part of his life", life is "schizoid in the extreme". Not so much as a function of "the alternate hot and cold plunges" between the bustle of the rat race and working life and that relaxation found in the exurbs, though this was a part of it, but more a function of the different tale told by the experience of what was felt, and that markedly different and divergent story of what is understood. Here is Greenberg's version embedded in the same culture. I quote it in order that we are fully aware of Greenberg's recognition and investment in what he perceives as a shift from a religious frame of reference with all its associations with the symbolic, to a post-exilic textual economy, organized necessarily in accord with an allegorical mode.

> T. S. Eliot first brought to our attention that "disassociation of sensibility," that divergence between thought and feeling which, he says, began to manifest itself in English poetry with Milton. It had, however, begun elsewhere and its effects were already noticeable on the Continent before they became apparent in English literature. Formally, the disassociation dates from Descartes' claim that the subject receives the surest guarantee of the fact that he exists from the presence of his own thought. Thought becomes the *prima facie* evidence of truth and throws out of court whatever is reported by direct perception or intuition or affect without being manipulated by the "categories of understanding". The truth is not what is *felt* but what works and is consistent with itself. The result is a split in consciousness, between the connative and the cognitive, the subjective and the objective. In the end we fall prey to a kind of collective schizophrenia.
>
> This schizophrenia is part of the discomfort of our civilization. It is painful to be unable to assent to the data of immediate awareness and to be compelled to act upon that which is only

derived from the operations upon experience of "objective", detached reason. How intense by comparison is the comfort of believing what we feel. And how richer seeming.[46]

Only "crabbed" and "half-baked", Greenberg's own words for the "awful age", can convey the utter rancor and contempt with which he viewed the sundered conditions of consciousness in the present. The metaphoric inversion was the crux of the problem. Because consciousness itself was a function of metaphoricity, "disassociation" and "schizophrenia" were a part of the discomfort of our civilization". The problem of separation, isolation, and alienation under capitalism was finally a function of a fundamental disunity or division in the self. Social forms of alienation and separation derived from the fundamental problematic of human consciousness. Ironically for Greenberg, it was precisely this despairing predicament which opened up some slim possibility. "It is precisely our more intimate and habitual acquaintance with isolation", Greenberg writes,

...that gives us our advantage at this moment. Isolation, or rather the alienation that is its cause, is the truth -- isolation, alienation, naked and revealed unto itself, is the condition under which the true reality of our age is experienced. And the experience of this true reality is indispensable to any ambitious art".[47]

At the core of Greenberg's undestanding of the modern subject is an acceptance of a fundamental non-unity at the core of subjectivity. Disjunction and non-unity was at the core of the subject. It posed experience beyond any kind of amenable or bridgeable chiasm.[48] For Greenberg, consciousness was itself the result of a tension between the totality offered up by immediate experience, and the fallen temporality of the empirical self coming into being, which presented the former (now) in the process, as an absence.[49] Experience could, in other words, only enter

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[46]Greenberg, "Religion and the Intellectuals: A Symposium, (*Partisan Review*, May-June 1950), p. 40.
[47]Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment", (*Partisan Review*, Jan. 1948), in C.G. 2, p. 193.
[48]Consciousness would arise out of nothingness, or at least the nothingness that is in itself immanent or the plenitude of immediate experience.
[49]See, Paul de Man, "Ludwig Binswanger and the Sublimation of the Self", in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, p. 42-44.

the world as a function of man's alienation from himself, a temporal gap spatialized in terms of a metaphoric displacement or symetrical chiasmic inversion.

Perhaps we can better clarify this issue if we compare the kind of self being proposed by Riesman as opposed to that described by Greenberg. If in the former's account we see a kind of fluidity typical of received sociological constructions of the mind, in Greenberg this continuity is entirely lacking. For Greenberg, the self can only exist in the world as a succession of indivisible presents. It is a self that is removed from the "action" of a becoming; a self that is nothing less than a discontinuous series of teleological end points. It should be no surprise that the self appears "purely mechanical" and "dryly rational" as in Paul de Man's description of allegory. Such a conception of character structure or personality, has in the twentieth century, always provided the most crucial departure for any exploration of the symbolic.

In a sense, Greenberg's notion of periodicity complexifies to the extent of nullifying the possibility of the kind of progress as slippage that Riesman finds at the new frontiers of consumption. For if in Riesman's case the manager is in a better position to make gastronomic leaps than the steelworker, for Greenberg both are equally destined to gain pleasure only ever from eating the meat and potato casserole that mother used to make. Now that is "fine, redolent, avant-garde pedigree"![50] The self as character structure represents a process that is an eternally static patterning or reading of experience; one dictated by physical substance. Contrary to the dictates of therapeutic culture, for Greenberg the constraints placed on experience are totalizing. There is no possibility whatsoever of a therapeutic evolution within the individual. Periodicity in the pattern of energy exchanges that governs personhood, impels one to make meaning of experience in an entirely consistent manner over time.

[50]T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", p. 48.

"The middle brow in us all", Greenberg writes, "will become recalcitrant if the "significance" is not labeled immediately and obviously, and if too many conditioned reflexes are left without appropriate stimuli."[51] "The middlebrow in us all ... even more conspicuously than the lowbrow, wants most to have his expectations filled exactly as he expects to have them filled."[52] In sum, there is a circuitry that defines the self which is unchanging. This circuitry is based in the purely physical transformations of energy exchanges and the mind's flickering awareness of those quantities and transitive relations as the feeling of pleasure and pain. Meaning in this equation can only happen after the physical event. It is signification without proper regard for causality; it is only meaning assumed to be causal because of extrinsic stimulus in the present. This is, I think, human nature placed under the greatest scrutiny, as much at home in Enlightenment philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth century as it is on comfortable terms with the contemporary debates in clinical psychiatry. We can imagine Greenberg reading David Hume's *A Treatise on Human Nature* or Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* with the same eager delight as he might have read Sullivan's "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and in Life" or Einstein's latest contribution to *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*.

To summarize we can say that desire can only be "without appetite", can only be a "curiosity without energy or tenacity", because it does not ever have the complete and full presence of the object. For Greenberg this was the incontestable nature and detestable state of experience in the present. The emotional economy could only ever be a contingency of the present. The necessity of the commodity, the morality of the group was always too powerful. One might say that the individual personality is predisposed to certain choices and patterns of desire, because an all-encompasing extrinsic law makes it so. Inasmuch as the extrinsic forces of the present determine choice, we can say that the law is encapsulted in the

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[51]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 136.

[52]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 136.

action of coming into being itself. Luckily enough for Greenberg, "action" as a mirroring of profounder forces and crystallized out through "conditioned reflexes" and "expectations", circumscribes some minimal field of attention in the context of too much culture. And too much culture, "the number of jukeboxes", a note which Greenberg ends his essay "The Plight of Our Culture" on, a theme with which Greenberg fills every one of his sentences, was the "reality and the plight of our times"; "the number of jukeboxes" was the anxiety of the age.[53]

How many jukeboxes? How much "harm" could they do? And how serious was the problem? Well, at least as serious as buying refrigerators in 1953. Sure, refrigerators are not something you buy every day, but judging by the number of refrigerator advertisements in *Life* magazine during those same two months when Greenberg's two-part article on "The Plight of Our Culture" was published, how could anyone resist not buying one everyday, or at least thinking about which one to buy every single moment of the day. Which is precisely the problem Greenberg was trying to get at by placing such importance on Kafka's "tension ... toward the presence of the present". What would Greenberg look for in a refrigerator? He must have used one. He must have thought about buying a new one. What features would he want? What model? Was defrosting an issue? What about automatic ice making, wasn't it always an absolute necessity? Or was the traditional tray serving sufficient? I mean, let's face it. These were the big issues. Or at least a species of the big serious issues that everyone was confronted with all the time. It was the nature of the present, the historical form of modernity Greenberg and everyone else in America was (now) confronted by. No use pretending that you were not affected. That would only "do genuine culture more harm".[54] No use in fooling yourself that you and your tastes and desires were simply autonomous, given more to the radical nature of a Spinoza or a Tolstoy. There is just no use in

[53]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 152.
[54]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 152.

thinking that a new refrigerator, a shiny new one, doesn't interest you. It's a priority. The only priority you have (now).

Well then, what about that new *Servel,* "the world's only refrigerator that -- Makes a continuous supply of ice cubes without trays -- Automatically"[55] (Figure 1). . . That would be great for parties. . . Or what about the *Crosley Shelvador.* Supposedly it puts "more food at your fingertips" (Figure 2). . . Look at it, it literally "doubles your "front-row" space".[56] If only I could get that feature in combination with the *Admiral Dual-Temp,* then both having guests over and the problem of left-overs later on would be made easy. . . The "Moist-Test" proves I need it (Figure 3).

> These peas were left uncovered 3 days in an *Admiral Dual-Temp.* Moist cold kept them fresh, green and tender as when they came from the pod.
>
> These peas, from the same pods, were left uncovered for 3 days in an ordinary refrigerator. They're shriveled, dry and "hard as bullets".[57]

Well sure, no one wants to eat peas that are "shriveled, dry, and hard as bullets", but does it have defrost? I could just buy a *Kelvinator Model KPC* (Figure 4) with "Magic-Cycle" Defrosting. It comes with "Moisture-Seal Crispers" included.[58] Who wants "the messy chore of getting rid of frost and frost-water" anyway. That's worse than disposing of spent nuclear materials . . Then again, the *Crosley Shelvador* defrosts itself, "every night, while you sleep"[59] (Figure 5). . . Its like a Valentine's day present, and besides those "Moisture - Seal Crispers" could be just a gimmick. Mind you, anyone would be happy with a *Cycla-matic Frigidaire* (Figure 6). . . This is a fridge that gives me all things: it has a "real food freezer"; "defrosts itself"; "all the shelves roll out"; plus it comes with a kind of macabre instrumentation, "the simple, silent Meter-Miser mechanism"[60]. . . This is a fridge

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[55]*Life,* June 22, v. 34, n. 25, 1953, p. 88.
[56]*Life,* June 1, v. 34, n. 22, 1953, p. 66.
[57]*Life,* June 8, v. 34, n. 23, 1953, p. 5.
[58]*Life,* June 1, v. 34, n. 22, 1953, p. 1.
[59]*Life,* June 22, v. 35, n. 2, 1953, p. 54.
[60]*Life,* June 15, v. 34, n. 24, 1953, p. 74.

that even Kafka would buy. It's built and backed by General Motors too ... *The Imperial IS- 106* ... it even sounds like a car ... A car in my own kitchen ... Maybe I should go with the *Servel* (Figure 7) it comes in a gas model and its got those "Dry supercubes. Big, supercold Ice-circles".[61] I heard they last longer and after all square cubes have become so tiresome. Aah but I'm a Ford Mercury man anyway. I'd probably look better with the kind of fridge that guy owns whose driving the Mercury Convertible Coupe. Good-looking, economy-minded, likes his standard V-8 (Figure 8). Good ad too. It kind of thematizes the way commodity fetishism works through the image. It pinpoints exactly the new tension placed on the individual within the surrounding culture. "Just look -- we won't say a word"[62]. . . That's just what I've been trying to get at all along. I wonder if those ad guys read my article . . . Probably the same bunch selling Toasters (Figure 9). . . That new 6 position "toast shade" selector on the GE is great. "From light to dark -- and many shades inbetween".[63] Eat a couple of dark slices, have a couple of light ones afterward and its kind of an allegory of the "middlebrow in us all". Of course "toast-ability" is not all about the kind of toaster you use, those kinds of issues are contingent on bread, on texture, freshness, whether it has dextrose or sugar added, it depends on the practice of bread-making itself (Figure 10).[64] And besides, right now I need a refrigerator. I need a *Philco Automatic* (Figure 11). "It thinks for itself", for Christ sake.[65] Wait a minute. What's this (Figure 12). "The *Hot-Point Super Stor* -- No wonder Ozzie And Harriet Rave About Their Big New *Hot Point Super Sto* ..."[66] Ozzie and Harriet ...

The point, I think, is clear enough. For Greenberg, the nature of the relation between the individual and culture exemplified the inescapable constraints placed

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[61] *Life*, June 27, v. 35, n. 4, 1953, p. 109.
[62] *Life*, June 15, v. 34, n. 24, 1953, p. 24.
[63] *Life*, June 8, v. 34, n. 23, 1953, p. 126.
[64] *Life*, June 22, v. 34, n. 25, 1953, p. 11.
[65] *Life*, June 1, v. 34, n. 22, 1953, p. 9.
[66] *Life*, June 22, v. 34, n. 25, 1953, p. ?.

on all manner of individual choices. Not in any way bound to what Riesman considered the autonomy of the emotional economy, the gourmet's and *parvenue's* pursuit of the experience of good wine, or a good refrigerator, was entirely bound up in those extrinsic laws governing the desiring subject. The predicament of the individual in consumer society was not just a tricky one. It was the worst possible of worlds. To put it more succinctly, for Greenberg, absolutely no possibility was being sustained under the conditions of modernity whatsoever. How could there be, in view of the kind of aimless skipping about and distractions continually bombarding the consumer, precipitated by desire, forced by the anxiety of events, or merely manifest through the acquiescence of the peer group. These were and are bleak times. Not even choosing the shade of one's toast was exempt from the pressures of commodity capitalism.

The problem of what to do in face of such a "crabbed", "half-baked", and "awful age" such as this, was of course central to "The Plight of Our Culture". I take this to be the crucial passage.

> The avant-garde -- which is the "cadre" that has led the fight for aesthetic truth, high standards, continuity with tradition, and against the utilitarian ethos during the past century -- tends to make a virtue of its isolation and identify this with high culture by definition. But it is no longer as easy as it was in Baudelaire's and Flaubert's day to be so militant in one's isolation. The political convulsions of our time have revealed more immediate threats to culture than those of bourgeois routine. And the bourgeois public, for its part, has through the medium of middlebrow culture began to make conciliatory overtures to the avant-garde. The more ashamed philistinism becomes of itself the less benefit does culture get from an attitude whose main point is anti-philistinism, and the less meaning does such an attitude in itself retain.
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> For a variety of reasons it is no longer possible to rest a fruitful criticism of contemporary life on a total rejection of the kind of experience that gives rise to philistinism. We are better able today to appreciate the benefits of a middle class confident enough in its philistinism -- as the German middle classes were not -- to insist that politics be expedient rather than ideological. The avant-garde will have to acquire new content for itself if it is to stay cogent and not degenerate into Alexandrianism.[67]

The implications are startling, not least in their complexity or the ease with which they can be misconstrued and misinterpreted. In effect, the avant-garde's traditional separation from the kind of experience that gives rise to philistinism is

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[67]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 139.

of no use. What was now required of the situation was "the kind of experience that gives rise to philistinism". And herein an "avant-garde" will "acquire content for itself". In effect, what Greenberg is advocating is a complete embrace of ones "desire" and "curiosity", even if these are divested of "appetite" and "energy or tenacity". For remember, if it "... is painful to be unable to assent to the data of immediate awareness and to be compelled to act upon that which is only derived from the operations upon experience of "objective", detached reason. How intense by comparison is the comfort of believing what we feel. And how richer seeming.[68]

Kafka's writing was the consecration of a symbolic mode of becoming through and against an allegorical notion of consciousness. His method hinged on building a fence against history out of the "the treadmill of routine, permanence, and pattern, with scrupulous thought as its constituent and enabling principle"[69], By doing so his fiction localized "the eternal recapitulation of the occurrence", the transformative moment which encapsulated the perfect repetition through which the self came into being. As a kind of condensation of larger extrinsic forces structuring desire, the transformative was the physical and material truth behing taste. It was the philistine truth behind all contemporary experience.

If conformity was the absolute bane of modernity, it also provided the terms for some minimal refusal. But even refusal is to strong a term. For all that could be mustered was a self-consciousness of one's own utter lack of autonomy. Faced by the predicament of the present one could do little else than provide a mere reflection, a mirror reflection of a profounder wholeness and totality structuring the individual, yet otherwise lost to the individual. A recourse to the prosaic formalized a more primary and perfect repetition; a repetition which encapsulated a symbolic mode action. Two types of repetition: a second imperfect repetition, which endlessly defers meaning through an incessant colonizing, and a first deathly and perfect repetition, formalized by the operation of the other. Conformity is here

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[68]Greenberg, "Religion and the Intellectuals: A Symposium, (*Partisan Review*, May-June 1950), p. 40.
[69]Greenberg, "Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 205.

accepted as a first principle, because it is constitutive of the fallen form of consciousness itself. We are all just philistines for Greenberg because the creative or imaginative act is in the end, no better, no more creative, than the impulse behind a steelworkers choice for breakfast. In sum, conformity as a strategy offered the individual the deepest and most profound connection to the world, the most substantive way of being in the world.

The truth of Kafka's fiction was that "the kind of experience that gives rise to philistinism" was what constituted the present reality. Everyone was under the pressure to conform. To look and experience as a philistine looks and experiences was an *a priori* principle. "We are better (today)", Greenberg writes, "to appreciate the benefits of a middle class confident enough in its philistinism -- as the German middle classes were not -- to insist that politics be expedient rather than ideological."[70] An acceptance of conformity had, in other words, become a political expediency: It was the only way to prevent the rise of "totalitarianism" again; the only way to prevent the rise of an authoritarianism "within us all" again. In an ironic turn of events the bland and worn imprint of metal, i.e., experience made to mean through the most mundane and ritualistic transformation -- the most insidious and fluid of processes, the purest of repetitions -- provided a foothold against the self-same processes of conformity by allowing consciousness some sounding board or mirror to work against. This is a deeply pessimistic view of the culture of modernity, a view in which one finds only the smallest consolation in "the comfort of believing what we feel. And how richer seeming", this intense illusion.[71]

Once his anti-communism had subsided Daniel Bell realized the paradox of his own situation as well. Despondently so, however. For the ruin it spelled for the kind of freedom based in anxiety he had earlier counted on, was not to be replaced

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[70]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 139.
[71]Greenberg, "Religion and the Intellectuals: A Symposium", p. 40.

by Greenberg's despairing perspective on conformity. The subtitle of his 1960 book *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas,* was a realization that marginality could only be a posturing, that there was no anxiety out there that had not already been predicted by the market. He writes:

> In Hollywood, where Pickfair society in the twenties once counterfeited a European monarchy, "non conformity", according to *Life* magazine, "is now the key to social importance and that angry middle-aged man, Frank Sinatra, is its prophet and reigning social monarch". The Sinatra set, *Life* points out, deliberately mocks the old Hollywood taboos and is imitated by a host of other sets that eagerly want to be non-conformist as well. Significantly -- a fact that *Life* failed to mention -- the reigning social set and its leaders, Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., are all from minority groups and from the wrong side of the tracks. Sinatra and Martin are Italian, Davis a negro. In earlier times in American life a minority group, having bullied its way to the top, would usually ape the style and manners of the established status community. In Hollywood, the old status hierarchies have been fragmented, the new sets celebrate their triumph by jeering at the pompous ways of the old ... The additional sardonic fact is that the man in the gray flannel suit, the presumed target of the beatniks, is ... especially if he is in advertising, or the entertainment media, an upper bohemian himself. The job is accepted as a means of obtaining an income in order to sport and flaunt his presumed, idiosyncratic tastes in dress, food, travel, and the like. The problem for all these multiple sets is not conformity but added novelty".[72]

If it would take Bell and Riesman until the launch of Sputnik and the apparent success of the Soviet economy to realize it, Greenberg had recognized that a model of critical detachment depending on avant-garde dissidence, which he himself had in part proposed, had altogether collapsed with the onset of postwar industrialism and the mounting manichaeism of the early Cold War. This realization was undoubtedly partly a function of the interests of the circle around *Commentary* whose theological knowledge, combined with an entirely secular politics, would have continually steered discussion around hermeneutics, i.e., a framework that conceived of the predicament less in terms of escape or possibility with regard to the surrounding culture, than a spiraling in the object, consistent with a poetics. Robert Warshow's "Protest and Rejoinder" to Irving Howe's "This Age of Conformity", and published as a defense of *Commentary's* position is succinct and to the point.

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[72]Bell, "America as a Mass Society", in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 36.

> The story is told that during the years when Professor (then Mr.) Irving Howe worked as a writer for *Time* -- on a part time basis -- he met one day in the corridors of the Time Life building an acquaintance whom he had known only in the less commercialized world. "My God," said Mr. Howe immediately taking the offensive, "what are *you* doing here?" "Why I'm working here," said his acquaintance. *"Full time?"* said Mr. Howe.
> It is not altogether clear in Professor Howe's compendious aspersion on the chastity of practically everybody, whether he is actually claiming virginity for himself; probably he is only claiming to be a part-time virgin ("the pressures of conformity are at work upon all of us, to say nothing of the need to earn one's bread; and all of us bend under the terrible weight of our time"). This is more than most of us could claim, or would wish to. Still, if I were Professor Howe writing about Professor Howe, I might find it "no accident", that although he makes hostile references to *Commentary*, the *New Leader*, and the *New Yorker*, there is no mention in his article of the Luce publications -- nor any mention of them that I can recall in what I have read of Professor Howe's other writings.[73]

All this goes, I think, to the heart of the problems confronting intellectuals and artists during the early Cold War period. For Warshow recognizes, as Greenberg certainly did, that avant-garde dissidence, anti-philistinism, negation, or what have you, had all been validated by corporate capitalism and as much coopted by Cold War politics. Nevertheless anxiety remained the sole defense against what Schlesinger had called "totalitarian certitude".[74] For Greenberg, anxiety, could only be accessed by invoking a self-reflexive structure. Greenberg's emphasis on the prosaic and routine, was first and foremost an attempt to isolate anxiety within this new predicament. It was an attempt to build a fence against history out of an incessant and interminable attempt to read the infinite. For anxiety could now only be the product of a self-reflexive movement to know and write the immediate.

"The pressures of conformity", as Warshow graciously concedes on Howe's behalf are, "at work on all of us". If Bell, Howe, and others retained its primacy as the cardinal trope of individual resistance, however, for Greenberg, there was no such thing as resistance anymore. Greenberg's famous dictum of the avant-garde's

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[73]Robert Warshow, "This Age of Conformity": Protest and Rejoinder, (*Partisan Review*, Mar.-Apr. 1954, v.xxi, n. 2), p. 235.

[74]Little wonder that every up-and-coming manager or decision maker in the movies and novels from the late 1940s and 1950s had a distinguished military career somewhere in his past. Or that the English conquest of Mt. Everest in 1954, any of a number of first ascents documented in the expedition literature of the period, were successes couched in the rhetoric of Cold War anxiety, and for that matter were all touted as accomplishments inconceivable for "totalitarian man".

"umbilical cord of gold" from his 1939 article "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", was not something to hide from, or indeed something that warranted skulking about the hallways, elevators, and drinking fountains of Rockefeller Center. Rather it was something to be acknowledged and confronted as a first principle. If Bell would sadly comment on it in 1960, or Gregory Peck star in a movie about it in 1955, Greenberg and the circle around *Commentary* had began to construct a whole new world around the ambiguities of "the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" already by 1947. Take again Greenberg's remarks on achievement from "The Plight of Our Culture". I think they shed light on the problem of "anxiety" that Greenberg notes "the rule of efficiency seems to provoke wherever it is internalized -- as it must be if industrialism is really to function".[75] And in the postwar period industrialism did seem to be really functioning.

> The upper classes can no longer say to the rest of society: "Work -- that's your fate, not ours." Status and prestige are not derived so implicitly as before from social origin, and are conferred more and more preponderantly on achievement, and sustained achievement at that. Old-fashioned, complete leisure is now felt by the rich, too, as idleness, as remoteness from reality, and therefore the way to demoralization, thus no longer presupposed as the natural and positive condition of the realization of the highest values -- much less as the end for which one strives in youth as well as old age ... In this point if no other, Puritanism has won a lasting victory.[76]

Obviously, the multifarious subjects of American capitalism had all taken anxiety for their own. In so doing, however, the anxiety and risk-taking strategies of an avant-garde were rendered obsolete. "Achievement and sustained achievement at that" within the realm of work as a whole, had become a matter of a means-end-rationale, an individual quotient of doing things better, achieving perfection and completion more economically and more efficiently. Even the unshakable conviction of Greenberg must have been unsettled with the realization that process itself was now the key to industrialism. At least up until Greenberg had understood the full force of Kafka's world view. For perhaps, more than anyone else, Kafka

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[75]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", p. 147.

[76]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture", pp. 146-147.

provided insight into the problem of anxiety in the corporate or bureaucratic state. For "once efficiency becomes a matter of conscience, the failure to be completely efficient -- or even to be able to imagine what the perfection of efficiency is -- weighs like a sense of sin. For no one is ever efficient enough."[77]

Greenberg's position was premised on an acceptance of sin. His was an embracing of that guilt which weighed so heavily on one to perform better, faster, and more efficiently. The pre-packaged, the efficient, and the modulated was the irreducible fact of consciousness. The anxiety for efficiency was the fundamental fact of consciousness. In contrast to Riesman and Bell, for instance, who had counted on the potentially liberatory effects of the new leisure time or of the expansion and general prosperity of the economy respectively, Greenberg had remained determinedly in opposition to all the treasures that the "good life" offered up. Which is not to say that Greenberg did not enjoy the pleasures of the "good life". He did. Only, he considered them always a hollow chimera. Perhaps we can extract the important legacy of Greenberg's aesthetic position in relation to the likes of Bell and Riesman, Howe or Schlesinger, by focusing lastly on the nature of the new economy itself.

It was a system, they believed -- and this holds true for the entire political spectrum -- that was built upon the principle of change, flux, mobility, and the constant acceleration of these factors. In sum, it was an order which voraciously and continuously ate up the margins, and consumed the periphery in a never ending process of colonization, all for the integrity of the reservoir of diversity. Middlebrow culture was only one example of this process. It had effected a simulation of avant-garde attitude and content through its "conciliatory overtures" toward high culture.[78] For Bell, and more generally for Riesman, the vitality of the American situation, both economically and culturally, was founded on the fact of paradox; that despite the incessant processes of colonization, an avant-garde of taste makers was

[77]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 147.
[78]Greenberg, "The Plight of Our culture", p. 102.

keeping up to the pace. Though they acknowledge an inherent dynamism to the system, they also believed that the cultural and social field was benefiting from the cat and mouse game between the players, always pushing and straining for difference, and the inevitable momentum of commodification and colonization. For Bell, this new enfranchised avant-garde would work in constructive homology with the perceived dialectic driving modern industrialism. As a kind of organic elite in Riesman's words, "paying society's costs for research and development", it would propel modernity onward and upward, despite psychical prostration on other levels of the social. [79]

If the repercussions of this alignment are not now entirely clear, the taste maker and a corporate elite are one and the same. In fact, in the vast majority of the literature, there is never any distinction between the taste maker and the managerial elite. They make up a dynamic and fluid fraction at the upper echelon of culture which is the product of the same complex of forces. Little wonder that Daniel Bell would enter these dialogues from a perspective gained as a staff writer for *Fortune* magazine in the mid and late 1940s. What prospects he did place in the future of the country were inextricably bound up in very calculated attempts to continually link up a managerial elite with the taste maker via the old "umbilical cord of gold".[80] It seems that with the increasing pressure placed on the question of freedom, anxiety was given the decisive role of guardianship.

Amidst the blandness and conformity of middle management, the risk-taking manager decision-maker validated the image of the corporate sphere and a larger landscape devoid of difference and anxiety. Beginning in the late 1940s a whole new genre in literature and film emerges, entirely devoted to this construction. Think of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit , Executive Suite , How To Get Ahead in Business*

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[79]By plumbing the contradictions of liberal democracy Bell's version of the "new liberalism" had appropriated the positioning and legitimacy of an incorporated minority condition while rejecting the traditional precepts of avant-garde marginality and dissidence. Though apparently opening up an avenue for the minority voice, it functioned within a larger political economy to co-opt that power, instead affirming the right of democratic rule by elites.

[80] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch".

Without Really Trying , or *The Exurbanites,* all of which showcase variations on the theme, ranging from just a good G. I. and homebody, to the closest thing to an aristocratic elite industrial capitalism could ever want to produce. Inspite of such disparities, all possessed the keys for the executive washroom and had gotten them because of original and imaginative ideas and selling strategies.[81] The idea's man functioned in a position where risk-taking and the anxiety of the boardroom was a fact of life, where lucid decision-making skills thrived and were just as necessary to stay afloat. This fraction of the dominant class, which exemplified America's potential efficiency, self-consciousness, rigor and originality, became the standard bearers of capitalism's heightened form of modernity in the war against Communism.

Ironically then, for many apostates, utopian and imaginative thinking was only being kept alive at the top end of the corporate economy where responsibility was insuring efficiency and profit in the next quarter. Propelled by post-war circumstance, the anxiety of decision making had been transfigured into a constructive force for freedom and creative practice. With the militant isolationist ethos of an earlier avant-garde obsolescent under the new form of American capitalism, the avant-garde was now conceived of as both incorporated and affirmative, an avant-garde entirely adjusted to the strictures of psychic life under capitalism and there for the benefit of the whole. The primary threat which conformity in the social body and cultural landscape had precipitated was the decline of just the type of imaginative thinking the corporate environment kept alive. For Bell and Riesman and those other intellectuals associated with the "new liberalism", the psychical mechanisms sustaining individuality, creativity, and originality, those qualities that had driven modernism in the arts and in their view societal progress since the late nineteenth century, had now been incorporated and

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[81]Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", p. 24.

formalized into the rule of efficiency that drove American capitalism at its phenomenal pace.

The rigorous process of self-consciousness -- once the privilege of an avant-garde was now only sustained by managerial decision-making.[82] In Riesman's article, "The Limits of Totalitarianism", the "dangerous responsibilities" faced by the managerial set, were even undermining the effects of totalitarianism.[83] Cutting across all Cold War boundaries even the top decision-makers in the Soviet Union faced the heightened risk and anxiety of the managerial elite. Anxiety as the title of his article suggests, marked the limits of totalitarianism, where "totalitarian certitude", began to crumble. This universalizing construction of the corporate risk-taker is, of course, not without consequence. It opens up both Bell's and Riesman's accounts to the problems of a more insidious, if soft form of colonialism; a form of territorialization, that has placed many of America's most heinous foreign policy directives under the veil of freedom. Despite the universalist politics of anti-aggression and anti-nationalism both Bell and Riesman strived to fulfill, freedom the world over was to be made over according to the American model.

Given this kind of context, I think we need to continually remind ourselves of the careful positionings and maneuverings Greenberg continually pursued through his various political and cultural activities. His resignation, or firing, in April of 1957 from the editorial position at *Commentary* he had held since 1945 was undoubtedly wrapped up in precisely this set of questions. The increasing financial support given the journal through suspicious bureaucratic channels, and Eliot Cohen's own increasingly vocal pro-Zionist position, was apparently at some discrepancy from his own understanding of the problematic relation that the modernist impulse was now necessarily framed by. It was a move, I think, to avoid

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[82]Riesman, "The Limits of Totalitarianism".

[83]Indeed the "dangerous responsibilities" faced by even the top managers in the Soviet Union even undercut to some extent the framework of totalitarian certitude. This construction of the manager in the Soviet Union is not without importance. I discuss the implications of Riesman's article in the next chapter in relation to Greenberg's politics. See Riesman's article "Some Observations on the Limits of Totalitarian Power", *The Antioch Review*, Jun. 1952, v. XII, n. 2, p.163.

the very pitfalls that much of the constellation of discourses around the "new liberalism" had and was falling prey to: the international pretensions, the social presuppositions, the closing down of cultural options, and the psychologically affirmative relation with capitalism it extended.

For Greenberg, the problem "of a wide open inside a closed and stifling world" could only be addressed through a critical conformity. How? Well, at least Greenberg thought, simply by virtue of the fact that the acceptance of repetition which enabled the "richer seeming" "comfort of believing what we feel" -- if contemplated upon by the imperfect repetition of "derivation ... and derivation upon derivation" -- might open up some space, temporal though it may be, that expressed the endless unfolding toward truth which was the individual's essential mode of being in the world. For Greenberg, Kafka's "derivation -- and derivation upon derivation" stood as the important example.

> Needless to say, the "Jewish meaning" of Kafka's work does not exhaust its content. Nor is that meaning as consistent as I, for the purposes of exposition, have made it appear. (Least of all is it consistent with respect to the Gentile plebs, towards whom Kafka had the typically ambivalent feelings of an enlightened, emancipated Jew, and in whom he could at times, as in *The Castle*, see potential allies as well as present enemies.) It would be wrong in any case to pin Kafka down to specific allegorical meanings. There is allegory in his fiction -- the most successful allegory in a century and more of literature -- but what makes it succeed when it does is that it transcends all final interpretation by virtue of its form.[84]

We might hazard a guess, despite Greenberg's warnings, that the allegory in Kafka's fiction hinges upon the tension between a perfect repetition and an imperfect repetition we were trying to identify at the beginning of this chapter. It is a figural rendering of a process that can be broken down into a dyadic structure: the second a fluid, imperfect and incessant repetition, all surface, stylistically forced and exaggerated; and a primary repetition, a "motoric reaction", unknown to the mind, which hypostatizes "the eternal recapitulation of the occurrence", and forces its eternal nature into an event, an endless succession of events that are instantaneous

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[84]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 207.

and presumed fluid. What Greenberg liked about Kafka's fiction was the ability to formalize this meta-historical quality. Kafka's writing staged the fallen condition of consciousness itself. A similar over-dramatization of the bland, prosaic, and routine founds Greenberg's text as well. We know in fact, he thought he had over-staged the banality of Kafka's fiction. He says as much by apologizing for speaking a little too directly to the "Jewishness of Franz Kafka". But this was precisely the aporia of expression under the conditions of modernity. Writing had necessarily to be forced into the arena of the apparently grotesque, bizarre, and excessive.

Had not Kant demonstrated in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* that "one cannot prove an aesthetic judgment in discourse" after all.[85] Had not Greenberg begun his essay as if in mid-sentence, half-way through a breath, and ended it much the same way, on a chord that provoked and demanded further contemplation. In fact we are left hanging in space once again; fettered at the neck and feet just in the process of making sense of experience once again -- "This, too, makes him a "modern" writer."[86] This tension toward the infinite is the allegorical tension in Greenberg's criticism. It is a "wide open inside a closed and stifling world". It operates between the pure repetition that is death -- the incessant "action" of the self coming into being -- and the imperfect repetition "of that which is only derived from the operations upon experience of "objective", detached reason". "States of being" can only exist within such a timeless realm of becoming -- any knots, or climaxes, anything but eveness, equivalence, and homogeneity, seriality or monotonous repetition, would be carried instantly by the figurative, by "a mobile army of metaphors" to the surface as meaning. And meaningness was to be avoided at all cost. Political necessity dictated it.

There are a number of ways to frame Greenberg's position. I have tried to pursue a tact that is rigorously historical, as well as attentive to the flux of political exigency. By situating Greenberg's concerns within the tensions of a field of

[85]Greenberg replies to F.R. Leavis, ibid, p. 216.
[86]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 209.

struggling discourses that repel and attract one another on some issues and overlap on others, it is clear that conformity was intentionally maintained as a critical strategy. It was decisive for tapping into the modernist impulse. We can situate Greenberg's perspective on the problem of conformity within the parameters and resonance of certain therapeutic paradigms and within the context of contemporary discussions on the personality. In so doing, however, we have to recognize that for Greenberg the empirical drive of these discourses held absolutely no interest, other than serving as a model to open up some small space in a claustrophobic world. But if we place Greenberg's perspective within these frames, the resonance of a specific philosophical genealogy needs to be recognized as well. For Greenberg aligns himself with that venerable tradition beginning in the sixteenth century -- David Hume's call for "what is commonly done". "If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe anything certainly are, my follies shall be natural and agreeable".[87] Or Nietzsche's advocacy in *The Birth of Tragedy* for not seeing as "the man of culture" sees, but rather of seeing and experiencing as a satyr sees and experiences. The satyr's willing engagement with the object in the present, believing in what it feels, is as "richer seeming" as the philistine might experience, as downright creaturely as Greenberg might buy a refrigerator, that a fool would reason, or as subservient as the animal "appetite" or "energy and tenacity" that drives one of Spinoza's dogs to drool for whatever food is present, or happily seek the company and fettering of any master and chain which happens to come along.

Greenberg, too, must have liked dogs. Undoubtedly more than refrigerators even. After all, the capacity for living "unhistorically", for living completely in the present, that is the peculiar birthright of the animal, founds the modernist impulse we are interested in as well. The problem was how to encapsulate the immediacy of the dog's experience of the present in the context of language or representation. In a

[87]David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (Penguin, New York, 1969), p. 317.

sense, Kafka had achieved this contradictory structure. It was at the core of his "claustrophobia"; it was the tension of his "world all middle" -- that "wide open inside a closed and stifling world". It was a question of remembering to forget; of being able to experience life without the burden of the past, like one of Spinoza's dogs, say, who trades in the fettering of any one master and chain for the next one, all in good faith, without regret, and in complete happiness. A chain of owners, a succession of backyards, like the pickets of a "'fence' against history", built out of "middle-class orderliness, routine, prudence, sedentary stability, application to daily tasks ... and chronic anxiety about the future that leaves little room for sentiment about the past."

"Man wonders about himself", Nietzsche writes ...

> about his inability to learn to forget, and about his tendency to remain tied to the past: No matter how far and how swiftly he runs, the chain runs with him ... Man says "I remember", and envies the animal that forgets at once, and watches each moment die, disappear in night and mist, and disappear forever. Thus the animal lives unhistorically: It hides nothing and coincides at all moments exactly with that which it is; it is bound to be truthful at all times, unable to be anything else.[88]

To "hide nothing and coincide at all moments exactly with that which it is." This is the dream of Greenbergian modernism. The dog day afternoon of high modernist painting (Figure 13). The dream of totality and wholeness at the core of Greenberg's reading of Kafka. The question was how to factor into a dog's life, the effort of an intervening subjectivity, i.e., how to capture man's condition between matter and meaning from the ironic perspective of consciousness; how to make the instantaneous incorporative of an anxiety ridden reading-in, that is blinded to the subject. Greenberg believed that Kafka had accomplished this difficult tension by allegorizing the immediate. His fiction staged the confrontation between a pure repetition and an imperfect repetition. It was a tension that revealed becoming as the core of the "eternal recapitulation of the occurrence". It pinpointed the

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[88]Friedrich Niezsche, "On the Use and Misuse of History for Life", quoted by de Man in "Literary history and Literary Modernity", *Blindness and Insight*, p. 146.

unframeable problematic of a continual becoming from a posterior perspective. Anteriority, which is non-existent in the animal "that forgets at once, and watches each moment die" is constitutive of that continual conjuring of experience that is Kafka's "living continuously" between poles, an eternal making meaning of nothingness. For a "wide open inside a closed and stifling world", "hides nothing and coincides at all moments exactly with that which it is."

Maybe there was something at stake in conformity after all. Certainly Robert Warshow and Nathan Glazer thought so, and apparently those others in the editorial circle of *Commentary* whom they spoke for: Warshow in his blast against Irving Howe's "This Age of Conformity"; and Glazer in his review of *Dissent* , "the new trade journal of non-conformism".[89]

> (Editor Dissent): "The purpose of this new magazine is suggested by its name: to dissent from the bleak atmosphere of conformism that pervades the political and intellectual life of the United States; to dissent from the support of the status quo now so noticeable on the part of many former radicals and socialists; to dissent from the terrible assumption that a new war is necessary or inevitable, and that the only way to defeat Stalinism is through atomic world suicide."
> (Nathan Glazer): If the reader now looks forward, despite this unpromising beginning, to some documentation of how "the bleak atmosphere of conformism" is spreading in the United States, he will find precious little offered him in the remaining...[90]

For Clement Greenberg, too, there was something at stake in the bleak atmosphere of conformity. Of course, it was most suggestively understood in the furthest and most obscure figurative sense and terms. But all the hope there was "remaining" in the "bleak atmosphere of conformism in the United States" was only a "precious little". Conformity as a strategy gave some sensuous subsance to what "precious little" was left in the world. It ennabled a foothold on the "wide open" by reconstituting the instantaneous; by beginning with the "predigested" and the "expected" of "what is felt", and tracing backward a teleological imperative that doomed a "tenacious intention" to conformity, from the beginning. Greenberg's

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[89]Robert Warshow, "This Age of Conformity: Protest and Rejoinder",(*Partisan Review*, Mar.-Apr., 1954, v. xxi, n. 2.), p. 238.

[90]Nathan Glazer, "Philistine Leftism", (*Commentary*, v. xvii, Feb. 1954), p. 202.

criticism revealed the absolute state of "crabbed" and "half-baked" decay the individual was left in by capitalism at mid century. It gave precious substance to a life otherwise devoid of it. It was quite literally a consecration of the suburban night of mere reflection. A mirror reflection. A dogged concern for shedding light on the noonday of life.

Figure 1 "It makes a continuous supply of ice cubes, *without trays*". SERVEL-Automatic ice-maker refrigerator ad. *Life Magazine*, v.34, n.25, June 22, 1953, p.88.

Figure 2 "It doubles your 'front-row' space! And no other refrigerator manufacturer can make this claim". CROSLEY SHELVADOR refrigerator ad. *Life Magazine*, v. 34, n. 22, June 1, 1953, p. 66.

Figure 3 "Believe me. You can tell which peas were kept in an Admiral". ADMIRAL Dual-Temp refrigerator ad. *Life Magazine*, v. 34, n. 23, June 8, 1953, p.5.

Figure 4 "It comes with Moisture-Seal Crispers". KELVINATOR Model KPC refrigerator ad. *Life Magazine*, v. 34, n. 22, June 1, 1953, p.1.

Figure 5 Dream or nightmare?. .."Free forever from the messy chore of getting rid of frost and frost-water". CROSLEY SHELVADOR refrigerator ad. *Life Magazine,* v. 35, n. 2, June 22, 1953, p.54.

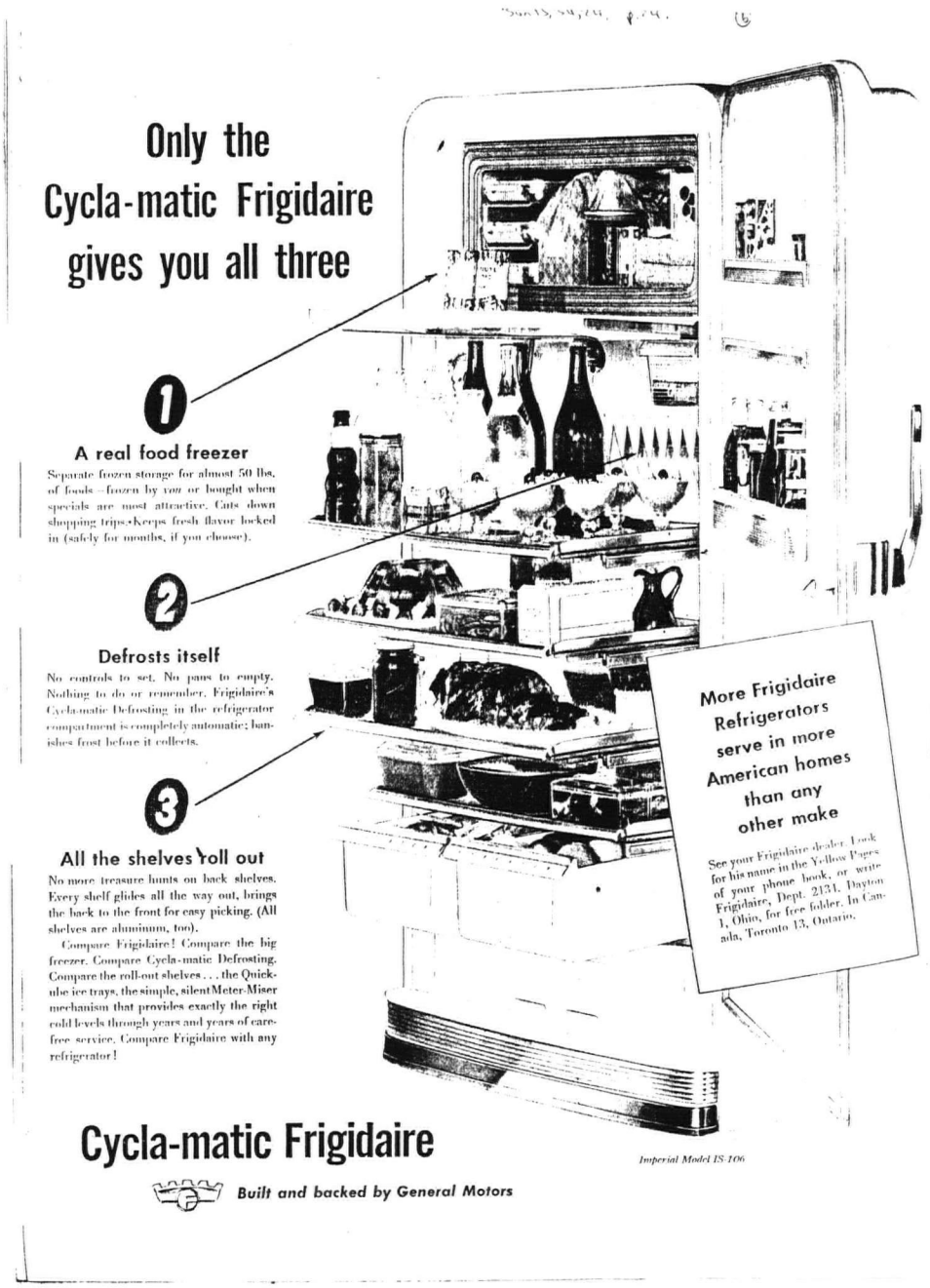

Figure 6 "Even Kafka would buy one!" CYCLAMATIC FRIGIDAIRE refrigerator ad. *Life Magazine*, v. 34, n. 24, June 15, 1953, p.74.

Figure 7 "It's 3 great appliances in 1". SERVEL Automatic ice-maker refrigerator ad. *Life Magazine,* v. 35, n. 4, June 27, 1953, p.109.

Figure 8 "Just look -- we won't say a word." MERCURY Convertible coup ad. *Life Magazine*, v. 34, n. 24, June 15, 1953, p.24.

Figure 9 "Say good-bye forever to digging for toast or burning fingers trying to rescue a muffin." GENERAL ELECTRIC Automatic toaster ad. *Life Magazine,* v. 34, n. 23, June 8, 1953, p.126.

5 reasons why bakers use dextrose in baking better bread

1. Texture

For good eating, the texture of bread must be even, close-grained, soft and tender. In baking, dextrose sugar importantly aids the development of fine bread texture... smooth, even and uniform.

2. Crust Color

Appetizing crust color is the mark of better bread. Bakers find that dextrose helps to develop superior "bloom," rich golden brown crust. This fine-looking loaf says "good eating."

3. Taste

The primary function of sugar in bread baking is to feed the yeast, to promote fermentation—not necessarily to sweeten. Bakers have found dextrose to be a superior sugar in developing fine bread.

4. Lasting Freshness

Leading bakers use a combination of ingredients, including dextrose sugar, which tends to keep bread fresh—soft, moist and tender . . . the way you like bread best.

5. Toast-ability

The final test of better bread is the kind of toast it makes. If it toasts evenly—turns to a golden brown outside—stays tender inside—it's fine bread—the kind leading bakers make with dextrose.

Facts about dextrose...

You won't find dextrose, food-energy sugar, for sale in a retail store. It is sold only to commercial producers of fine foods and beverages . . . who use it to improve the flavor and quality of their products.

As a natural sugar, dextrose is found in most fruits and many vegetables. It is sparkling white, mildly sweet and cooling to the taste. Actually, dextrose is the sugar your body uses *directly* for energy. It needs no digestion . . . it is promptly absorbed and utilized for energy.

Under the trade name of Cerelose, dextrose is produced by Corn Products Refining Company.

Figure 10 Five easy steps to modern bread making. Dextrose ad. *Life Magazine,* June 22, v.34, n.25, 1953, p. 11.

Figure 11 "For the first time in any refrigerator. It thinks for itself: For the First Time in any Refrigerator ". PHILCO Automatic freezer ad. *Life Magazine,* v. 34, n. 22, June 1, 1953, p.9.

Figure 12 "Harriet finds its new design puts everything more conveniently in reach than ever before". HOTPOINT Super-Star ad. *Life Magazine*, v. 34, n. 25, June 22, 1953. p. 42.

Figure 13 A dog day afternoon.

Chapter 3

Toward a Physics of Reading Greenberg Reading Pollock Relaxing Entropy as Dissipation in *Sober-Type* Painting

> Jackson Pollock's problem is never authenticity, but that of finding his means and bending it as far as possible toward the literalness of his emotions. Sometimes he overpowers the means but he rarely succumbs to it. His most recent show, at Parsons, reveals a turn but not a sharp change of direction; there is a kind of relaxation, but the outcome is a newer and loftier triumph. All black and white, like Kline's, and on unsized and unprimed canvas, his new pictures hint, as it were, at the innumerable unplayed cards in the artists hand. And also, perhaps, at the large future still left to easel painting. Some recognizable images appear -- figures, heads, and animal forms -- and the composition is modulated in a more traditional way, no longer standing itself in one forthright piece. But everything Pollock acquired in the course of his "all-over" period remains there to give the picture a kind of density orthodox easel painting has not known before. This is not an affair of packing and crowding, but of embodiment; every square inch of canvas receives a maximum of charge at the cost of a minimum of physical means. Now he volatizes in order to say something different from what he had to say during the four years before, when he strove for corporeality and laid his paint on thick and metallic. What counts, however, is not that he has different things to say in different ways, but he has a lot to say.
>
> Contrary to the impression of some of his friends, this writer does not take Pollock's art uncritically. I have at times pointed out what I believe are some of its shortcomings -- notably, in respect to color. But the weight of the evidence still convinces me -- after this last show more than ever -- that Pollock is in a class by himself. Others may have greater gifts and maintain a more even level of success, but no one in this period realizes as much as strongly and as truly. He does not give us samples of miraculous handwriting, he gives us achieved and monumental works of art, beyond accomplishedness, facility, or taste. Pictures *Fourteen* and *Twenty Five* in the recent show represent high classical art: not only the identification of form and feeling, but the acceptance and exploitation of the very circumstances of the medium of painting that limit such identification.[1]

I take "a kind of relaxation" to be the crux of Greenberg's criticism of Pollock's art. In fact, "a kind of relaxation" is a touchstone of what Greenberg demanded of modernist painting in the latter part of the twentieth century if it was to stay cogent or relevant at all. In the passage above much hinges on the rhetorical work done by this relatively insignificant characterization. Because of it, Pollock's Black and White paintings from his show at the Betty Parson's Gallery in 1951 (Figure 1) (Figure 2) are "a newer and loftier triumph". It hints, "at the innumerable unplayed cards in the artist's hand". It suggests "not that he has different things to say in different ways, but he has a lot to say". It is evidence to the effect "that Pollock

[1]Clement Greenberg, "Feeling is All: Art Chronicle, 1952", (*Partisan Review*, 1952), C.G., v. 3, pp. 104-105.

is in a class by himself", that "no one in this period realizes as much as strongly and as truly". In sum, Pollock's new "relaxation" gives "achieved and monumental works of art, beyond accomplishedness, facility, or taste"; it gives us "high classical art: not only the identification of form and feeling, but the acceptance and exploitation of the very circumstances of the medium of painting that limit such identification". "A kind of relaxation" is, in other words, saying a lot.

Yet if one reads these accolades heaped upon Pollock too literally it would be missing the point. For there is a wiry sense of irony at the heart of Greenberg's excitement with the work that goes to the core of his deepest held concerns and assumptions about contemporary American painting. A "kind of relaxation" carries the burden of what were an as yet unfulfilled set of hopes and expectations that Greenberg held for that painting. There is a sense of strain and forcedness in Greenberg's reading, a kind of hesitation or qualifiedness that gives the actual presence of relaxation more the sense of a quality hoped for than one simply extant. The great paradox of Pollock's new painting from 1951 was that it was just beginning to unravel from within, a kind of painting Pollock had done more than most to establish. Nevertheless if one is to follow Greenberg on the matter of Pollock, what Harold Rosenberg had called "action painting", what others had dubbed abstract expressionism, was giving way to what is tempting to call "a kind of relaxation" painting.

Following Greenberg on the matter of Pollock is important. Greenberg remains still today Pollock's most insightful critic. The comments on Pollock's art above, come at the end of a set of short reviews strung together as a contribution for the January-February 1952 edition of *Partisan Review*. The text, entitled "Feeling is All", touches upon a number of recent exhibitions by Matisse, Gerhard Marck, Hans Hoffman, Franz Kline, and Barnett Newman. In some ways the argument made for Pollock and the others is not surprising. The issues pursued are a restatement of a familiar set of themes and concerns which dominate much of Greenberg's criticism

during the period 1947 to 1957. In "Feeling is All" that familiar set of themes and concerns revolves around the polarity between action and relaxation. What is surprising are the unexpected inversions and oppositions that follow from this original dyad. There is the stasis of action and the movement of relaxation, the necessity, vitality, and strength required of relaxation on the one hand and the fatigue and contingency which sustains action on the other hand. The title of the article both points to the reasons for this paradoxical structure and neatly sums up the argument Greenberg will make for Pollock's new painting. "Feeling is All" forefront's once again a steadfast concern that painting hinge on feeling; that it rest entirely "on sensation the irreducible elements of experience". Claiming "a kind of relaxation" in Pollock's new work was about movement, necessity, and strength -- all those kinds of things that one would not expect from the lessening of tension "a kind of relaxation" infers -- rested on the contradictory nature of Greenberg's notion of the aesthetic.

It is a great moment in American painting. In terms of this dissertation project it represents the beginning of a fundamental reassessment of abstract expressionism, the post-cubist project, and contemporary avant-gardism. In a more limited sense it represents a convergence between Greenberg's aesthetic criticism and Pollock's art which this chapter takes as its departure. As we will see this convergence of interests allows an unprecedented opportunity to explore the makeup of one version of materialism in the twentieth century. In order to gain entrance into Pollock's painting I begin with a close reading of Greenberg's "Feeling is All". A reading which will enable a further and more specific investigation into Pollock's practice itself.

In the context of Greenberg's essay, a " kind of relaxation" resonates with the history of painting since the impressionists, and the more specific terms of a series of developments that reflect Pollock's ongoing dialogue with cubism. While the

more general backdrop of avant-gardism is only figured, a "kind of relaxation" is specifically defined through and against what Greenberg considered the contemporary manifestation of avant-gardism, post-cubist painting. Within the parameters of Pollock's own development, a painting like *Number 14,* 1951 (Figure 3) represented a progression toward "a kind of relaxation" from one of his abstractions like Number 1, 1949, (Figure 4). But as much, *Number 14,* 1951 represented "a kind of relaxation" with regard to post-cubist painting more generally. For Greenberg, Pollock's abstractions from 1947-1950 were exemplary of all the best in post-cubist painting. Yet in respect to the new paintings the abstractions were wanting. "A kind of relaxation" was what Greenberg demanded of contemporary painting if it was to remain cogent and relevant, if it was to overcome the limits of post-cubist painting. Here is Greenberg addressing Pollock's tranquilizing moves in the crucial passage. I think it opens up a "kind of relaxation" which is somewhat of an amorphous term, to the kind of constraints cubism was placing on modernist painting. He writes,

> Tautness of feeling, not "depth", characterizes what is strongest in post-cubist art. The taking up of slack, the flattening out of convexities and concavities -- the ambitious contemporary artist presents, supposedly only that which he can vouch for with complete certainty; he does not necessarily exclude, but he distrusts more and more of his emotions. This makes art much more of a strain, and I believe it accounts in part for the fatigue from which Picasso and Braque and even Matisse have suffered since middle age (though, of course, it is not just a question of fatigue).[2]

Though Greenberg never explicitly states the nature of relaxation in Pollock's painting, we can safely assume that "a kind of relaxation" is a relative term, a term that posits a lessening of tension relative to that "tautness of feeling ... what is strongest in post-cubist art ". Evidently in the case of the "ambitious contemporary artist" -- and this was the label for anyone concerned with the issues of post-cubist painting, "complete certainty" accompanied a "tautness of feeling". Furthermore, this "complete certainty" and "tautness of feeling" is equated with the "taking up of

[2]Greenberg, ibid, p. 102.

slack, the flattening out of convexities and concavities".[3] What is surprising in all this is that post-cubism's concentration on surface comes at the expense of feeling. For as a corollary to a "tautness of feeling" and "complete certainty", emotion is distrusted "more and more". If we are to accept Greenberg's reading, it seems that a "tautness of feeling" is complicit in a slackening or weakening of modernist painting. For as he puts it bluntly at the beginning of the passage, if a "tautness of feeling ... characterizes what is strongest in post-cubist art," "depth" does not.

What is important to realize here, is that flatness or a concentration on surface, that hallmark of Greenbergian modernism, is devalued. In fact, for Greenberg a "tautness of feeling" in post-cubist painting while not exclusive to "depth", does side line "depth", the emotions, or feeling "more and more". In the case of Pollock's new paintings, a "kind of relaxation", which goes deep, was undermining a "tautness of feeling" and a "complete certainty", which stays superficial. Which is to say that flatness, what was strongest in Pollock's earlier abstractions, had supposedly been replaced by a concentration on surface that was deep; a "depth" that followed from trusting his emotions "more and more". If a "tautness of feeling" or concentration on surface negated the possibility of "depth" in his previous works, a "kind of relaxation" which was equally to do with surface, though not in the completely certain sense of post-cubism, figured a profounder depth. In effect, while Greenberg is addressing the formal problems of post-cubist painting, he is actually zeroing-in on cubism and post-cubism as a practice ultimately reliant on intention.

This is a construction that we need to be especially attentive to. As a fundamental critique of cubism, it forms the crucial foundation of Greenberg's aesthetic. Indeed, Greenberg's critique of intention is at the core of his attempt to lay the groundwork for a new era of modernist painting hinging on the depth of feeling. If in the passage above, flatness and two-dimensionality (when a function

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[3]Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism", p.213.

of "complete certainty") is ultimately contingent on intention, then a certain flatness and heightening of surface (when a function of a "kind of relaxation") analogically corresponded to that depth possessed of the emotions or unintention -- something "beyond accomplishedness, facility, or taste". Apparently in post-cubist art -- Pollock's abstractions included -- the strain under which surface is placed, can in the end only just be a metaphor of the strain under which surface is made. No matter how hard the post-cubist painter tries to make surface a metaphor of depth, indeed simply because he tries, he can it seems only make a surface -- something depth psychology would delimit to the sphere of a surface psychology. As a fable of sorts, the message of "Feeling is All" seems clear, almost naively so. Apparently making surface function as an analog of depth was simply a matter of relaxing.

Pollock's "kind of relaxation" is of course more complex than just this. For a "kind of relaxation" is achieved in Pollock's new works through what we know was once the essential constituent of a "tautness of feeling". The fact is, that the new paintings are not simply a slackening from the previous period, as a kind of "all-overness" "remains there to give the picture a kind of density orthodox easel painting has not known before". "All-overness" is apparently achieved in a new way. Greenberg reminds us that it is not "an affair of packing and crowding" any more, but rather "of embodiment; every square inch of the canvas receives a maximum of charge at the cost of a minimum of physical means". For Greenberg "a kind of relaxation" was both founded upon and serving what was in the years previous, integral to a process that emboldened Pollock's practice. In fact "a kind of relaxation" was a working through of a "tautness of feeling". It was a logical progression from the anxiety and strain of post-cubist painting. It was a move beyond post-cubism's reliance on "accomplishedness, facility, or taste". As a formalization of the post-cubist problematic it was part of an understanding, and interpretation of anxiety (which is in a sense a "tautness of feeling") as a structural phenomenon.

Despite the trajectory from a "tautness of feeling" to a "kind of relaxation" Greenberg's essay apparently celebrates, his opinion of cubism was not simply a critical one. It is important to realize that a "tautness of feeling" was not to be rejected outright. Rather it encapsulated an absolute limit that painting had now to confront if it was to advance. Only a few years before, in 1947, Greenberg had hailed cubism as "the great phenomenon, the epoch making feat of twentieth century art, a style that has changed and determined the complexion of Western art as radically as Renaissance naturalism once did".[4] If by 1951 cubism's place as "the only vital style, the one best able to convey contemporary feeling" was waning, it did at least remain "the only one capable of supporting a tradition which will survive into the future and form new artists".[5] Cubism's great contribution lay in its investigation of the object.

> ... Picasso and Braque discovered that it was not the essential description of the visible relations of volumes in nature or the more emphatic rendition of their three-dimensionality that could guarantee the organization of a pictorial work of art. On the contrary, to do these things actually disrupted that organization. By dint of their efforts to discover pictorially the structure of their objects, of bodies, in nature, Picasso and Braque had come -- almost abruptly, it would seem -- to a new realization of, and new respect for, the nature of the picture plane itself as a material object; and they came to the further realization that only by transposing the internal logic by which objects are organized in nature could aesthetic form be given to the irreducible flatness which defined the picture plane in its inviolable quality as a material object. This flatness became the final, all-powerful premise of the art of painting, and the experience of nature could be transposed into it only by analogy, not by imitative reproduction. Thus the painter abandoned his interest in the concrete appearance, for example, of a glass and tried instead to approximate by analogy the way in which nature had married the straight contours that defined the glass vertically to the curved ones that defined it laterally. Nature no longer offered appearances to imitate, but principles to parallel.[6]

In distinction to the pictorial illusionism of the Renaissance which accorded the object, action, or event a special priority over that of the field, or indeed impressionism's interest in "the purely visual sensations nature presented ... at the given moment", the great fact of cubism was "a new respect for the nature of the

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[4]Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism", (*Partisan Review*, March 1948), C.G. 2, p. 212.

[5]Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism", p. 213.

[6]Greenberg, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting", p. 273.

picture plane itself as a material object". In Greenberg's reading of cubism surface was the "experience of nature ... transposed". Surface was to function as a metaphor of depth. Not an emotional depth as in the case of Pollock's new painting, but a depth that was related to an "internal logic by which objects are organized in nature".

Objective, clear-sighted, and methodical, cubism's investigations into the problem of the object represented the height of rationalism. It's insistence on the two-dimensional picture plane expressed "the empiricist's faith in the supreme reality of concrete experience."[7] With Cubism, Greenberg writes, "we are faced with the debacle of the age of "experiment", of the Apollinarian and cubist mission and its hope, coincident with that of Marxism and the whole matured tradition of the Enlightenment, of humanizing the world".[8] The bridges cubism maintained with science, mathematics, and physics, directed its investigation from the merely visual problematic of the object, action, or event, to deeper material and physical "truths". "Viewing the world as a continuum, a dense somatic entity (as was dictated by their age)", the cubists, Greenberg writes, "had to strive to organize the picture -- itself an object -- by analogy with the single object abstracted from surrounding space and by analogy with the space relations between the different parts of one and the same object".[9] By subjugating the importance of mimeticism to that of the material object, cubism had discovered a kind of meta-historical level laying beneath the object -- a depth which appearance militated against.

However historically important this concentration on surface was, its achievement would be a negative one. For Greenberg, cubism had pushed the problem of the object to its limit. It had solved the problem of the object, "but, as Marx would say, only by destroying it: willingly or unwillingly, cubism sacrificed the integrity of the object almost entirely to that of the surface. This -- which had,

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[7]Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism", p. 214.
[8]Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism", p. 212.
[9]Greenberg, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting", p. 273-274.

however, nothing to do with aesthetic value -- is why cubism constituted a turning point in the history of painting."[10] What "aesthetic value" cubism's concentration on the material object did in fact generate was coincidental. Though the "complete certainty" with which it sought out the picture plane, beggared the kind of depth that was feeling, its objective and empirical approach made accommodations for a more subjective orientation. For Greenberg, cubism's interest in the picture plane had accidentally broached the gestalt problematic.

In its attempts to uncover certain meta-historical 'truths' in nature, i.e., immutable laws governed by reason, cubism had unintentionally mapped out everything that a depth of feeling was not. By virtue of its own closure and limits, cubism's totalizing account had opened up a new field of possibility. Through a process of default, it had circumscribed the investigation of the meta-historical and universal which it sought in natural phenomenon, to historically specific processes governing perception and/or consciousness in the experiencing subject. As we will see, Pollock's shift toward "a kind of relaxation" was in large part an engagement with this cubist inheritance in light of a working knowledge of issues and concerns surrounding the gestalt problematic -- the key scientific perspective on the tension between surface and depth.

The problem with cubism's investigation into depth, was that depth plumbed was entirely a function of reason, and thus divorced from and antithetical to a depth that was true to one's feeling. Greenberg's perspective on modernist literature is illuminating here. For what can easily be construed in "Feeling is All" as merely a playful concern with intentionality -- that tension between a "tautness of feeling" and "a kind of relaxation" -- reveals itself as a thoroughgoing and full-fledged despair for the conditions of consciousness under post-war industrialism. For Greenberg, the literary model of thematizing feeling or expression was at the heart of the contemporary avant-garde's problem. It was a question of "pessimism

[10]Greenberg, "Master Leger", C.G. v.3, p. 167.

rest(ing) on cynicism rather than on despair". In the case of Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot a "logical or topical consistency", an "intellectual" rather than "emotional" understanding of the form, holds the poetical work together. Eliot, "who has strained to prove himself as a "professional" poet", comes under the heaviest criticism. "Above all his verse -- or at least the art in it -- I can never help smelling something of the *tour de force*, the contrived, the set piece: it is the man of letters peeping out of the wings, deliberate, prestidigitating, apart from the poetry -- yet always hoping that this one time he won't be apart, that it will come off like the real thing and not a piece of the magician's fictitious art."[11]

As far as Greenberg's perspective on feeling went, any and all recourse to accomplishedness, facility, or taste", learned, or acquired skills, "logical" or "intellectual" understandings, had long since been terminated. An utter faith in the parameters of rationality (which would include consciousness) had ended, as the larger project of modernity had seemingly ended, with the complex of circumstances surrounding the rise of "totalitarianism". What is important to recognize however, is that while Greenberg would acknowledge the corruption of a *telos* , like consciousness, he would vigorously maintain the value of positivism, becoming, or the teleological process itself. For Greenberg "a kind of relaxation" represented a strategic move to recoup a notion of positivism, in an age when positivism seemed the one and only threat.

The contrast with Harold Rosenberg is revealing in this regard. In fact, Pollock's own intentions in 1951 can be addressed in terms of a shift from the orbit of Rosenberg to that of Greenberg. Within the art world Rosenberg's account was the powerful counter position to Greenberg's reading. Undoubtedly it was even the more resonant of the two. The processes of apostasy which had resulted in a kind of political emasculation for an entire generation of the American Left were remolded by Rosenberg's aesthetics of "action painting" into a project for a kind of individual

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[11]Greenberg, "T.S. Eliot: The Criticism, The Poetry" (*The Nation*, Dec. 1950), C.G. v. 3, p. 69.

revirilization based in the absolute emptiness of any programmatic social utopianism. Much more extreme than Greenberg in his suspicions of the course of modernity, Rosenberg embraces what might be called a kind of 'existential' anti-rationalism. Indeed, he rejects the teleological imperative of the Enlightenment project altogether. For Rosenberg, the project of modernity had been entirely appropriated by a diffuse apparatus of power, by totalitarian regimes abroad and mass culture at home.[12] The vigor of Rosenberg's non-ideological stance was the harshest rejection of modernity. Progress was an irredeemable prospect, a reaction quite distinct from Greenberg's more balanced if paradoxical stance. Despite the conscious antipathy between the two positions, however, both Greenberg's and Rosenberg's politics fit within the same wide ideological parameters. Within the art world they represented perhaps the two most interesting poles of liberal anti-communism. In a sense we are dealing with two different types of existentialism; Rosenberg's which found possibility in the intuitive and immediate nature of experience, and Greenberg's which recognized the liberatory effect of spontaneous and immediate experience as an illusion, but placed hope in it nevertheless.

In Rosenberg's 1952 article, "The American Action Painters", experience is given form through the anxiety-ridden act. Experience is manifest as a negation of reason.[13] Greenberg's position was in large part formulated against this kind of complete dismissal of the project of modernity. Rather than a wholesale rejection of positivism, Greenberg's was an attempt to accommodate the terms of modernity within the context of a new set of constraints. From Greenberg's perspective Rosenberg's appropriation of the psycho-drama, could only encapsulate the cynicism of an older generation and its flight into extreme solutions which Greenberg was ever on vigil against. While Greenberg's new project for modernist painting was as much wrapped up in an attempt to isolate the kind of experiential

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[12]Rosenberg, "The Herd of Independent Minds: Has the Avant-Garde its Own Mass Culture?", (*Commentary* , Sept. 1948, v. 6, n. 3), pp. 244-252.

[13] Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment", *Partisan Review*, Jan. 1948, in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2*, p. 193.

moment that Rosenberg privileged, it was nevertheless conceived of in altogether Proustian terms; in terms that predicted the circumscription and corruption of experience as a basic function of its entrance into the world.[14] Which is to say, anxiety and isolation were for Greenberg as much the essential conditions of existence, but that the kind of metaphysical unity between an inside and an outside that Rosenberg's aesthetics were based on, was no longer recognized as secure or a viable prospect under modernity.

The irony of all this is that Rosenberg's reading of action painting was the right one as far as Pollock's early tactics for his abstractions from 1947-1950 was concerned. In 1947 both Pollock and Rosenberg believed that modernist painting could only proceed if it was founded on a negation, that was a manifestation of the realm of immediate experience. This is not to say Greenberg did not realize this about the abstractions. He did. The fact is, he thought it another symptom of the weakness of any painting still mired within the problems of post-cubism, the problem of the metaphor, the material object, and intentionality. Greenberg's continual focus on formal issues in Pollock's painting was a function of his unwillingness to accept the premise of representing unmediated experience as such. Nor, indeed, did he wish to entertain the repercussions of such a move in terms of the larger picture of post-enlightenment philosophy.

From Greenberg's perspective, the insights cubism had attained, the radical course into "unknown territory" it had once charted were now confounded by the natural affinities which reason shared with the "totalitarian state". "The great style of any period", Greenberg writes,

> is that which relates itself to the true insights of its time. But an age may repudiate its real insights, retreat to the insights of the past -- which, though not its own, seem safer to act upon -- and accept only an art that corresponds to this repudiation; in which case the age will go without great art, to which truth of feeling is essential. In a time of disasters the less radical artists, like the less radical politicians, will perform better since, being familiar with the expected

[14]Greenberg's project was a cheerful version of what Herbert Marcuse had described in *Eros and Civilization*, as "the *truth value* of memory"; where "the *recherche du temps perdu* becomes the vehicle for future liberation". Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 34.

consequences of what they do, they need less nerve to keep to their course. But the more radical artists, like the more radical politicians, become demoralized because they need so much more nerve than the conservatives in order to keep to a course that, guided by the real insights of the age, leads into unknown territory. Yet if the radical artist's loss of nerve becomes permanent, then art declines as a whole, for the conservative artists ride only on momentum and eventually loses touch with the insights of his time -- by which all genuine artists are nourished. Or else society may refuse to have any new insights, refuse to make new responses -- but in that case it would be better not to talk about art at all...

In a world filled with nostalgia and too profoundly frightened by what has just happened to dare hope that the future contains anything better than the past, how can art be expected to hold on to advanced positions? The masters of cubism, formed by the insights of a more progressive age, had advanced to far, and when history began going backwards they had to retreat, in confusion, from positions that were more exposed because they were more advanced. The metaphor, I feel, is exact.[15]

"Feeling is All" was Greenberg's attempt at making sense of art in a "conservative epoch" like the post-war period. It was an attempt to link a "tautness of feeling" in post-cubist painting to a kind of conservatizing, stalemate position on modernity -- a position which was only a superficial defense of positivism. The situation confronting Pollock in a context dominated by abstract expressionism was grist for the mill. In Greenberg's reading post-cubist painting, specifically abstract expressionism, represented a retreat from and a repudiation of earlier insights. As a style it was complicit in a "loss of nerve" that the conservative epoch of the post-war period demanded. But more than all this, the essay provided a backdrop for plotting out the direction that a relevant or cogent art had now to pursue. Pollock's "kind of relaxation" though a style which seemed out of synch with the age, a backtracking and retreat from the more radical and extreme conclusions of the contemporary avant-garde, was ironically a crucial advance, because founded in the "truth of feeling" that characterized the age, because founded in a kind of positivism that the extremes of a contemporary avant-garde was actually a reaction against.

"The great style of any period", in Greenberg's opinion was not an attempt to advance in front of, or retreat to the rear of its time, but rather was an engagement with the "truth of feeling" that was dictated by the time, the period, or the moment of modernity. Depth or "true insight" was a possibility only if feeling itself was

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[15]Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism", pp. 213-215.

mined. "A kind of relaxation" was acknowledgment that trying to make the material object a metaphor of depth by forcing or pushing its inviolable qualities to extremes was bound to fail; it was a recognition that a negation of ones feeling was an empty gesture and only a denial of the historically conditioned nature of experience. Pollock's "kind of relaxation" was a move away from the stridency, over-wroughtness, and anxiety which had become representative of a contemporary avant-garde's attempts to thematize depth by escaping the strictures of its own context. The denigration of metaphor, as an implicit critique of an avant-garde's attempt to escape from the strictures of its own time, through a negation of its own conditions "... I feel, is exact".

With these kind of high-minded issues at stake, it is easy to forget the glib and superficial character of Greenberg's account of modern painting. The fact is that depth was inseparable from superficiality. The fact is that a general sense of levity and the series of lighthearted caricatures "Feeling is All" provides, was playing for the very highest and most serious of stakes. For Greenberg, Pollock's turn toward "a kind of relaxation" represented a moment not unlike that one when Rimbaud himself had tread upon similar ground, "abandon(ing) his own path" toward the "Gothic", "romantic", and "subjective".[16] Pollock's "kind of relaxation" seemed to distill out the sobering terms of a practice confronting its own inadequacies and limits; a post-cubist, abstract expressionist practice questioning the very conditions of its own possibility. If, in Rimbaud's case, such abandonment was a realization that the avant-garde's flight or escape into "transcendent exceptions, (and) aberrated states", was only "an evasion, not a solution, and already on the point of becoming, in the profoundest sense academic", then Pollock's "turn" away from a

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[16]Greenberg's discussion of Rimbaud and the "Gothic" tradition introduces his criticism of Pollock ... "the most powerful painter in contemporary America and the only one who promises to be a major one is a Gothic, morbid, and extreme disciple of Picasso's cubism and Miro's post-cubism, tinctured also with Kandinsky's and Surrealist inspiration". Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture", pp. 164-166.

spectacularization of the subjective, and absolute athleticism of the gesture of his earlier works signaled a similar realization.[17] It marked a moment when the project of an older generation on the verge of collapse had ironically rendered its own protocols and procedures obsolescent, by formalizing the structure upon which that practice was based. This process of formalization which was integral to Pollock's "kind of relaxation" marked out a new vision of the self and the world. It rendered the post-cubist stalemate obsolete. For Greenberg, Pollock was poised to usher in a new era of modernist painting; a high modernist painting that if grounded in the topical trend of contemporary avant-gardism was sufficiently self-reflexive to admit and return to what Greenberg valued most dearly in the early avant-garde's.

Avant-gardism itself was not the problem, so much as its peculiar manifestation at mid-century. Post-cubist painting had lost touch with the contemplative pessimism of the early French avant-gardes and had gone the way of a "Gothic" and "extreme" tradition.[18] "Industrialism (can now only) exacerbate and drive us", Greenberg notes, "to extreme positions, where we write poetry but are unable to calm ourselves and live long enough to fix abiding plastic representations."[19] Pollock's "kind of relaxation" represented a sort of banal though culminating moment in the demise of the "dominant creative tradition" of the "Gothic". By placing the set of assumptions upon which his former practice was based, under scrutiny, he had arrived at an entirely more circumspect consideration of arts relation to the surrounding culture. If Pollock's work up to 1951 was not, his new painting <u>was</u> negotiating a predicament in which any and all avant-garde tactics were themselves already predicted, complicit, co-opted, and utterly contingent on the surrounding culture. "A kind of relaxation" aligned Pollock with what Greenberg valued most in Nietzsche. It was what Nietzsche knew "inspite of his

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[17]Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture", p. 164-165.
[18]Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting", p. 164.
[19]Greenberg, ibid, p. 164.

profession of the Dionysian".[20] It was the truth of "a bland, large, Apollonian art".[21]

As odd as characterizing Greenberg's view of Pollock's painting in negative terms may sound, the weight of his criticism warrants it. Certainly Greenberg was one of Pollock's earliest defenders, yet there was always some tension between the two men. In effect, Greenberg was highly critical of the "Gothic", "romantic", and "subjective" tradition that Pollock's earlier work, especially his abstractions from 1947-1950 stood for.[22] Yet Greenberg's praise for Pollock's work new and old should be taken seriously. The work dealt consistently and in a progressively complex formal manner with the question of the object, the figure, the body, and the physical, all issues central to Greenberg's evaluation of contemporary practice. In effect, the abstractions from 1947-1950 were a metaphoric embodiment of his earlier figurative work, while the new work from 1951 was a formalization of the physical therein.

"Like some older masters of our time", Greenberg writes of Pollock, "he develops according to a double rhythm in which each beat harks back to the one before the last".[23] Inasmuch as his new work was a "relaxation" of sorts that allowed a resurfacing of some notion of the figure from his first phase, the not fully realized figuration, only half-formed and half-emergent of his new phase, was built upon formal lessons mobilized in his second "all-over" phase. While the "all-over" abstractions "strove for corporeality", a materialization of the violence and anxiety underlining or driving his figurative work from 1941 - 1946, his new work was a formalizing of that anxiety and violence ("tautness of feeling") which drove or presumed his abstractions from 1947 - 1950. A violence or anxiety against the figurative or bodily in the first phase corporealized as an attention to surface -- a

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[20]Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting", p. 168.

[21]Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting", p. 168.

[22]See John O'Brian's excellent discussion of this matter in "Greenberg's Matisse", in *Reconstructing Modernism*, pp. 144-171.

[23]Greenberg, "Jackson Pollock's New Style", p. 106.

laying of "paint on thick and metallic" -- in his second phase is, in turn, made over into the formal object of his third and new phase. It seems Pollock's new painting had displaced the anxiety or "tautness of feeling" of his earlier figurative works and abstractions, by virtue of an exploration of "depth", the aesthetic correlate of a "kind of relaxation". If we take surfaceness or an intentional concentration on the two dimensional picture plane to be the object of anxiety in post-cubism, "depth" in Pollock's new painting is anxiety formalized. Which is to say that post-cubist art's "tautness of feeling" is placed under scrutiny itself; that post-cubism's anxious concentration on surface as metaphor is made the object of the artistic process. Not through a staging or thematizing of anxiety, but through a shift in the temper of the underlying methodology, whereby anxiety gains the status of a formal object, an objectless(ness) that warranted the title "Feeling is All".

What we need to recognize here is that the material truth of the object discovered by cubism, the medium's flatness, had lost all authority in Greenberg's reading. The object of cubist painting is, in fact, replaced by a formal object that advanced art had necessarily to pursue (now) if it was to remain vital and cogent. A "kind of relaxation" was important because it acknowledged that the anxiety born of intention was itself a constraint; that anxiety was *always-already* a tension in the structure of feeling. In other words, the new work was built on a foundation identical to Greenberg's own critical reappraisal of the post-cubist problematic. That is, Pollock's move away from the more extreme solutions of post-cubism toward a "kind of relaxation", amounted to more than just a disenchantment with, and an antagonism toward a general milieu enamored with the cult of action, it amounted to a fundamental reworking of the object, the figure, or the body, indeed a fundamental reworking of the aesthetic that paradoxically balanced the subjective and objective, the phenomenal and the nuomenal.

It was in speaking to the materialist orientation of the early avant-garde's that Greenberg first introduces the question of Pollock's "kind of relaxation" and the cult of physical action from whence it was derived. As we have already intimated, it was much to Greenberg's chagrin, that an earlier positivism had given way to the subjective and extreme trends of post-cubist painting. If for Greenberg the trajectory of this larger shift was corequisite with a move from materialism toward the cult of physical action, then Pollock's turn was back from the athletic to the aesthetic. Framed by a wide-ranging critique of instrumental reason, Greenberg traces the roots of athleticism back to a more contemplative notion of the physical.

> It is this kind of rationalization that has made life more and more boring and tasteless in our country, particularly since 1940, flattening and emptying all those vessels which are supposed to nourish us daily. Our difficulty in acknowledging and stating the dull horror of our lives has helped prevent the proper and energetic development of American art in the last two decades and more. The emptiness of our American life is not something to be declaimed about as such. What has to be recognized are the circumstances in which such emptiness becomes the common fate. These, endemic to bourgeois industrialism, were already recognized, among painters, by the French impressionists; and if their outlook, as that of most Parisian art up to 1925, was not dark, it was because industrialism -- and history -- still permitted the individual a little confidence in his own private solution, a modicum of space in which personal detachment could survive and work up its own proper interestingness. Standing off in the preserves of Bohemia, the impressionists, fauvists and cubists could still indulge in a contemplation that was as sincere and bold as it was largely unconscious: and the soberness of their art, a soberness indispensable to all the very great painting, from Ajanta to Paris, stemmed from this automatic contemplation.
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> The impressionists and those who came after them in France put themselves in accord with the situation by implicitly accepting its materialism -- the fact, that is, that modern life can be radically confronted, understood and dealt with only in material terms. What matters is not what one believes but what happens to one. From now on you had nothing to go on but your states of mind and your naked sensations, of which structural, but not religious, metaphysical or historico-philosophical, interpretations were alone permissible. It is its materialism, or positivism presented more explicitly than in literature or music, that made painting the most advanced and *hopeful* art in the West between 1860 and 1914.[24]

How ever bad the predicament of culture had become, the lesson to be salvaged from the early avant-garde's was the same: "that is, the fact, that modern life can be radically confronted, understood and dealt with only in material terms. What matters is not what one believe's, but what happens to one. From now on you had nothing to go on but your states of mind and your naked sensations." For all intents and purposes an acceptance of the surrounding culture's "positivism, or

[24]Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture", p. 164.

materialism" hardly seems the foundation of a critical art. Nevertheless what Greenberg is interested in here is the way in which a contemplation on the body "in material terms" (as "states of mind" and "naked sensations") encapsulates, the "positivism, or materialism" of the surrounding culture on its own terms.

The bodily form that Greenberg's aesthetic project was to assume under America's form of corporate capitalism should come as no surprise. It was, remember, a position formulated in opposition to the contemporary avant-garde's attempt to escape from the "truth of feeling". A formalization of the "corporeal", as Greenberg called Pollock's conception of "all-overness" was very much in synch with the American economy. What is important here was not systems of belief, politics, the instrumental, or programmatic nature of consciousness, but rather the structure of feeling, an instantaneous event preceding the ideological; one constituted through a confrontation between a subject and an object. The structural relation between bodies, that which animated "states of mind" and "naked sensations", was an internalized expression of the surrounding culture that could be mined for depth and insight.

Paradoxically then, Pollock's reworking of the physical as "a kind of relaxation" was as much a corporeal or bodily matter as the action or the gesture. What is important to recognize however, is that it explored a form of the physical well beyond any simple representation of the physical. Rather than an investigation into the contingent, it was an exploration aimed at the immediacy and spontaneity of experience, a necessity with depth. What was absolutely crucial, for both "depth" and "true insight" was experience shaped by the present, experience related directly to a larger more ungraspable whole. The irony of Greenberg's materialism was that confronting, understanding, and dealing with modern life in only "material terms" -- in terms of "your states of mind and your naked sensations -- meant pursuing a realm of the physical which only the instantaneous form of the structural interpretation accessed. As a suppressed or forgotten history of consciousness, it was

a kind of movement or trajectory framed by the instantaneous moment of the structural relation. A moment that if made possible by the structural relation was simultaneously blinded by the structural relation. "Materialism or positivism" corresponded to a process of becoming, which preceded the *telos*.

Earlier in 1946 Greenberg had described the question of the "physical" as the great stumbling block of the School of Paris.

> After 1920 the School of Paris's positivism, which had been carried by the essentially optimistic assumption that infinite prospects of "technical" advance lay before it, began to lose faith in itself. At the same time that the suspicion arose that capitalism itself no longer commanded perspectives of infinite expansion, it began to be suspected that "physical" art was likewise faced with limits beyond which it could not go. Mondrian seemed the writing on the wall. But artists like Matisse and Picasso also appear to have felt that unless painting proceeded, at least during our time, in its exploration of the physical, it would stop advancing altogether -- that to turn to the literary would be to retreat and repeat; whether the physical was exhausted or not, there was no ambitious alternative. All this -- the despair of the physical and the doubt whether anything but the physical remained -- is dramatically mirrored in the painting Picasso has done since 1927.
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> Materialism and positivism, when they become pessimistic turn into hedonism, usually. And the path-breakers of the School of Paris, Matisse and Picasso, and Miro too -- no less than the surrealists and the neo-romantics, whose pessimism rests on cynicism rather than on despair-- began during the twenties to emphasize more than ever the pleasure element in their art. The School of Paris no longer sought to *discover* pleasure but to *provide* it. But whereas the surrealists and the neo-romantics conceived of pleasure in terms of sentimental subject matter, Matisse, Picasso, and those who followed them saw it principally in luscious color, rich surfaces, decoratively inflected design.[25]

Rather than formalizing the physical in terms of an instantaneous structural condition, the School of Paris had arrived at what was a merely cynical impasse -- "the despair of the physical and the doubt whether anything but the physical remained". Picasso's work after 1927 was built on a progressively radicalized restatement of this essential tension. Evidently the further the physical fact of surface was pushed, the more extreme, shallow, and empty, the gesture became. For Greenberg, ambitious art was not a question of restaging the failure of the project of modernity more and again, each time in a more intense fashion, rather it was in recognizing that the physical was the limiting condition in the first place. This

[25]Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of School of Paris Painters", (*The Nation*, June 1946), C.G. 2, pp. 88-89.

meant avoiding the trap of a representational, gestural, merely allegorical, "'physical' art".

The only way to ground painting in materialism was by rendering transparent those structural conditions wherein the bodily (as sensation or experience) dwelled. Confronting modern life in "material terms" was not representable as such. Since it was only realizable as a process of becoming, painting had necessarily to formalize the structure of feeling as an instantaneous or synchronic event. The gesture or sign of emotion was nothing better than a contingency of experience. Like consciousness it was little better than the product of mental gymnastics. A practice founded on a faith in the infinitely colonizable grasp of reason was no better than one which spectacularized the physical act. It was but an allegorical representation, a hollow entity without depth.

A formalization of the physical involved an "embodying" of emotion in terms of the language of painting. It meant rendering the instantaneous structural conditions that were constitutive of the subject as an analog of the integrity completeness, or homogeneity of surface. What Greenberg had called "all-overness" was precisely this, a "dissolving" of emotion into the "abstract elements of style".[26] Yet if in the abstractions emotion was embodied as a "plastic unity", the move to formalize the physical was still being undercut by cubism's recourse to intentionality. The "totality, integrity, economy, and indivisibility" of surface in the abstractions was founded upon a strident and intentional negation of the gestalt for the meta-historical. In contrast the new paintings formalized the meta-historical as a function of "a kind of relaxation". A "tautness of feeling" (an anxiety), which was the structural precondition of the subjects entrance into the world, "relat(ed) itself to the true insights of its time". By formalizing the structural relation constitutive of the subject in terms of the absolute limits placed on the physical act of painting, Greenberg felt "sensations the irreducible elements of experience" were manifest.

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[26]Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of the Jane Street Group and Rufino Tamayo", C. G. 2, p. 133,

With the advent of post-war industrialism the making of meaning itself had become entirely a function of those external laws driving the consumer economy. Those forces driving American capitalism had been themselves internalized and made a constitutive aspect of subjectivity. Because the subject, was always the product of a structural relation in the present, with the world, the object, or phenomenon, consciousness was *always-already* a contingency of the surrounding culture -- a *telos* -- and thus empty. The absolute pessimism of Greenberg's position should be duly noted. Particularly in regard to affinities with the structuralist perspective offered up by interpersonal psychiatry. The structural tension which frames the interpersonal relation -- that which is animated by a predetermined circuitry or patterning of experiencing, that which was a function of anxiety -- was itself an encapsulation of the unfailing processes of acculturation. Greenberg's materialism "of which structural ... interpretations were alone permissible" held out little therapeutic hope. The structural relation upon which subjectivity rested was conceived of as an immutable precondition of character. For Greenberg there was absolutely no escaping the ideological, because the ideological was constitutive of the very processes through which the conscious subject came into being.

Capturing the symbolic plenitude of the body was a possibility under corporate capitalism only by virtue of a dialectical slight of hand that incorporated the corporeal. By turning reason back upon itself, back from its *telos*, back upon the body or process through which it came into being aesthetic detachment was again possible. Ultimately what is at stake here is the high jacking of an external law, that is mirrored in the very depths of ones immediate experience or sense of the world, for the purpose of establishing an autonomy from the world. The subject's blind making of meaning that is itself beholden to the intractable laws governing the surrounding culture are appropriated in order to give what can only be a hollow contingency -- a death mask, a gesture, a thought -- the thickness, dynamism, and necessity of a symbolic order. "What is at stake" Terry Eagleton notes,

> is nothing less than the production of a entirely new kind of human subject -- one which, like the work of art itself, discovers the law in the depths of its own free identity, rather than some oppressive external power. The liberated subject is the one who has appropriated the law as the very principle of its own autonomy, broken the forbidding tablets of stone on which that law was originally inscribed in order to rewrite it on the heart of flesh. To consent to the law is thus to consent to one's own inward being. "The heart", writes Rousseau in Emile, "only receives laws from itself; by wanting to enchain it one releases it; one enchains it by leaving it free"... Rousseau speaks of the most important form of law as one "which is not graven on tablets of marble or brass, but on the hearts of citizens. This forms the real constitution of the State, takes on every day new powers, when other laws decay or die out, restores them or takes their place, keeps a people in the ways it was meant to go, and insensibly replaces authority by the force of habit ... The ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order, in contrast to the coercive apparatus of absolutism, will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections. And this is equivalent to saying that power in such an order has become aestheticized."[27]

Sure, things had gone from bad to worse, but out of the despairing depths of the most pessimistic appraisal of American culture during the Cold War, Greenberg the Kantian, had formulated a visionary project for universal emancipation. For Greenberg the bond that promised emancipation -- the bond that unites men in Nietzsche's phrase -- was itself the root cause of subjugation and repression. "At the very root of social relations lies the aesthetic, source of all human bonding."[28] As a teleological process, a movement of becoming, the aesthetic was a vection between polarities: a trajectory between matter and meaning, the material and immaterial, "sensations the irreducible elements of experience" and thoughts, beliefs, or ideas. That which made Pollock's new painting the most advanced and hopeful art at mid-century, that which "made painting the most advanced and *hopeful* art in the West between 1860 and 1914", its materialism, or positivism -- was an energetic and physical movement of becoming, formalized as a sobriety or "a kind of relaxation".

In a sense "Feeling is All" is made up of nothing more than a long list of avant-garde burnouts no longer able to cut the muster. Short-lived and war-weary this general grab bag of post-cubist painters had spent too many years trying to hard

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[27]Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 21.
[28]Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 24.

to make surface a metaphor of depth. For Greenberg, a "tautness of feeling" was nothing more than a useless exertion of energy. There is the later work of Picasso and Braque, which suffers from a "fatigue" that emerges from continually distrusting their emotions, their "falling off" being a measure of a stress or "strain" that can be traced to a long dishonesty with the self. The problem of the early Matisse, who was "plagued by hesitations ... as much because he was afraid to traduce his feelings as because of lack of confidence". There is the "tautness that cannot be sustained" in the painting of Hans Hoffman, who "appears to be unable to break through to those riches -- that is the truth inside himself -- except in convulsive moments. He makes a method of convulsiveness and, of course, it does not work as a method".[29] Finally there is the "quintessential tautness" of Franz Kline's "large canvas', with their blurtings of black calligraphy on white and gray grounds".[30] Kline's is a tautness, we can assume, that will similarly take its toll, simply by virtue of its unstable, convulsive, "blurting", nature.

The exception to Greenberg's fable of entropy and the avant-garde is Matisse. Apparently the artist who "wanted his art to be an armchair for the tired businessman" was somehow avoiding a relaxation contingent upon fatigue, or caused by exhaustion.[31] Matisse's "kind of relaxation" was somehow sustaining a sort of "radical nerve", because it was intentionally meant for the "tired businessman".[32] Reflecting on a retrospective in Philadelphia Greenberg writes, "Matisse had not relaxed so much during the twenties after all, even though he did go back to Chardin, Manet, the Impressionist still-life of the 1870s, and a firm modeling of the figure. He may have turned off the highway leading to abstract art

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[29]Greenberg, "Feeling is All", p. 103.
[30]Greenberg, "Feeling is All", p. 104.
[31]Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of the Jane Street Group and Rufino Tamayo", (*The Nation*, 8 March 1947), C.G. 2, p.134
[32]John O'Brian has begun to answer this question in terms of the "pastoral tradition". See "Greenberg's Matisse", pp. 149-150.

and ceased from spectacular adventuring, but it was not altogether the *detente* one used to think."[33]

In the case of Matisse, the question of "relaxation" is necessarily approached through a double perspective: on the one hand accounting for the "unprecedented success of his efforts to assimilate decoration to the purposes of the easel picture", and on the other hand separating this out from the concerns of "something like decorativeness (that) seemed to have an adulterating effect on his art during the 1930s and a large part of the 1940s".[34] If in the former case we have a relaxation that is intentional, for "by instinct" and "as borne out by his sculpture" Matisse is not a decorator, then in the latter instance we are dealing with a "relaxation" that is contingent on "fatigue". For our purposes the decorative as an intentional relaxation is most important. An intentional recourse to the decorative was a relaxation distinct from that fatigue "from which Picasso and Braque" suffered. Not surprisingly it was the equivalent of Pollock's "kind of relaxation". Which is to say, that an intentional recourse to the decorative, is a kind of "relaxation" that is not simply a function of "the strain of contemporary ambition", but rather is integral to a new and bold tactic that is less of a *detente* than one would think. In a painting like *Interieur a Nice, la sieste,* 1922 (Figure 5) Matisse's form of the decorative embodies a kind of frank and forthright engagement with the philistine tastes of the *parvenue.* In contrast to the more distinguished and moneyed inhabitants of the *Cote d'Azur,* more attune to the intricacies of the "fashionable season" this new clientele was tasteless.

As an implicit rejection of the strain, shock value, high-mindedness, "accomplishedness, facility, or taste" of post-cubist painting, the decorative was a courting of middlebrow taste. Greenberg's comments, in the same article, on Barnett Newman's paintings from his 1951 show at the Betty Parsons Gallery are revealing. Greenberg loves them all. Precisely because "there is no shock value

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[33]Greenberg "Feeling is All", p. 100.
[34]Greenberg, "Feeling is All" p. 100.

involved";[35] because they are all so decorative. Because "the literary shock effects that have by now become unspeakably stale" were complicit in a certain straining toward a high ended and optimal limit of taste, the avant-garde's effrontery to bourgeois taste is in the instance of a painting like *The Way I*, (1951) (Figure 6), replaced by an acceptance of its more base, pessimal, or mundane limit. If one is at all tempted to yawn in face of *The Way I*, one can be sure that it is partly what Greenberg liked about Newman's new work. The bland, almost functional design quality of the painting is read as an intentional move to accommodate a leveled set of tastes; in fact the philistine tastes of the corporate world itself. Newman's paintings constitute, he writes, "the first kind of painting I have seen that accommodates itself stylistically to the demands of modern interior architecture for flat, clear surfaces and strictly parallel divisions."[36] Now that's a change of pace! How far we have come, indeed, from the author of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", where the flight of the avant-garde toward "new experiences" and "unknown territory", by continually forcing taste, was the only thing keeping it sacred from an incessant colonizing by the ersatz.

Matisse's form of armchair adventuring, Newman's bow to a corporate style, like Pollock's "kind of relaxation", was in opposition to the straining for feeling one sees in post-cubist painting. It was founded upon a new conceptualization of taste. Not taste of the "high falutin" variety that Greenberg's criticism is continually mistaken for either. But taste at its abysmal, most pessimal limit, one approaching and courting the level of a do-it-yourself-middle-class culture. To understand the fuller implications of Greenberg's critical appraisal of the decorative and its relation to a "kind of relaxation" we need to place it in the context of the those contemporary dialogues on therapeutic culture and the suburban taste group we discussed in chapter two. For if in David Riesman's model, a gourmet-one-ups-man-ship was negotiating the problem of conformity in a manner somewhat akin to avant-garde

[35]Greenberg, "Feeling is All", p. 104.
[36]Greenberg, "Feeling is All", p. 104.

brinkmanship, any such developmental capacity for actually heightening or elevating one's taste was rejected by Greenberg. The decorative was an acknowledgment that taste was an immutable material determination; a determination dictated by the conditions of the surrounding culture.

The decorative in Terry Eagleton's words went to the "very root of social relations". It encapsulated "the aesthetic, source of all human bonding". From Greenberg's perspective, it was the lowest common denominator in America's culture of conformity. If the decorative seems antithetical to the extreme solutions explored by avant-gardism, it should. Founded upon humility, piety, simple habits and affections it was in stark contrast to the post-cubist project. If a "tautness of feeling" in post-cubist painting was achieved through a spectacularization of anxiety, that same "tightness desired of modern composition" was achieved by Matisse through routine, permanence, and pattern, i.e., a "kind of relaxation". "He the great exponent of pure color as the means to form, showed what still could be achieved by modeling with dark and light, and how this modeling could contribute to the tightness desired of modern composition".[37] The connection between an intentional recourse to the value contrast, and the decorative is equally underscored in a brief note in *Harpers Bazaar* published by Greenberg the same month as "Feeling is All".

> Line and the contrast of dark and light became the essential factors for Pollock in his second phase. Now he has them carry the picture without the aid of color and makes their interplay clearer and more graphic. The more explicit structure of the new work reveals much that was implicit in the preceding phase and should convince anyone that this artist is much more than a grandiose decorator.[38]

Pollock, like Matisse of the twenties, used the value contrast against its own traditional function, not as a "convincing illusion of depth and volume", as in cubism's "conservative" bid to save the sculptural from impressionism, but as a

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[37]Greenberg, ibid, p. 100.

[38]Greenberg, "Jackson Pollock's New Style", January, 1951, *Harpers Bazaar*, C.G. v. 3, p. 109.

function of that depth which infers feeling. In effect the value contrast no longer functioned as a relation between objects in the world, but in terms of the way it defined surface totality and thus that tension which was a structure of feeling. The force of Pollock's decorativeness was thus directed against illusionism and mimeticism as the "chief agent" of pictorial art's "structure and unity".[39] What mattered for both it seems was the structure of feeling, an instantaneous phenomenon that was graspable only as a function of totality or integrity of surface.

Having painting hinge on the way dark and light made surface was a deeply pessimistic turn. It was a recognition that consciousness itself was always-already a contingency of the present, the surrounding culture, or an extrinsic law. Having painting hinge on the way dark and light made surface was a recognition that even spontaneous and immediate experience was predicted and contingent. It was an acknowledgment that painting was *always-already* a commodity, always a function of the economy, always destined for the pages of *Vogue* magazine. Pollock's new painting no longer operated under the delusion that taste could be pushed or forced beyond its inert material level by prioritizing a high pitch aesthetic and over-wrought working method. His new painting from 1951, was a realization that the "gothic" and extreme measures, the vicious strokes and slashes of his earlier abstractions, could not break through any barriers of taste; could not escape the conditions of its own culture. "A kind of relaxation" refigured Greenberg's own despairing form of pessimism, that the best painting could now manage, was only to mirror the conditions of its own constitution.

Given these kind of coordinates Greenberg's formal characterizations become clear. If a "tautness of feeling" was based in the development of an analogical correspondence between the "experience of nature" and the medium's surface or flatness, then a "kind of relaxation" carried all the implications of an altogether different view of the world where analogy or metaphor no longer functioned. It

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[39]Greenberg, ibid, p. 227.

was a view of the world where surface and depth coincided at a kind of interface, where something deep, which is often heavy or high-minded, might just as easily be something decorative, which is always light and superficial. This liminal zone possessed of a "transparency of feeling", represented a pessimal limit of taste that embodied the vulgar and philistine truth of contemporary experience.

For Greenberg the decorative had less to do with a "loss of nerve" in the radical project of an avant-garde than the sign of a return to an earlier "nerve" that carried the burden of a set of assumptions upon which an entirely more circumspect consideration of arts relation to the surrounding culture rested. If Pollock's "kind of relaxation" pointed to the failure of a dissident form of avant-gardism that privileged a kind of intentionality, a "kind of relaxation" was founded in the realization that feeling was itself unrepresentable, that the parameters of one's own practice were in fact constraints, and could only prove inadequate to the job of rendering feeling in material terms. Straining or pushing ones taste was useless. What was required for the "transparency of feeling" rather, was relaxation.

What we continually need to keep in mind is the absolutely critical nature that a pessimal limit of taste had come to occupy under the new form of postwar industrialism. As in Greenberg's reading of Kafka's materialism, "new experiences" and "unknown territory" could (now) only be salvaged through a kind of *rapprochement* with the mundane and banal of the everyday. As with Greenberg's great unrealized, utopian book project --"A Home-Grown Aesthetics" -- the truth of ones feeling could never be forced beyond a certain immutable and philistine limit.[40] This intentional concentration on the pessimal limits of taste, rather than the optimal limits, where the sensory and semantic properties of language supposedly coincided, was a problematization of subject/object dialectics. It was an acknowledgment of the absolute constraints placed on making meaning within any

[40]Clement Greenberg Interview with Shep Steiner. Feb. 1994.

cultural predicament. It mapped out the paradoxical and contradictory nature of Greenberg's aesthetic.

Pollock's "kind of relaxation", as much as Newman's courting of "modern interior architecture", was a formalization of failure, and because of, not in spite of this, a moment of a sufficiently self-reflexive nature to herald the new.[41] The sobering tone of Pollock's new work carried an utterly positive valence in Greenberg's project for art at mid-century. By courting rather than fleeing the pessimal limits of "the decorative", where feeling was rendered transparent, Pollock was mining the nature of consciousness for its own history, providing a sort of framing apparatus or self-reflexive questioning that presumed feeling, pure sensations, or the "irreducible elements of experience" as the only 'outside' or 'before' in the context of a surrounding culture. One need only recall Greenberg's remarks on the relative security afforded a "crabbed and half-baked" philistine taste, as opposed to the displaced and proxied operations performed upon experience by "objective" reason" -- "For how intense by comparison is the comfort of believing what we feel and how richer seeming".[42]

The resonance which "a kind of relaxation" held for both Greenberg and Pollock in terms of the history of painting is one thing. The intentions behind and specific understandings brought to bear on the question of relaxation is quite another. Certainly one finds "a kind of relaxation" operating as a crucial nexus in both cases, yet subtle differences in perspective and emphasis make for a vastly different picture of why "a kind of relaxation" was an issue at all. Greenberg's concern and concentration on questions surrounding the universality of taste is one instance of such a discrepancy. Pollock's own main concerns are wrapped up in a slightly different, even cosmic, conception of what constituted universality. What is common to both by 1951 nonetheless, is a convergence of sorts around the

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[41]Greenberg, ibid, p. 102.
[42]Greenberg, "Religion and the Intellectuals", ibid, p. 40.

structuralist approach of interpersonal psychiatry. Of main interest to us now is the question of how Pollock's early acquaintance with Jungian psychoanalysis was transformed over time into something approximating Greenberg's own more delimited concerns for depth and feeling.

Michael Leja's *Reframing Abstract Expressionism* offers a useful departure in this sense. He has characterized Pollock's early shift toward abstraction in terms of a gravitation away from a Jungian model of the unconscious, toward one loosely associated with a vitalist or pan-energistic tradition. He writes:

> One competing model was particularly compelling, apparently: a model related to the energic, vitalist paradigm of Fergusson. In Pollock's hands, its metaphors were principally electrodynamic, hydraulic, and energic, envisioning mental processes as involving the circulation and distribution of energy flows. While it is vaguely discernible in Pollock's 1943 letter to Sweeney, and in several early paintings ... it is perhaps clearest around 1948-50, when Pollock began to describe the "inner world" expressed in his painting as a realm of energy and motion... Pollock's conjoining of energy and motion with an inner world and memories suggests that his idea of the unconscious was at this time closer to some dynamic model than to the eerie realm of mysterious figures and elusive symbols.[43]

Leja's comments on Pollock's shift are to the point. They attempt to map a changing conception of the unconscious on to what are the generally accepted and clearly defined phases of Pollock's style. His argument seems all the more convincing given the thorough documentation and investigation into Pollock's interest in Jungianism during the 1940s, his associations with The Analytical Psychology Club of New York, and finally what seems an increasing engagement with what Leja calls "Modern-Man" discourse. Still, that Pollock's enthusiasm for Jugianism would waine in 1947, is somewhat of a strange conclusion to draw from a painter who in 1956 told an interviewer "I've been a Jungian for a long time".[44] Still more so if one accepts Greenberg's argument (as I do) for a certain continuity throughout Pollock's career; a continuity focused on a process of formalization and concerns surrounding the body.

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[43]Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, p. 197.
[44]Selden Rodman, *Conversations With Artists*, (New York, Devin-Adair Company, 1957)p. 82.

If at one time Pollock was interested and engaged in Jungian understandings why, in 1946 and 1947, one needs to ask, would he have thrown it all to the wind, suddenly to stake everything on what was obviously an ersatz version of the former's critique? Why would Pollock turn to a dynamic model of the unconscious and forgo his previous affinities? Was indeed a dynamic model of the unconscious entirely antithetical to his earlier interest in Jungianism? Perhaps a more pertinent question asked of Pollock's shift and the archival material at hand, would thus be, how Pollock's thinking about painting, was changing and refining the way he was thinking about a Jungian unconscious, rather than the other way around as in Leja's argument? The fact is that Pollock was first and foremost a painter; that his painting even before his shift to abstraction in 1946 or 1947 was about figuration as much as a "thick and fuliginous flatness". Moreover, Pollock's paintings from 1947-1950 were about being abstract; about negating cubism's figurative imperative through "all-overness". In sum, if the abstractions were about the immediate impact of the decorative, how was the fact of a concentration on surface -- that integrity and totality which Pollock seems to have wanted to build into surface -- informing his reading of the unconscious.

As far as Pollock's painting goes, I think Greenberg's sense of the problem is correct. A lot hinges on the way Pollock negotiated the question of cubism's reliance on the object, the way surface functioned as an analogy or metaphor of experience. Pollock's method in the abstractions was founded upon the fact of negation, the intentional negation of the object or figure for the material object as surface. A large part of the anxiousness in Pollock's abstractions from 1947-1950 is a contingency of precisely this. That is, if illusionism and mimeticism were expurgated from Pollock's practice, it was intentionally expurgated, as a function of negating the object or figure. The logic involved in Pollock's procedure was fairly simple. It is based on that well known dialectic between the unconscious and conscious, between civilization and repression that Rosalind Krauss, Leja and others have noted is a

founding dynamic in Pollock's development ... a founding dynamic if and "when you're painting out of your unconscious".[45]

A background in Freud is helpful here. In a footnote to *Civilization and its Discontents* he had mapped both phylogenetic and ontogenetic evolution in terms of the progressive development of gestalt perception.[46] Developmental progression, whatever kind, was inversely proportional to repression. In Freud's account the development toward mature gestalt perception paralleled an increase in repression.[47] As a function of vision, one of two distance senses (the other being hearing), the gestalt function represented the crucial step in the ontogenetic progress of the infant's maturation from the proximity senses of smell, taste, and touch. In Freud's view the evolution from nursling infant toward self-presence and erect posture, was a process homologous to the development of vision as the predominant sense. The emergence of the gestalt function paralleled the developing infant's increasing notion of self. The complexification of Gestalt perception evolved in homology to that of the ego; a development and complexification, of what Freud had elsewhere called the system Pcpt. Cs (perception consciousness).[48]

It is important to note the correlation between perception and consciousness which Freud's understanding of the gestalt function describes. As a basic premise of the psychoanalytic method, it underwrites both Pollock's concerns and I believe much of Greenberg's own aesthetic theory. Given the antipathy between consciousness and experience, perception and vision was itself complicit in the

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[45]Jackson Pollock, in Selden Rodman, *Conversations With Artists*, (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1957), p. 82.

[46]Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents", (1930), V. XXI, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Trans. J. Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 99-100.The movement toward the distanced spatial orientation of erect posture was homologous to the processes of modernity, a developmental progression complicit in mature gestalt perception.

[47]See Leo Bersani's excellent discussion of this text. Leo Bersani, "Theory and Violence", *The Freudian Body*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 7-27; And Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization.*

[48]Sigmund Freud, "A Note on the Mystic Writing Pad" (1924), in V. XIX,*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, pp. 227-232.

denigration of depth or feeling. The kind of perceptual tools and understandings gestalt psychology brought to the investigation of consciousness, revised and complexified, if only through opposition, Pollock's entrance to the question of the unconscious. In effect coming into being was recognized as a structural event which prohibited the reconciliation of the Freudian dialectic. The dyadic structure which gestalt psychology hinged upon was uniquely suited to fit the framework of an art founded on feeling or experience. "We're all of us influenced by Freud, I guess".[49]

In the United States, gestalt psychology had a distinctly clinical orientation. It was like psychoanalysis in general, greatly informed by the predominance of interpersonal psychiatry, what Henri Ellenberger has more generally described as dynamic psychiatry.[50] In a study published in 1932 by Lauretta Bender, which is typical of research trends in American gestalt psychology, an apparatus for experiencing, one preexisting the fully functional operation of gestalt perception, is described in terms of a corporeal or bodily movement. In Bender's article, the sidewalk chalk drawings of children that "dot the East Side of New York" become a site for the expression of a somatic mode of experiencing. With "absolute spontaneity", drawing "for the fun of the thing and with apparently no other goal in view than the immediate joy of activity", a "pure motor pleasure", the children's endless scribbles represent an as yet evolved capacity to resolve dynamic drives through the operation of a Freudian notion of repression.[51] The affinities with Pollock's practice are provocative.

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[49]Rodman, *Conversations With Artists*, p. 82.

[50]Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

[51]What is important here is the fact that while there are no deep connections between Bender and Pollock, her understanding is representative of a more general psychoanalatically oriented model. Bender, "Gestalt Principles in the Sidewalk Drawings and Games of Children", (*Journal of Genetic Psychology*, Vol. XLI, 1932), pp. 198-199.

> The child is usually either sitting or kneeling on the ground on which he is drawing, or leaning over from a standing position, or even precariously balancing himself on roller skates and drawing with large arm sweeps. . . Perhaps the most important differences (from paper-and-pencil methods) are dependent upon the unlimited amount of space. A child with plenty of chalk, with pavement all about him, with plenty of time, and totally unconscious of any supervision, rarely draws a completely isolated figure. He draws and draws and scribbles all over the place, delighted when his scribbles display some unexpected form; experimenting with this; he modifies it first this way and then that by some simple variation as enlarging a loop or extending a line, often leaving some fragment of a design incomplete in order to try a new variation. He may for some reason leave this place and at some subsequent time take up the game again in some new area.[52]

The psychosomatic motor response that Bender localizes is a mode of experiencing, peculiar to the infant, though still formative in the child or adult. Apparently the infant's experiential mode, while still visually based, was organized around a locus of determinants somewhat distinct from the purely optical processes of gestalt perception. For Bender this corporeal apparatus was central to a mode of experiencing that pre-exists and underwrites the development of mature gestalt perception. The "sweeping arm movements" or "vortical and whirling motor activity", characteristic of the child's early attempts at representation, was rooted in the operations of this somatic based apparatus.

The implications with regard to Pollock's abstractions are, I think, clear. Pollock's heightened dependency on the body aligned itself in a very succinct way with a kind of somatic muscular memory which shared important affinities with an infantile, prehensile, or empathic mode of communication. As an intentional work against the object or figure, Pollock's "draw(ing) and draw(ing) and scribbl(ing) *all over* the place", was part of an attempt to negate gestalt oriented perception. The abstractions involved a negation of consciousness to a before; a negation of gestalt process to some conception of otherness which must have amounted in his mind to a new accord struck with the corporeal, somatic, and bodily dynamic of an infantile mode of experiencing. The peculiarities of his new technique for painting seem to confirm this. The new technique of dripping, pouring and throwing paint onto a

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[52]Bender, "Gestalt Principles in the Sidewalk Drawings and Games of Children", pp. 198-199.

canvas lying horizontally undermined all the "accomplishedness, facility, or taste" that Pollock had accrued over the years as a painter. By negating the fact of distance (Pollock's "being in the painting"), the fact of verticality (his recourse to painting on the horizontal plane), and finally the apparently indispensable need of actually touching the canvas with brush or stick, Pollock was purposely disabling or debilitating gestalt oriented faculties.

What is most important to note in all this is that Pollock accessed this infantile mode of experiencing through and against the set of protocols that defined the gestalt process. That is, Pollock's abstractions from 1947-1950 were founded on a willing regression. Much in the way that gestalt psychology was "running fullback for Freud's fancy speculative passing plays",[53] in Rosalind Krauss' words, an understanding of gestalt process was providing a kind of sounding board which revised and complexified Pollock's own incursions into the problem of the unconscious. Certainly in the context of a discussion surrounding gestalt psychology such as this one above, the question of Pollock's continuing interest in Jung seems rather far removed. Yet, depth psychology's mapping of the unconscious was in no way mutually exclusive to a knowledge of gestalt psychology. In respect to both Jung and Freud's own specific interests in depth psychology, the gestalt problematic mapped out the surface psychology of perceptual and conscious processes. Jung and Freud -- the two figures which Pollock most consistently refers to -- accorded it a privileged position. I would argue in fact that Pollock's formalization of the body as surface, was complicit in a move to access feeling as an instantaneous structure, accompanied a deeper and more complex understanding of Jung's mapping of the unconscious.

Backing up the speculative thrust of depth psychology was only one of the guises that gestalt oriented investigation had taken on in the United States in the

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[53]Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 247

1940s and 1950s. Gestalt psychology and theory was the backbone of any and all respectable investigations into the human condition. Simply put, it was the surface psychology *par excellence.* Gestalt theories' centrality and legitimating function within other psychological understandings in circulation cannot be underestimated. By the 1950s psychoanalysis, social psychology, Rorschach psychodiagnostics, and interpersonal psychiatry all accorded it pride of place. It was, after all, as scientific as the empirical study of man could ever get. It mapped and determined consciousness, using the most up-to-date findings in the physical sciences.

A highly interdisciplinary field, gestalt psychology hinged mainly on physics. Evidently the relation between classical laws of electrodynamics and fluid mechanics on the one hand -- a modeling concerned with two-dimensional surfaces or planes -- and deeper more fundamental laws of nature on the other hand, proved an especially rich framework for understanding the tensions between a surface psychology and a depth psychology. Within the parameters of gestalt theory surface related directly to the profounder mysteries or depths of the physical universe. Linking the conditions of consciousness to such universal or physical givens, during a moment in history that was fondly dubbed the atomic age and which gave birth to the space age, was a large part of the appeal of gestalt theory. Equipped with all the grand claims of theoretical physics, it was by mid-century enjoying a tremendous prestige and popularity. After all, if anyone was going to unlock the secrets of the universe, the fundamental laws of nature, much less the mysteries of consciousness one would think it was going to be the likes of a Niels Bohr, a Robert Oppenheimer, a Max Plank, a Max Wertheimer, or an Albert Einstein.

According to the general grouping of discourses related to gestalt theory -- and here I refer mainly to the work of Max Wertheimer, Max Born, and Wolfgang Kohler[54] -- the processing of visual stimuli was itself the constitutive moment of

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[54]As a general introduction to this literature see Wolfgang Kohler's, *Gestalt Psychology: An Introduction to New Concepts in Modern Psychology,* (New York: Mentor, 1947); Max Wertheimer, *Productive Thinking,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949); Max Born, *Natural Philosophy of Cause and Chance,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); Lauretta Bender, A Visual Motor Gestalt Test and Its

consciousness. That is, consciousness was a physically determined, spatially and organizationally contingent function, a function ultimately dependent on physical laws. Consciousness was a structural phenomenon, constituted through the relation between subject and object. In other words, gestalt psychology focused in on, consciousness as the product of an instantaneous structural relation. The gestalt function was constitutive. Obviously enough its structural mapping of the subject was easily assimilated within the framework of Greenberg's own Kantianism and the investigations into character structure and personality pursued by the Washington School of Psychiatry.

What is more important to note in this respect however, is that the kind of analogy being posited between surface function and depth was as easily absorbed into the general framework of a Jungian cosmology. The tension between Jung's notion of the "archetype" as "cosmic unconscious" on the one hand, and consciousness on the other hand was at the core of Jungian theory. Certainly this tension would have been recognized at The Analytical Psychology Club of New York. Jung's paper "On the Nature of the Psyche" which was his first attempt to incorporate Quantum Theory's notion of "complementarity" into the structural tension which defined the psyche, was published by the Club in 1943. The affinities between physics and psychology, each formulated in terms of the tension between surface and depth, would not have been lost on club members weaned in an atmosphere generally defined by dynamic psychiatry either. In a footnote to "On the Nature of the Psyche" Jung makes the connection explicit:

> It may interest the reader to hear the opinion of a physicist on this point. Professor Pauli, who was good enough to glance through the MS. of this supplement, writes: "As a matter of fact the physicist would expect a psychological correspondence at this point, because the epistemological situation with regard to the concepts 'conscious' and 'unconscious' seems to offer a pretty close analogy to the undermentioned "complementarity" situation in physics. On the one hand the unconscious can only be inferred indirectly from its (organizing) effects on conscious contents. On the other hand every "observation of the unconscious", i.e., every

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Clinical Use, (New York: The American Orthopsychiatric Association, 1938); Willis D. Ellis, ed. *A Source Book of Gestalt Psychology*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1938); Mary Henle, ed. *Documents of Gestalt Psychology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

> conscious realization of unconscious contents, has an uncontrollable reactive effect on these same contents (which as we know precludes in principle the possibility of 'exhausting' the unconscious by making it conscious). Thus the physicist will conclude per analogium that this uncontrollable reactive effect of the observing subject on the unconscious limits the objective character of the latters reality and lends it at the same time a certain subjectivity.[55]

Wolfgang Pauli should be familiar to those aquatinted with the history and development of Quantum mechanics. He and Werner Heisenberg were intimates of Niels Bohr in Copenhagen at the Bohr Institute for Atomic Physics. In the 1930s, the Bohr Institute was a kind of think tank or who's who of atomic physics. Which is, I think, to suggest that Jung's friendship and collaborations with Pauli put him in the know. Or at least put him astride Quantum Theory as seen by The Copenhagen School. Jung's interest in Quantum Theory was more than likely kindled by the fantastic insights gestalt psychology had achieved through its marriage with physics. This is especially true with regard to insights gained into direct experience, i.e., insight gained into obfuscating processes, between a subject and an object, that defined the conditions or limits of any physical system.[56]

For both Jung and Pauli consciousness existed in a "synchronistic" relation to that of the physical universe. The concept of synchronicity was Jung's attempt to assimilate the paradox at the heart of Quantum Mechanics, the theory of complementarity, into a graspable model of the psyche. It was a principle that accounted for "the simultaneous occurrence of two meaningfully but not causally

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[55] Jung, "On the Nature of the Psyche", in *C. G. Jung, The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*, ed. V. Staub de Laszlo (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 99. This edition was first published in 1943 by The Analytical Psychology Club of New York City. In "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle" Jung writes: "As I was able, thanks to the freindly interest which Professor Pauli, evinced in my work to discuss these questions of principle with a professional physicist who could at the same time appreciate my psychological arguments I am in a position to put forward a suggestion that takes modern physics into account." Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle", in (*The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, v. 8, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series), p. 514. Pauli would return the intellectual debt to Jung on two ocassions: Wolfgang Pauli, "Ideas of the Unconscious from the Standpoint of Natural Science and Epistemology", (*Dialectica*, Dec. 1954), pp. 149-164; and "The Influence of Archetypal Ideas on the Scientific Theories of Kepler" (1952), pp. 219-280, in *Wolfgang Pauli: Writings on Physics and Philosophy*, eds. C.P. Enz and K. von Meyenn, trans. R. Schlapp, (New York: Springer Verlag, 1994).

[56] Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology*, p. 21.

connected events".[57] For Jung the "terms of a meaningful coincidence were connected by simultaneity and meaning."[58] Synchronicity was at the core of "an acausal connecting principle". It accounted for "the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels, to the momentary subjective state".[59]

If it is at all doubtful or debatable that Bohr's theory of complementarity and Jung's version of synchronicity both hinge on the forces of an absurdist universe or indeed that the universe is absurd, addressing the founding paradox of Quantum mechanics here in an essay on Clement Greenberg and Jackson Pollock would seem to refute and disprove any and all detractors. Nevertheless, what I am trying to do here, is to establish a chain of possible connections and associations that painting, specifically abstract painting might have held for Pollock in the late 1940s and early 1950s. By 1946 or 1947 it seems that physics was potentially operating as a kind of locus for Pollock's interest in the unconscious. Coincidence has no place in such a formulation. That cubism's problem of the object had any relation, even an inverse one to gestalt psychology; that depth could only be a function of plumbing feeling; that the nature of direct experience was the limiting condition of a physical system; that a theory of perception based in experience related in turn to Jung's own attempts at depth psychology, which in turn were linked with pressing contemporary debates on physics, is a profoundly historical problematic.

The kind of questions about the unconscious that Pollock seems to have turned toward in 1947, were questions probing a concern with the instantaneous structural relation through which the subject came into being. For Pollock this seems to have hinged on "an acausal connecting principle". A principle that if antithetical to Greenberg's own interests, ultimately provided a kind of theoretical legitimation for directing Pollock's art toward the formal quality of "all-overness".

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[57]Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Factor", pp. 436.
[58]Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Factor", p. 485.
[59]Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Factor", p. 444.

Rather than simply turning his back on Jung for a dynamic model of the unconscious, it seems Pollock's interest in Jung shifted from a delimited focus on the archetype and symbolization to an interest in the dynamic between the unconscious and the conscious which was still very much a Jungian concern. A concern by 1941 that was conceptualized in terms of a "pretty close analogy to the .... complementarity situation in physics".

The argument here is simple. Pollock's abstractions were conceived of in terms of a depth which hinged on an a-casual construction of surface effects. This is of course not that startling an argument in view of the best criticism on Pollock's abstractions, Greenberg's own commentary which argues for an analogic correspondence between surface and depth. My aim here is to unravel Pollock's understanding of metaphoricity in terms of a metonymic fabric of association, one that places Pollock's own world of association within a framework provided by the former reading. For Pollock, surface was meant to stand in for and crystallize profounder physical forces governing the universe. How else was one to paint the experience of the atomic age. That Pollock himself believed his paintings were tackling these, the very biggest issues of the modern period, is apparently confirmed by some of the titles given to the early abstractions. Forget Greenberg's all too tedious history of art, the overly weighty materialism of Clark's focus on practice, Fried's celebration of "opticality", or Leja's strained argument for *film noir*, though these are all important determinations in Pollock's abstractions. What one needs to isolate is the absolute exhilaration and confidence of a painter who has realized that the circumscribed bounds of the history of art, the practice of painting, the limitations of perception and consciousness, were actually connected to deep truths governing the universe. Pollock's abstractions are the renaissance of science fiction. It is Pollock increasing, multiplying, and exponentially expanding meaning from the more circumscribed bounds of a Jungian inspired work like *Moon Woman* to the profounder cosmological implications of what exactly constituted the infinite.

There is *Reflection of the Big Dipper* (1947), *Phosphorescence* (1947), *Shooting Star* (1947), *Comet* (1947), and *Galaxy* (1947).

The kind of physics Pollock was interested in, described the central mysteries of the universe as one in the same as those governing the subjective nature of gestalt perception. It was a physics which focused on the constitutive moment of consciousness as a process or movement of becoming that shared in certain large if unknown laws governing nature. For Pollock, the aesthetic was conceived of in terms of physics, because physics offered up the most powerful solution to what seemed the fundamental dilemma of painting if and "when you're painting out of your unconscious". Commenting on an early transitional work, Serge Guilbaut ventures near the heart of the matter.

> ...In *Sounds in the Grass: Shimmering Substance,* the commas of color in the center of the canvas are placed on a dazzling surface created by a grid of thick white strokes and form a luminous yellow circle, a center of energy that can be understood as a sun. The effect recorded by Pollock is one of bedazzlement, such as can be caused by staring too long at the sun, leading to complete perceptual disintegration. The shredding of objects and forms by light is more complete and radical than anything accomplished by the impressionists. Things disintegrate not only on the surface, as seen, but also in their very essence, owing to the deeply searing quality of the light. What Pollock depicts is a source of energy that is not merely powerful but also destructive. What is shown, in short, is not the sun but its equivalent, the atomic bomb, transformed into myth ... Full of power, energy, and strength, these canvases seem to trap their own energy within their deliquescing linear forms.[60]

The abstractions do indeed hinge on a forceful attempt to paint the sun. Not the sun or the atomic bomb *per se,* but physical forces and processes that are constitutive of nuclear fusion on earth and on the sun. Physical forces, beyond any rational explanation. Physical processes constitutive of any act of consciousness, yet blinded to the observer by a flash of illumination that is as searing and powerful a force as the sun. The kind of gestalt theory Pollock was interested in, a kind of physics that seemed to broach the questions of a painting focused on surface, was an

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[60]Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War,* trans. A Goldhammer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 97.

unsophisticated mix of received notions about Quantum Mechanics and relativity theory, the kind of confused and contradictory mix one finds in general circulation. It was a kind of atomic physics that dealt with the paradoxical relation between experience and consciousness in terms of the complementarity situation in physics. It was a physics concerned with the relations between surface and depth, the particular and the general, the individual and the whole. A physics that forwarded an account of the structural relation that was constitutive of consciousness in terms of the profounder implications of a fundamental law of nature based in the acausal. Pollock's was a physics concerned with the field relations between a subject and an object (which is always a function of anxiety); a physics which tried to isolate a teleological movement of becoming as a complementary phenomenon to this structure -- a phenomenon displaced and silenced by the gestalt function.

The associations and possibilities that atomic physics held for Pollock, if a logical progression from his earlier interest in a Jungian cosmology were as much a function of his continued pursuit of a painting with depth. Pollock's was a reading of Jung which accommodated a general climate of psychoanalytic and psychological opinion more or less defined by the principles of dynamic psychiatry. Rather than an orthodox focus on the space of the Jungian unconscious, it seems that the process or vection of transforming the unconscious material into consciousness had assumed the priority. In a work like *Sounds in the Grass: Shimmering Substance* the transformative moment is itself localized as a tension between sight and sound. In effect, the shimmering substance of a surface made homogenous, "all-over", or equivalent, isolated a dynamic movement into depth that sounded. The influence of dynamic psychiatry should be noted here. For if surface was a function of the gestalt problematic, sound was a function not of an unconscious *per se*, but that process which the principle of complementarity cloaked; a becoming out of depth that the instantaneous structural relation presumed but never revealed. For Pollock

in 1947 painting hinged on a forceful attempt to paint that dynamic movement which was the transformative moment.

In the heady days of 1947, making surface a metaphor of depth was absolutely imperative. Take the example of *Shooting Star,* 1947 (Figure 7), where successive layers of over-writing, militate against any attempt to organize, order, or break down the whole into sensible, isolateable or finite components. The density, thickness, and echoes of innumerable layers of line, forbid any and all acts of focal differentiation. Pollock intentionally produces a surface that is a seamless and extended whole -- a metaphor of the instantaneous, transformative, acausal nature of the universe. "Dynamic interaction" and wholeness, solely the product of internal distributions, currents, and flows, In contrast to the wholes and sub-wholes of cubism, the object in *Shooting Star* is entirely broken down, indeed pummeled to the elementary nature of the unified field.. Surface is the product of an intentional attempt to paint "dynamic interaction"[61], equal and opposite distributions, currents, densities, and flows.

Thus *Comet,* 1947 (Figure 8): a system equilibrating irregularity and stresses through the "balanced distribution of underlying processes".[62] Yet, streaking through the universe. Neither wholly autonomous nor able to carry out its traditional function of delineating autonomous entities or objects, line traveling at the speed of light has no life independent from the system as a whole.[63] Line becomes a part of a surface operating according to the laws of extended bodies, a body wherein causality is confounded by the instantaneous nature of events. Thus *Galaxy,* 1947 (Figure 9), where "unitary process" becomes a function of the immanent action of repetition and its felt vibrations and interrelations in a field.[64] A painting with all the stability and dynamism of an H^+ region. A kind of photo-

[61]Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology,* p. 72.

[62]Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology,* p. 78.

[63]This, of course, is a traditional reading of Pollock's line which still holds some authority. See Michael Fried's, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Frank Stella.* (Fogg Art Museum: Garland Publishing, 1965), pp. 13-19.

[64]Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology,* p. 62.

negative, not of visible light, but that of light made visible through a radio telescope -- "energy and motion made visible"[65] (Figure 10). If the silver-white surface is of a kind of thick neutral gas like that of Orion's "dark bay", without wave properties, then the visions opening up behind this continually collapsing molecular cloud are all variety of thermal instabilities.[66] Even with glowing red Hydrogen speeding away, and ionized blue gas traveling toward a sun, this infinity of depth is reformulated as a surface effect of the gestalt problematic: "No part of the distribution is self-sufficient; the characteristics of local flow depend upon the fact that the processes as a whole have assumed the steady distribution".[67]

In *Phosphorescence*, 1947 (Figure 11) the object is blown to molecular bits. All that remains of it is formalized as a function of a "thick, fuliginous flatness". The effect achieved is of a surface positively buzzing with an iron-filed magnetic charge. Its aluminum-silver lines, more like wire with a gauge, charge the surface with the dynamism's of a kind of highly polarized electromagnetic field. Yet even these electromagnetic metaphors do not do justice to the effect of the surface. Just look at it. One needs a portable Geiger-counter to determine the counts per minute of its space age aluminum paint. It is not electricity it is buzzing with, but radioactivity.

> Scintillation count: high.
> Specific Gravity: 13.6. Heavier than Mercury.
> Fusibility Rating: Infusible.
> Reflective Range: Uneven; Adamantine to Vitreous luster, to Resinous characteristics.
> Color: Variable yellow, aluminum, dark brown to gray, green, black.
> Occurrence: Oxidized zones.
> Habit: banded; coatings; mica like masses; trace of gravel and rivet glue admixture.[68]

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[65]Jackson Pollock, Holograph statement, "A Documentary Chronology", in *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works*, D 90, p. 253.
[66]Simon Mitton, ed. *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Astronomy*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1977), pp. 278-299.
[67]Wolfgang Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology: An Introduction to New Concepts in Modern Psychology*, (New York: Mentor, 1959). p. 78
[68]See "How to Recognize Uranium Minerals" in Alvin W. Knoerr, and George P. Lutjen, *Prospecting for Atomic Minerals: How to look for and identify atomic ores; stake and protest a claim; evaluate and sell your minerals*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1955), pp. 8-20.

Aesthetic sensibility has no place in front of a painting as extreme as this. "Is this a painting?"[69] ... Pollock's question to Lee Krasner seems especially resonant at such a moment ... Or is it Pitchblende (UO_2, UO_3), Davidite (Rare-earth-Ti-Fe oxide), or Uranophane ($CaO{\cdot}2UO_3{\cdot}2SiO_2{\cdot}6H_2O$)? One needs to measure the radioactive emissions, to know for sure. Or even better, just listen to the crackling sound of its counts per minute. But don't get to close or linger too long, isotopes are dangerous.

The point in extending and exaggerating a reading like this is that, if for Pollock, psychology and physics were conceived of in terms of analogous disciplines, his new technique of painting, was itself very likely conceived of in terms of a kind of experimental physics as well. It is almost too obvious. But what else can one make of a practice so forced, strained, and violent in its technique that it could only have been intended to effect quantifiable changes at the molecular level. *Phosphorescence* is quite literally the product of high speed electron bombardment. Painting as electron bombardment. Painting about experience, feeling, and depth, conceived of as problems homologous to questions facing atomic physics. One wonders if the yellow sulfurous ground has just been bombarded with neutrons, as in Enrico Fermi's famous experiments, to produce radioactive phosphorous. One wonders if all this radiant evidence of a state change is analogous to the dynamic processes of an unconscious material becoming conscious. Is this surface the result of experience having undergone a state change into the representational? Is what we see here the sonorous evidence of the nuclear material itself, now exposed, because no longer a function of the phenomenal world but rather the processes constitutive of the structural relation which the principle of complementarity would under normal conditions exclude?

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[69]Jackson Pollock to Lee Krasner, in Francis V. O'Conner and E.V. Thaw eds.*Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works, V. 4,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), D. 102b, p. 263.

With *Phosphorescence* we are given spectroscopic vision. It is as if the intrinsic stability of the electronic configuration is forced to the surface in complete accord with the laws of spectral lines. For the painting's "sharp line" characteristics seem to correspond to the invariability of a kind of nuclear material itself. Visible light otherwise blinding the observer to the deeper truth of the object is here supplanted by a vision founded in molecular processes, forces, and vibrations -- in all, sounds of radioactivity -- that govern the transformative moment of becoming. In a sense, Pollock's painting was as effective in isolating radioactivity as Fermi's experiments at the Bohr Institute for Atomic Physics.[70] For the physical aspect of Pollock's art produced feeling, content, and depth, as though they were analogous to radioactive isotopes. For Pollock, smashing atoms against atoms, even if only metaphorically, revealed a hidden nuclear material, the deep truth of the material object, the physical universe, and hence also the individual.

The apparent leap from a kind of Jungian based practice to a reading here based on the invariability of a nuclear material, which stands in for content or experience, is not as great a distance as one might think. The "archetype" as ungraspable precondition, as unformed substrate, "... tak(ing) on the specific aspect of a modality that has the functional significance of a world-constituting factor" would have been considered by those Jungians in Pollock's early analytic circle as the psychological equivalent of a kind of irreducible nuclear material.[71] The point being, that the rather far fetched analogies between psychology and physics, was in fact a potentially powerful one for Pollock in the first place. The dynamic tension between a Jungian based depth psychology and a gestalt based surface psychology was a tension that informed Pollock's practice during these years.

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[70]Fermi conducted his experiments at the Bohr Institute in Copenhagen. His most spectacular success was the transmutation of sulphur into radioactive phosphorus. Niels Blaedel, *Harmony and Unity: The Life of Niels Bohr*, (New York: Springer Verlag, 1988), pp. 203-206.

[71]Jung writes: "Archetypal equivalences are contingent to causal determination, that is to say there exist betwee them and the causal processes no relations that conform to law ... It is an initial state which is "not governed by mechanistic law" but is the precondition of law, the chance substrate on which law is based ... The archetype represents *psychic probability*, portraying ordinary instinctual events in the form of *types*." Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle", p. 515.

In Pollock's abstractions the forces of an absurd universe are presented in the ironic flash of an instant. In effect, surface and depth encapsulate the same forces unleashed over Hiroshima in 1945 to end the war. The forces of nuclear fusion that were a measure of America's technological supremacy and at the same time the depths to which that scientific and technological achievement had brought Western culture. In the sobering atmosphere of the early days of the nuclear arms race, the hand imprints in *Number 1,* 1948 (Figure 12) must have seemed especially resonant. Not arms, but hands (Figure 13), perhaps the most immediately graspable essence of an isolated and despairing human condition. "Not an index of presence", as Clark writes, "but "seen as" a hand, a hand out there, someone else's".[72] A hand that relates directly to an a-causal whole, a symbolic whole, a whole body, someone else's body, a whole universe out there of unfathomable depth. This surface is my body, this surface relates directly to the depth's of my body. And yet only just a hand, slapping, marking, and pawing for an outside. A hand only scratching a surface.

Number 1, 1948 is a moment when the gesture or touch of a hand, the sincerest gesture of empathy, of commonalty, of a metaphoric connectedness with everything in the chaos of an acausal universe, is simultaneously metonymically associated with arms. Just as in *Phosphorescence,* where the metaphoric possibility of surface is thick with the associations of the atomic age, *Number 1,* 1948, is built out of a half-realized anxiety for the stock-piling of nuclear armaments. For if hands metaphorically contacting some notion of wholeness, they are also hands metonymically connected to arms, attempting to escape from the chaotic swirling forces of modernity, that arms had a hand in unleashing. *Number 1,* 1948, if one of the more extreme statements hinging on the metaphoric connection between surface and depth, must also mark a limit case; the beginning of a more concerted attempt at dismantling metaphor for fear of manufacturing more arms simply through the meaningful coincidence of a hand-crafted surface and an obscure depth.

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[72]Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstractions", p. 197.

If the abstractions are involved in what Clark calls "a complex dismantling of metaphor" (and I think they are, Greenberg did), *Number 1*, 1948 is the beginning of an intensification of that process that will ultimately lead to the black and white paintings from 1951.

Chaos -- that description most hated by Pollock[73] -- is always, necessarily one half of an equation for the whole. The fact is, that for Pollock, painting was both labyrinth and gestalt. Indeed, we know from Lee Krasner that Pollock often began with an image and then afterward chose to veil and obscure it. "I deny the accident" Pollock wrote.[74] We have to remember that these are paintings conceived of in terms of an instantaneous dialectic between the isolated and intentional action of an individual on the one hand and a galactic model of universal proportions on the other hand. Those forces constitutive of consciousness -- tensions which internally organize the gestalt according to the formal rules of "dynamic self-distributions" -- are figured in terms of a galactic field: a relation encapsulating the absurdist paradox of an a-causal universe.[75] In a painting like *Number 1*, 1950 (*Lavender Mist*) (Figure 14), chaos is the radical other, to a kind of wholeness, order, and all too beautiful surface effect. "What kind of mist would it be like that contained or exhuded this thicket of blacks, fibrillated and staccato, as if made from some razor-thin and razor sharp material?" Clark asks.[76] The lavender mist of a defibrillated pulse of energy. A pleasant color, a Lavender and misty color, that was complementary to the approach of a super-heated incendiary shock wave. It is as if barbarity was inseparable from progress; that the gesture or mark of a hand on a surface was complicit in all manner of atrocities; that the experimentally verifiable

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[73]In response to a *TIME* (Nov. 21, 1951),article titled "Chaos, Damn It", Pollock responded with a letter to time beginning: "NO CHAOS DAMN IT", *TIME*, (Dec. 11, 1951)

[74]Jackson Pollock, in Francis V. O'Conner and E.V. Thaw eds. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works, V. 4*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), D. 88, p. 253.

[75]Wolfgang Kohler, *Gestalt Psychology*, p. 96

[76]Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstractions", p. 204.

and quantifiable changes of mutual electric repulsion in the nucleus of U235 during fission, was in the end, inseparable from "the glaring whitish pinkish light" seen over Hiroshima, and Pollock knew it.

I think we can safely assume that Greenberg more than anyone realized intentionality as the crucial weakness in Pollock's work; why he avoided writing about the abstractions; and conversely why he greeted the black and white paintings from 1951 with such great expectation. For in speaking to the abstractions we are talking neither exclusively about modernist painting nor America's military industrial complex, but the insidious connection between the two. Greenberg's notion of the decorative implicitly refused the notion of the a-causal in favor of causality, not so as to attain a tension between surface and depth so much as a merger or fusion between the two. For Greenberg, there was no escaping the predicament of modernity. Consciousness was an act of violence, and all that could be done was acknowledge ones own complicity in this predicament. For Greenberg, if the decorative was to be achieved, analogy or metaphoricity had to be expurgated; it could only serve as a beginning, a limit, a premise upon which to proceed.

In a sense post-cubist painting -- "the Apollinarian and cubist mission and its hope, coincident with that of Marxism and the whole matured tradition of Enlightenment, of humanizing the world" -- as the enframing apparatus of *Phosphorescence,* is not reconciled. Rather, it remains a single beat in what is the unsolvable double beat of the dialectic. That is, the effect of a painting like *Galaxy,* 1951 (Figure 9) might be construed as a gestalt, but if it is, it is as much a reduction or narrowing of the visual field to a point where the interior dynamism's of the field annihilate the causal distinction between a subject and an object. The irreducible fact of distance or objectivity upon which the gestalt function operates, cannot be isolated out from an obliterating function, which the repetitious and over-wrought nature of the surface presumes. This is perhaps the great irony of Pollock's abstractions, or maybe this is precisely the substance of their achievement, namely,

that formal proliferation could only equal annihilation. Which is another way of saying that during a moment in history when nuclear build up or proliferation was a cause for alarm, it seems that a similar anxiety was fueling Pollock's painting.

After all the same year as Pollock had painted these early isotopes Greenberg had effectively offered up the same critique of metaphoricity by contrasting Matisse to what we can assume was Pollock's position as representative of the major tendencies of the contemporary scene.[77] "In face of current events painting feels, apparently, that it must be more than itself: it must be epic poetry, it must be theater, it must be rhetoric, it must be an atomic bomb, it must be the Rights of Man. But the greatest painter of our time, Matisse, preeminently demonstrated the sincerity and penetration that go with the kind of greatness particular to twentieth-century painting by saying that he wanted his art to be an armchair for the tired businessman."[78] If "in face of current events painting feels ... that it must be more than itself ... (that) it must be an atomic bomb", perhaps the logic behind Pollock's shift in 1951 was that if nuclear proliferation equaled annihilation, then simply, it was time for "a kind of relaxation".

1951 was a crucial year in Pollock's work. It was the year that Pollock would finally achieve "a kind of relaxation". It was the year of *Number 7,* 1951, (Figure 1), (*Frogman*) *Number 23* 1951, (Figure 1), Pictures *Fourteen* (Figure 3) and *Twenty-Five* (Figure 22). It was in December of that year that these would be exhibited at the Betty Parsons Gallery. But it was also the same year Pollock had, in his own words, "hit an all-time low -- with depression and drinking".[79] *Untitled* (1951) (Figure 15) from early January or February seems a portent. Half-painting and half-sculpture it is Pollock's version of what future lay in store for post-cubist painting, his own painting, if the stalemate of the physical was not surpassed. *Untitled* (1951) is

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[77]Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of the Jane Street Group and Rufino Tamayo", C.G. 2, p.131, p.133
[78]Greenberg, ibid, pp. 133-134.
[79]Jackson Pollock letter to Miguel-Jose Ossorio, (January 6, 1951), in Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, pp. 658, 889.

metaphoricity seen in its clearest light; nothing less than a monstrous formulation. Paint is piled on so thick that surface has itself become bloated and distended beyond recognition. The infinite depths that surface once plumbed through analogy is here materialized in the most brutal, literal terms; it is nothing less than the extension in space of some "neutral massive corpuscle".

It is always worth keeping in mind the conjunction between a deteriorating mental health on the one hand and a physics gone awry, such as in *Untitled,* on the other hand in Pollock's late work. For materialists such as Pollock and Greenberg dissipation and entropy have always enjoyed a very special relationship. "Dissipate" was Greenberg's favorite word not only because of the fundamental laws of physics it called up, but because dissipation as a lifestyle was the one way to combat the universal loss which the law of entropy described.[80] With Pollock's new painting from 1951 we move from the anxiousness surrounding a Jungian unconscious to the sobering atmosphere of Manhattan's Upper Westside. The upper 70s and 80s was Sullivanian country and Sullivanian psychiatry had its very own take on dissipation. It was not unrelated to insight gained from the dialogue between atomic physics and field theory.

Consider two photographs (Figure 16 and 17) of Pollock's studio at the Springs not long before his exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery in November and December of 1951. Take especial note of the single length of canvas hanging at lower left in the second of these (Figure 17), or for that matter those canvas' hanging at upper middle and upper right in the same picture. We know that Pollock would eventually cut these single lengths of canvas into separate paintings. The one at lower left would, for example, be divided into *Number 6, 1951, Brown and Silver I,* 1951 and *Brown and Silver II,* 1951. Certainly the canvas is formed of a series of individual events, that constitute paintings in themselves, but there is I think some sense that these individual paintings were part of a succession of individual

[80]Eva Meier Interview, June 1995.

processes or events which were all regarded equal. They are distinct and self-contained, yet for all intents and purposes part of a larger whole, part of a larger surface. This kind of evolution in Pollock's practice, if in the end, not that stunning a difference from traditional easel painting is nevertheless quite important. It is -- along with what Greenberg describes as "a kind of relaxation" -- a crucial indicator of a move toward a more Sullivanian oriented understanding of the self.

A painting like *Number 4*, 1951 (Figure 18) offers another example. It is a painting very close in feeling and look to *Brown and Silver I* and *Brown and Silver II*. Perhaps even it is a painting that was originally part of a larger canvas, one event in a succession of events that constituted a fluid and continuous surface. *Number 4*, 1951 was a painting purchased at the Betty Parson's exhibition by Dr. Ruth Fox, Pollock's newest hope for the treatment of alcoholism. A Sullivanian psychiatrist, Fox would in January of 1951 come to Pollock highly recommended by the art critic Clement Greenberg.[81]

Ultimately if the black and white paintings from 1951 are to be understood in the context of the post-war period, and in terms of the resonance the decorative held for Greenberg, they need to be addressed in terms of certain psychological problematics raised by Sullivanian psychiatry. The provenance of *Number 1*, 1951 is important in this regard, but so is the way Pollock was now painting some of his canvas' -- the fact that is a painting like *Number 4*, 1951 was potentially treated as one discrete unit of energy or movement in a succession of units that constituted an otherwise continuous surface. Again this relates to both a new conception of the self which Pollock now had the tools to investigate, and a certain despairing form of pessimism complicit in the undermining of therapeutic efficacy which is a central determination in Sullivanian psychotherapy. Greenberg's notion of "a kind of relaxation" goes to the crux of these developments. For Greenberg they were an assurance that Pollock is more than just a "grandiose decorator".

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[81]Greenberg, Steiner interview, Febuary 1994. In conversation Greenberg told me that he had seen both Ruth Fox and Sol Stein, both Sullivanian's, Clement Greenberg conversation.

I think we can most fruitfully discuss these developments if we broach the problem of atomicity. With Interpersonal Psychiatry one is squarely confronted by the question of life at the atomic level. For a Sullivanian the self as a fluid surface veiled a more essential activity on the atomic level. Consciousness was in fact problematized as a discontinuous and periodic succession of static events. This periodic structure of surfacings -- surfacings that are for all intents and purposes continuous -- veiled what was conceived of as a relatively fixed "pattern of energy exchanges", vections, or teleologies. In effect, we are again faced by the paradox of the allegorical nature of consciousness and a symbolic notion of becoming -- a becoming in this case which registered changes in an atomic structure. It is important to recognize that Sullivanian Interpersonal Psychiatry was not founded in the analogic correspondence of a Jungian cosmology, but rather was founded on the attempt to understand psychical processes in terms of physical exchanges of energy at the molecular level. This kind of intense investigation into the nature of personhood was again the result of complexifications and problematizations in field theory brought about by Quantum Theory. Niels Bohr neatly delineates the problem by focusing on Max Plank's "elementary quantum of action" -- a radiant measure independent of any specific properties of matter. Plank's investigations into black body radiation would prove to be the pivotal moment in the development of Quantum Theory. Bohr writes...

> "The existence of the elementary quantum of action expresses, in fact, a new trait of individuality of physical processes which is quite foreign to the classical laws of mechanics and electromagnetism and limits their validity essentially to those phenomena which involve actions large compared to the value of a single quantum, as given by Plank's new atomistic constant. This condition, though amply fulfilled in the phenomena of ordinary physical experience, does in no way hold for the behavior of electrons in atoms, and it is indeed only the existence of the quantum of action which prevents the fusion of the electrons and the nucleus into a neutral massive corpuscle of practically infinitesimal extension ... The recognition of this situation suggested at once the description of the binding of each electron in the field around the nucleus as a succession of individual processes by which the atom is transferred from one of its so-called stationary states to another of these states, with

emission of the released energy in the form of a single quantum of electromagnetic radiation.[82]

What would be important to recognize in this respect is that the effect of Quantum Mechanics on field theory, whether it was understood or not understood, was indeed even a topic Pollock could care less for -- though the evidence suggests that it made up some set of concerns or other -- was a central problematic addressed by the often literate, scientific, and artistic minded circles of Interpersonal Psychiatry. Ultimately what Interpersonal Psychiatry was interested in was "the behavior of electrons in atoms" which were in no way described by "the classical laws of mechanics and electromagnetism". It was interested in, Greenberg was interested in, a depth which was a quantized (fixed or discrete) amount of physical energy; an energy that was complementary to the continuity of surface which the classical laws of electromagnetism described. Energy, any and all energy, especially physical energy in the body, was not continuous, but rather existed in discrete quanta which were complementary to any observable or continuous function.

Rather than wholly governed by the laws of classical physics, consciousness is quantized. It is conceived of as a discontinuous and periodic emission of discrete amounts of energy. Just as Plank had discovered that molecules in a heated material could vibrate only with certain discrete amounts of energy that are then given off as quanta of energy, Sullivan was able to characterize consciousness and personality as a highly individualized physical process dependent on a "relatively fixed pattern of energy exchanges". What would be important to recognize with regard to the quantum of energy as a descriptive tool, is that it is always the smallest amount of energy which is crucial, and that this minimum amount, determined the stationary state or continuous function of the surface effect. If it is not already obvious, the connection with Greenberg's notion of the decorative -- antithetical to

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[82]Niels Bohr, "Biology and Atomic Physics", *The Philosophical Writings of Niels Bohr: On Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge, v. II, Essays 1932-57,* (Woodbridge: Ox Bow Press, 1987), pp. 17-18.

that strain and "tautness of feeling" in post-cubist art, embrasive of a "kind of relaxation" or pessimal limit that provided for a "transparency of feeling" -- should be duly noted.

One has only to flip through an essay like Sullivan's "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and Life", and stumble upon a figure like the "Schematic of Personality" (Figure 19) to realize the debt interpersonal psychiatry owed to the interpretive frameworks of the more theoretically advanced physical sciences. For a Sullivanian like Fox, the social relationship was reducible down to the problem of anxiety, a being-in anxiety that could only prohibit and confound the knowing of it. Anxiety is in fact understood as a radiative phenomenon with disjunctive effects. If it was first of all the quantifiable evidence of activity on the atomic level and thus complicit in any normative process of becoming, it also complicated this process in its more serious manifestations. In Sullivan's diagram of "A Schizophrenic Episode Over time" (Figure 20) it's disjunctive effects are quantified as a structural relation between subjects -- in the case of (Figure 20) between subjects Jones and Roe -- a relative value that is dependent on the "pattern of energy exchanges" or physical circuitry in each subject.

Fox's treatment for alcoholism would have focused on the constitution or physical wiring of this structural relation. Obviously enough Sullivanian psychotherapy mainly focused its investigation on interpersonal relations. Pollock's relationship with Lee Krasner would have come under especially close scrutiny (Figure 21). Though psychotherapy and prescription drugs were also used to curb "the alcoholics compulsive nature" by Fox, her approach to therapy hinged on changing the pattern of dependency established between patient and spouse. Because the individual's "pattern of energy exchanges" was largely an unalterable physical and material fact, it was generally surmised in Sullivanian circles that changing the patients "dependency patterns" was the only way to discourage the

evolution of more disjunctive forms of anxiety.[83] In a rather orthodox statement, which nonetheless reveals the utter contingency of addiction with regard to the spousal relation, Fox writes, drinking for the alcoholic "is compulsive in nature, once he has started. He is driven by unconscious forces he does not understand and against which rational judgment and will power are helpless".[84]

Within the parameters of the field relation established between alcoholic and spouse, alcoholism was a foregone conclusion. Everything was in a sense determined beforehand; everything was already settled and decided. Admittedly this does not constitute the brightest prognosis. Yet this sense of predictedness, doom, and foreclosure is the definitive ingredient of the Sullivanian method. One could really only live out ones neuroses or addiction, Sullivan would say. Therapeutic improvement is in effect excluded as a possibility, because the self is recognized first and foremost as a function of repetition on the atomic level -- the subject is forever governed by the instantaneous structural relation through which he or she transforms matter into meaning.

In view of these coincidence, correspondences, and parallels, the temptation exists to trace the evolution of the new paintings from 1951 to Pollock's more complete introduction to Sullivanian therapy. Anchoring our argument for Pollock's painting within such psychiatric strictures, i.e., reading Pollock's painting against the background provided by these extrinsic discourses, is probably the last thing we want to do. What we do want to acknowledge, however, is the possibility that such understandings and their appeal were both a logical outcome of earlier interests in Jung and gestalt theory, and were integral to a set of formal progressions within Pollock's own practice that hinged on a consistent recourse to the *physis* (the Greek root word for both the body and physics). Which is another way of saying that these paintings are not in any way reducible to such psychologizing imperatives,

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83Fox, "The Alcoholic Spouse", in *Neurotic Interaction in Marriage*, ed. Victor Eisenstein, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1955), pp. 163; Also Fox's "Psychotherapeutics of Alcoholism", in *Specialized Techniques in Psychotherapy*, (New York: Basic Books, 1952), p. 258.
[84]Fox, "The Alcoholic Spouse", p. 149.

only that the atomic activity that this kind of empirical study of man opened up, was, in Pollock's black and white paintings, a new twist on the investigation of depth, which had always been an inverse function of that disparate set of discourses concerned with surface. Finally, in terms of Greenberg's own involvement in Sullivanian circles, we need to acknowledge that the fact he did place some faith in its insight was both because it fit within the structuralist framework that his own Kantianism rested upon, and secondly that it fulfilled the parameters of his own materialism, steeped in an atmosphere conducive to Relativity and Quantum Theory. That Kant's mature philosophy can be traced back to a physical cosmology laid out in his first important book *Theory of the Heavens* (1755) seems grist for the mill.

The kind of shift that Ruth Fox's Sullivanian oriented methodology could have precipitated, or conversely the reasons that Fox was appealing in the first place, might be understood as a foregoing of the kind of anxiety that the nuclear threat encapsulated outwardly in the world -- merely one metaphor of anxiety--, for an investigation of the inwardly directed and profounder embodiment of anxiety -- a physical manifestation of pure repetition -- that for Sullivan represented personality at the atomic level. The problem came down to isolating the atomic activity that makes one, who one is. It was a profoundly temporal problematic. For if anxiety complicated or confabulated the social relationship, it was also the founding dynamic of the instantaneous structural relation, the dynamic which permits an entrance into the world in the first place.

What we can say in the case of both Pollock and Greenberg is that Sullivanian Interpersonal Psychiatry helped open up and/or bolster certain perspectives or vistas onto a conceptualization of the individual that theorized consciousness as a static and periodic event. It helped problematize the transformative not in terms of some fictitious therapeutic goal, but rather in terms of the problem of the physical that was in fact the limiting condition of experience. To bring this all back around to the

question of painting is difficult. Yet, if we foreground the problem of anxiety in conjunction with the notion of the decorative we can I think speak to the black and white paintings in terms of patterns of energy exchanges existing only at the atomic level. That is we can address the black and white paintings as a profoundly physical painting founded on "a kind of relaxation".

How Pollock was making sense of all this high powered psychiatry and physics is crucial. How Pollock was making sense of radiative phenomenon, phenomenon as disparate as the conditions of consciousness and the constitution of light, is the crux of the matter. Now of course Pollock was no Einstein, but as a painter concerned with the physical he seems to have recognized early on the resonance of a practice dependent on particles colliding on a surface under the influence of light. Indeed, it seems clear that for Pollock by 1951, process, movement, or vibration on the atomic level, was independent of the color or frequency of visible light. Pollock's recourse to a restricted palette is, in other words, significant. It was part of a move toward "a kind of relaxation".

I think it is useful here to recall that it was Einstein who first proposed that light defined as an electromagnetic wave was an insufficient explanation for some of its properties. Einstein had used Plank's early investigation into black body radiation as his departure. The conclusions he would draw from the so-called photo-electric effect are revealing. He found that the emission of electrons from a metal surface under the influence of light did not depend on the intensity of the light, but only on its color, i.e., the frequency of light. Light, Einstein surmised consisted of discrete quanta of energy, called photons, each with an energy dependent on the frequency or color of light. Because of the quantum effect an increase in the intensity of monochromatic light did not increase the vibration or excitation of electrons on the molecular level, it only resulted in an increase in the total number of valence electrons released onto a surface. If the so-called Photoelectric Effect had no consequence on the look of a metal surface it did provide

experimental evidence of a complementary relation between the wave picture of light and the particle picture of light, or the idea of light quanta.

Perhaps another way of saying this is that given the fact that the excitation level of electrons was independent of the intensity or volume of the total number of electrons in motion, in the final analysis the visual was an insufficient account of wholeness or totality in the universe. The stark palette of Pollock's black and white paintings seems a corroboration of the fact that the decorative was a painting less concerned with light reduced down to the "elementary quantum of action" -- a property dependent on the color or frequency of visible light, than that complementary property equivalent to a paintings intensity, a unit of power per unit area. What was important to Pollock in the black and white paintings was the volume of sound made in terms of vibration or movement. What was important was " a maximum of charge at the cost of a minimum of physical means". If a profoundly deep and physical art was to be achieved, it seems Pollock had realized it was achievable only through a " kind of relaxation" of surface appearance.

What Greenberg describes as Pollock's new all-overness achieved through "a maximum of charge at the cost of a minimum of physical means", was light quantized in terms of the structural relation or instantaneous event. It was a way that Pollock was approaching or thinking about depth, feeling, and expression in terms of a rather cumbersome though not inconsequential relation between sight and sound. Sound was a metaphor of the movement of an atomic particle undergoing a state change, it was a metaphor complementary to a chain of other metaphors linking visible light, to the structural relation of waves, to vision, and to understanding. *(Echo) Number 25*, 1951 (Figure 22) seems the writing on the wall. Greenberg had singled it out as representative of "high classical art: not only the identification of form and feeling, but the acceptance and exploitation of the very circumstances of the medium that limit such identification". In *Number 25*, 1951 modeling in black and white involves a conceptualization of light beyond, yet

through the visual. If there is the presence of an ear, a mouth, or a head, all at upper left, the all-over effect of the canvas immediately galvanizes these black body parts into a vast interference effect. If "figures, heads, and animal forms" then also a surface of nothing more than enhanced and reduced intensity's.

Take *Number 14,* 1951 (Figure 3). If figuration can only just emerge at the periphery in *Number 1,* 1948 (Figure 12) in *Number 14,* 1951(Figure 3) it surfaces everywhere. It pops up from under maskings, overwritings, and multiple layerings, amidst absences, and through correspondences at both center and periphery. It seems that *Number 14,* 1951 is no longer driven solely by an anxiety for concealment. A reading prioritizing abstraction is as much a possibility as one hinging on the world of the sleek backed insect at center. If this creature emerges from the density of its thebaid and waits pensively at the edge of a clearing, the long swooping line of its carapace as quickly transforms into a sensuous echo of the framing edge above. The angular raw canvas area of its head and body blends just as quickly into the unity of the whole -- striking as natural and contiguous a formal balance with the swirling effects at each of the four corners as it does with the reflective image of a kind of underbelly below. What is important about *Number 14,* 1951 and *(Echo) Number 25,* 1951 is that they are both abstract and representational, i.e., they sound as good as they look. "A kind of relaxation" was a recognition that depth need not be a negation of the figurative for the truth of the material object, but that it was a complementary phenomenon to surface.

"It is significant", Greenberg writes in "The Crisis of the Easel Picture", "that the most radical steps taken in painting since Manet's time have in almost every case been accompanied by the tendency to *atomize* the picture surface into separate brush-strokes".[85] The tendency to "atomize" was complicit in a working with surface that figured painting, and more specifically light, as a phenomenon, reducible to "states of mind" and "naked sensations". In a similar but not identical

[85]Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture", (*Partisan Review,* April, 1948), in C.G. 2, p. 223.

way Pollock's black and white paintings were atomizing light. Not so much with brushstrokes, but through the intentional exclusion of color.[86] For visible light is quantized, or broken down into a particle picture which is the other side of surface appearance.

In a painting like *Number 20,* 1951 (Figure 23) the complementarity or double aspect of all radiative phenomenon is figured by an "all-overness" ironically achieved by both a rich surface incident and a technical virtuosity which delights in playing with innumerable species of black paint. An "embarrassment of riches" is placed in continual contrast to the poverty and want of raw canvas and the effect of the canvas as a whole.[87] Paint ranges in privilege from the dry honey-comb black defining the surface and tending from a velvety dull luster at moments, to a glistening bobbled shine at others, to the finest tracery that bleeds finally into the obscurity of the canvas' white weave. There are four or five bobbles of plumb dried paint that sit on top of the canvas, apart from it, ripe for picking, that pose an infinite distance from the recession into canvas itself. At moments a tannin pigment appears. There is a velvet black stain that gathers up the weave of the canvas upon drying and seemingly lowers it, through shrinkage, to a level beneath the literal surface. And there is the close relative to this sunken stain which resurfaces to the level of the untreated canvas, where build-up and pooling is of a sufficient degree to leave a meniscus-like glistening effect.

Yet, if *Number 20,* 1951 is made up of a rich local incident its global effect is quite the opposite. In terms of surface as an extended body the numerous species of black paint blend together into a single bland and monochromatic coat. That the tension between local and global remain unreconciled seems the effect Pollock was after. It is refigured again as a tension between surface and depth. For if the picture

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[86]In a sense we are confronted by an impressionist derived conception of light functioning within the constraints of post-cubist painting. This framing of the early materialist impetus of impressionism by the cubist project goes to the core of Greenberg's notion of the decorative, as much as it goes to the crux of Pollock's painting from 1951.

[87]Frank O'Hara describes Pollock's draftsmanship in these terms. Frank O'Hara, *Jackson Pollock,* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), p. 26.

is forced into and right up against a sort of complete interface with the surface, all the action or dynamics of *Number 20,* 1951 recede and sink back into infinity. The stark black honeycomb effect of the surface is strung so tight, and forced to such a degree, that it precipitates a kind of counter movement inward toward the depths of untreated canvas. There is flatness, but also, and as much, there is a kind of warping or bowing out effect that undermines planarity. While there is a sort of centripetal force closing the canvas in on itself, lending it the effect of a virtual collapse inward -- the result of stretching and extending the surface too thinly, of distorting a face or incident just beyond recognizable bounds -- there is also a kind of rushing forward into close proximity. If incident and micro effect is aided by this rushing forward, blandness and homogeneity is the effect produced by recession.

The point is that Pollock's new paintings from 1951 are about polarity. They are about an a-relationality, which is nevertheless constitutive of totality. They are about making black paint on a white ground exist in perfect balance, so that if figuration does emerge locally it will disappear as quickly as a function of the whole. About neutralizing that most essential polarity which founds the figure ground relation -- which founds Pollock's work in the abstractions and in works such as *Number 2,* 1948, *Cut Out,* 1948-50, or *Number 10A,* 1948 *(The Wooden Horse)* -- through the very terms which mobilize gestalt perception. And in a sense they succeed. For literally speaking the black and white paintings from 1951 use no light whatsoever. Pollock limits his palette to black paint, and black, quite simply, is a color that absorbs light. The color black is black, because it absorbs all other colors in the visible spectrum.

With a work like *Number 20,* 1951, Pictures *Fourteen* (Figure 3)and *Twenty Five* (Figure 25)we are confronted by painting which perfectly balances the emission and absorption of electromagnetic radiation. What radiant energy is absorbed by black is given off by white. For white light is the emission of the entire visible spectrum. White light is a cacophony of frequency's which is nothing less than

sound. *Number 20,* 1951: if a painting about the absolutely circumscribed and predicted nature of intention, then also a painting about sound emitted from an infinite universe of white. Intentionally restricting oneself to the deadening color of black, is the harshest indictment of the self and consciousness conceivable. It is a black eye for Liberalism; a black eye for any and all attempts at salvaging the individual.

Max Planck knew all to well that the perfect emitter and absorber of light was a black body. He also knew the extended body which most perfectly fulfilled this equilibrating function was the sun. For Greenberg who was no physicist but who always cared a great deal about a materialist philosophy of the physical, the black and white paintings were an encapsulation of "what Nietzsche knew in spite of his profession of the Dionysian". At the crux of Pollock's black and white paintings is a Romantic reading of the Enlightenment's adequation between light and consciousness. No longer do we have a Platonic view of the world where the sun is the bearer of Truth and Good. Rather more in a Nietzschean vein, the sun is the bearer of the "veils of illusion". In what is surely the most celebrated passage describing the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian, Nietzsche borrows his key metaphor from physics.

> Everything that comes to the surface in the Apollonian part of Greek tragedy, in the dialogue, looks simple, transparent, and beautiful. In this sense, the dialogue is the image of the Hellene whose nature is revealed in the dance because in the dance the greatest strength is only potential but betrays itself in the suppleness and wealth of movement. Thus the language of Sophocles' heroes surprises us by its Apollonian precision and lucidity, so that we immediately have the feeling that we are looking into the innermost ground of their being, with some astonishment that the way to this ground should be so short. But if for once we look away from the character of the hero as it comes to the surface, visibly -- which, at bottom, is nothing more than a bright image projected on a dark wall, that is, appearance through and through -- if we rather appear into the myth, which projects itself in these lucid reflections, then we suddenly experience a phenomenon that has an inverse relationship to a known optical one. When in a forceful attempt to fix the eye on the sun, we turn away blinded, we then have dark colored spots before our eyes, as a healing agent, as it were: inversely, those bright image projections of the Sophoclean hero, in short the Apollonian (aspect) of the mask , are necessary productions of a look into the innerness and terror of nature, as it were, luminous spots to heal the look wounded by gruesome night. Only in this sense may we believe that we understand correctly the serious and meaningful concept of 'Greek

cheerfulness'; whereas we of course encounter the misunderstood concept of this cheerfulness, as a state of unendangered comfort, everywhere today.[88]

Pollock's turn toward "a kind of relaxation" was a deeply pessimistic turn. Because a forfeiture of the cult of action, it was a pessimism which linked up to a dour mood of political apostasy. "A kind of relaxation" was a pessimism resting on despair. It spoke to Pollock's persistent concern with the body through the tension between surface and depth. It was a way of making painting about the body resonate with America's form of corporate capitalism. It was about process. About historical and physical processes beyond empirical observation. "A kind of relaxation" was anxiety formalized. It was a way of localizing anxiety as a process or becoming, and as an instantaneous and structural event. "A kind of relaxation" was a prescription for an atomistic and materialist understanding of man. But more than all of this put together, it was Pollock giving new meaning to the "serious and meaningful concept of Greek cheerfulness". It was Pollock's despair with what he knew about his profession of the Dionysian. "A kind of relaxation" in Pollock's new paintings from 1951, was his way of saying simply -- cheers!

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[88] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* translated in Andrezej Warminki's *Readings in Interpretation: Holderlin, Hegel, Heidegger*, (Univ. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987), pp. xxxv-xxxvi. All other references are to Walter Kaufmann' s translation of *The Birth of Tragedy*, (Vintage Books, New York, 1967), p. 67.

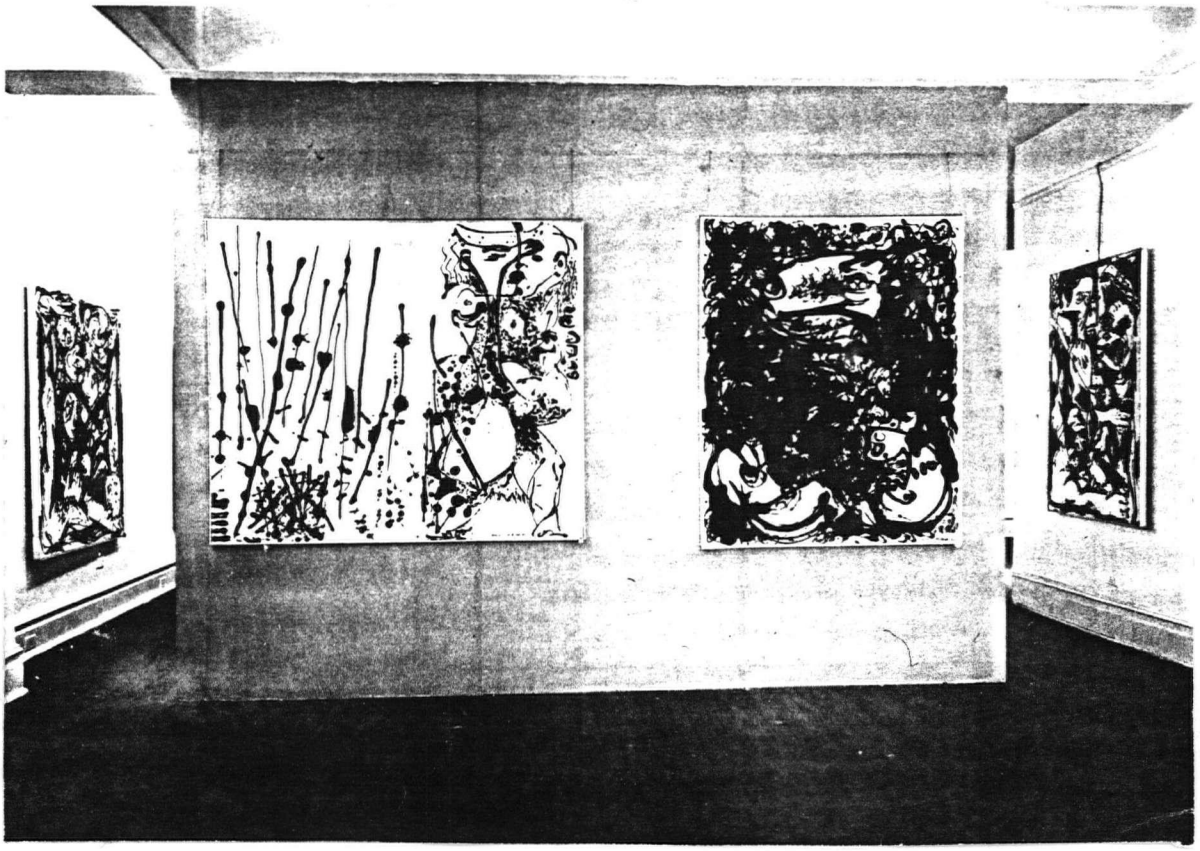

Figure 1 Jackson Pollock. Installation at Betty Parson's Gallery, 1951. *Number 7*, 1951; and *Frogman Number 23*, 1951. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 4, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 266

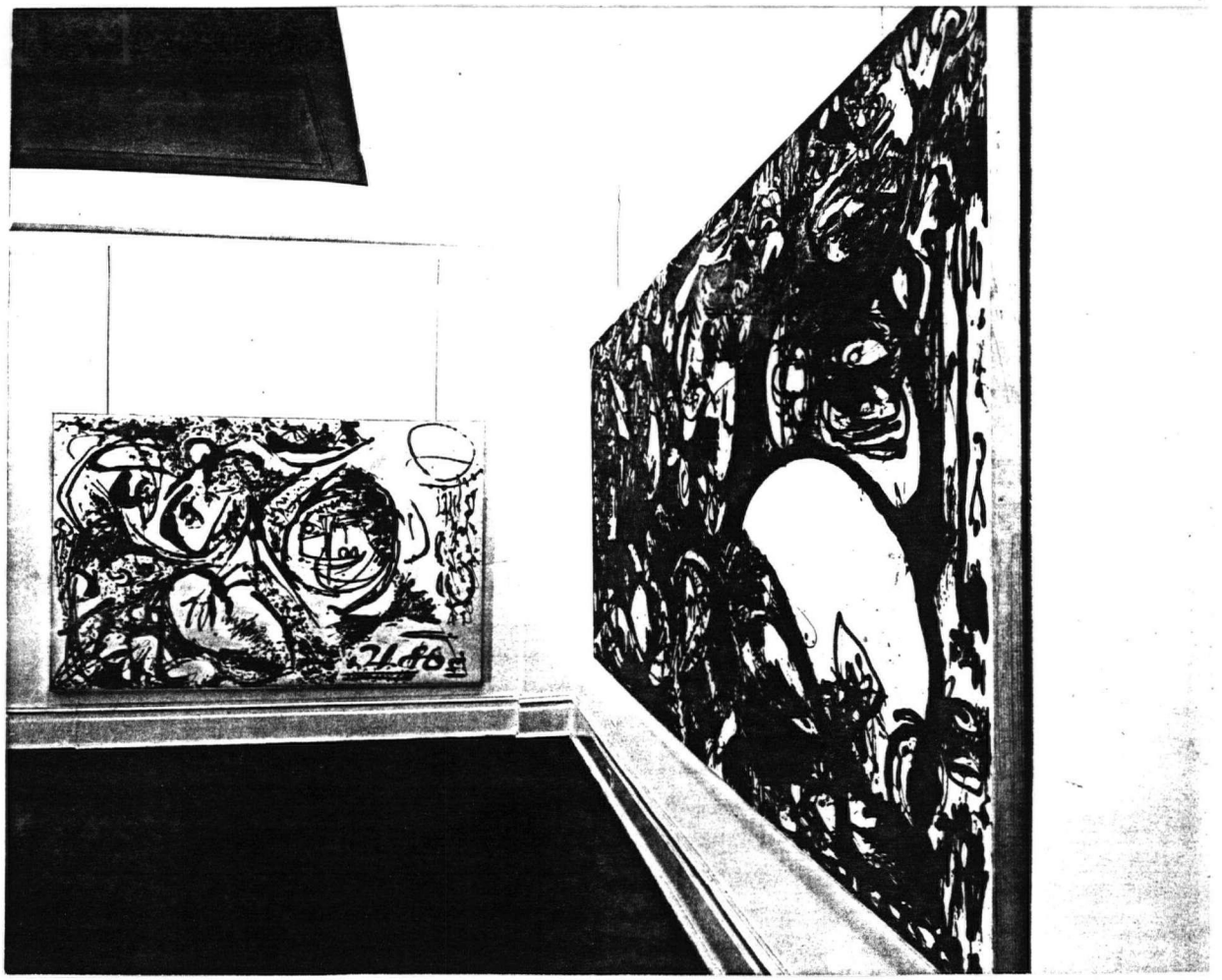

Figure 2 Jackson Pollock. Installation of Betty Parson's Gallery, 1951;*Number 13*, 1951 and *Number 11*, 1951. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 4, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 265.

Figure 3 Jackson Pollock. *Number Fourteen*, 1951. Enamel on canvas, 57 5/8 x 106 inches. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 4, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 155.

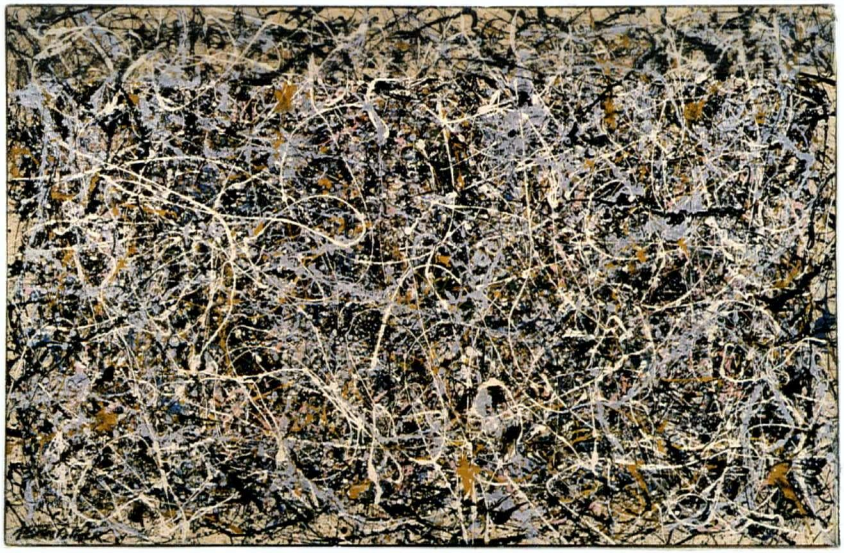

Figure 4 Jackson Pollock. *Number 1,* 1949. Enamel and metallic paint on canvas, 63 x 102 inches. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Figure 5 Henri Matisse. *Interieur a Nice, la siesta*, 1922. 66 x 54.5 inches. Musee National d'Art Moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou. Henri Matisse; The Early Years in Nice, 1916-1930, p. 167.

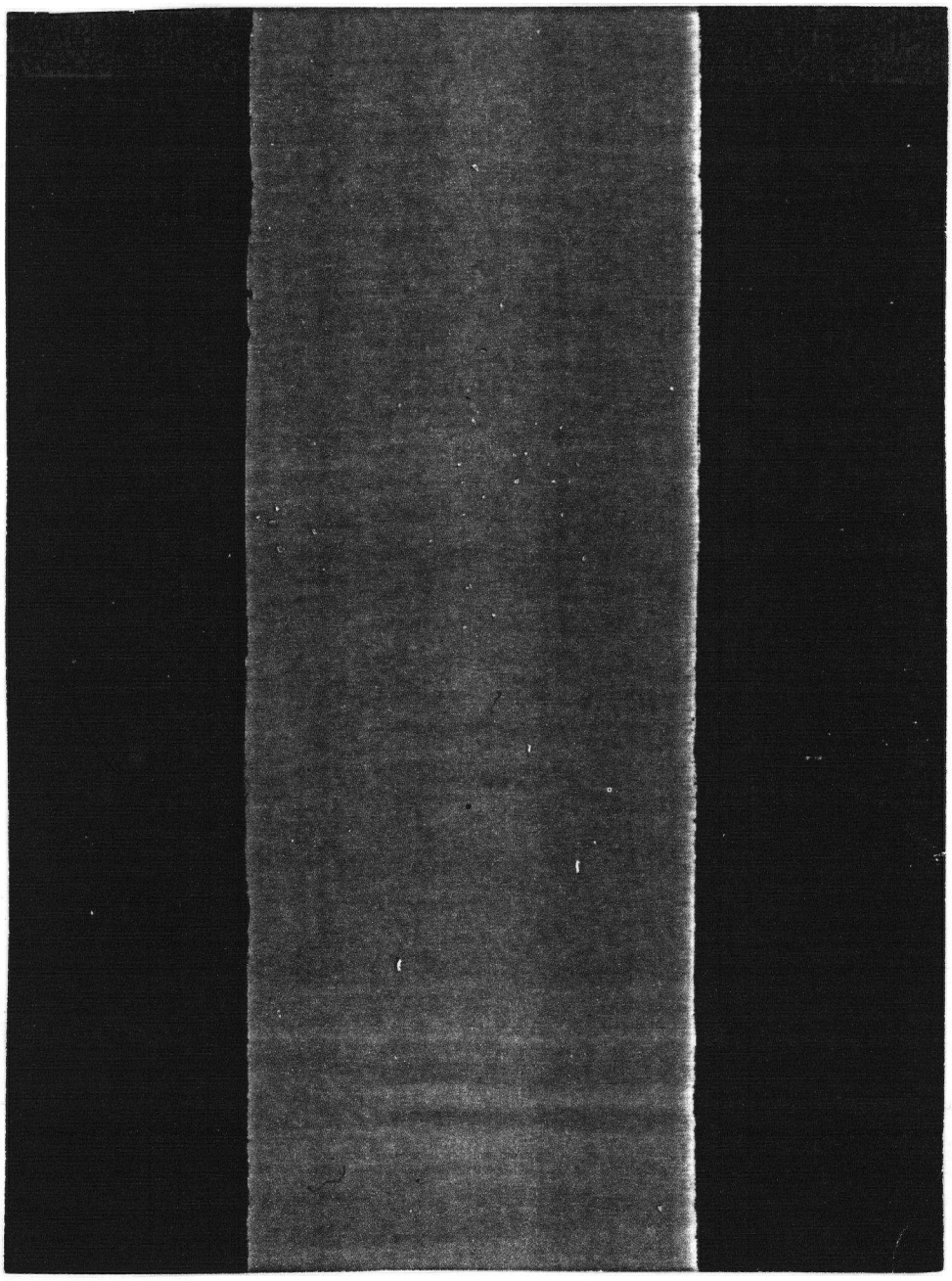

Figure 6 Barnett Newman, *The Way I,* 1951. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

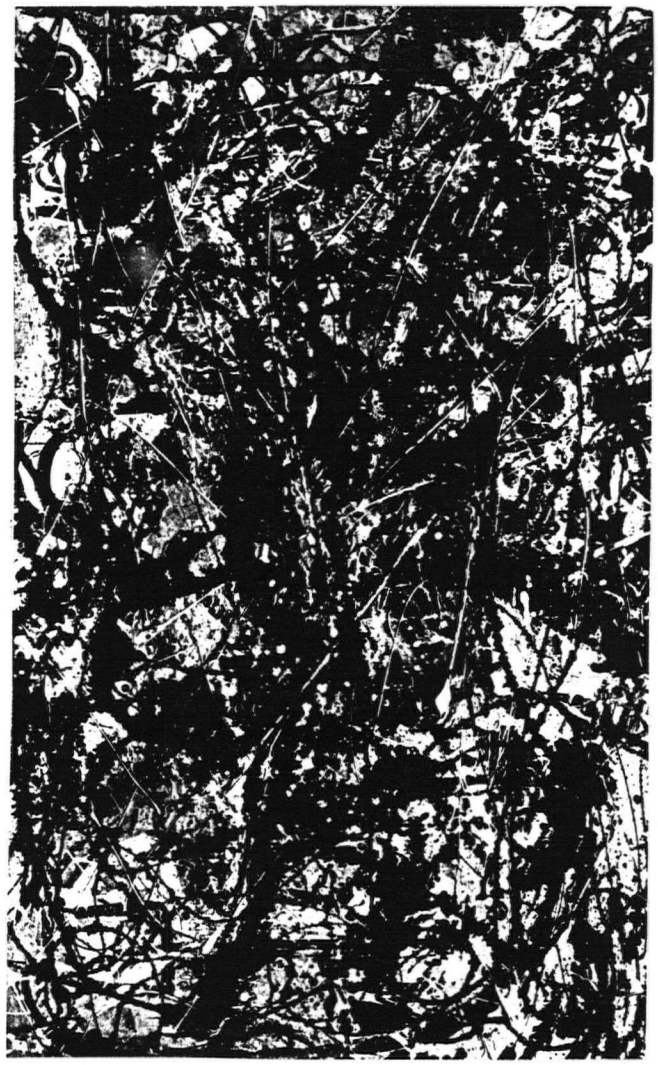

Figure 7 Jackson Pollock. *Shooting Star, 1947.* Oil on canvas, 39 x 24 inches. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 2, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 181.

Figure 8 Jackson Pollock. *Comet*, 1947. Oil on canvas. 37 1/8 x 17 7/8 inches, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works*. v. 2, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 167.

Figure 9 Jackson Pollock, *Galaxy*, 1947. Oil and aluminum paint, small gravel, 43 1/2 x 31 inches, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 2, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press.

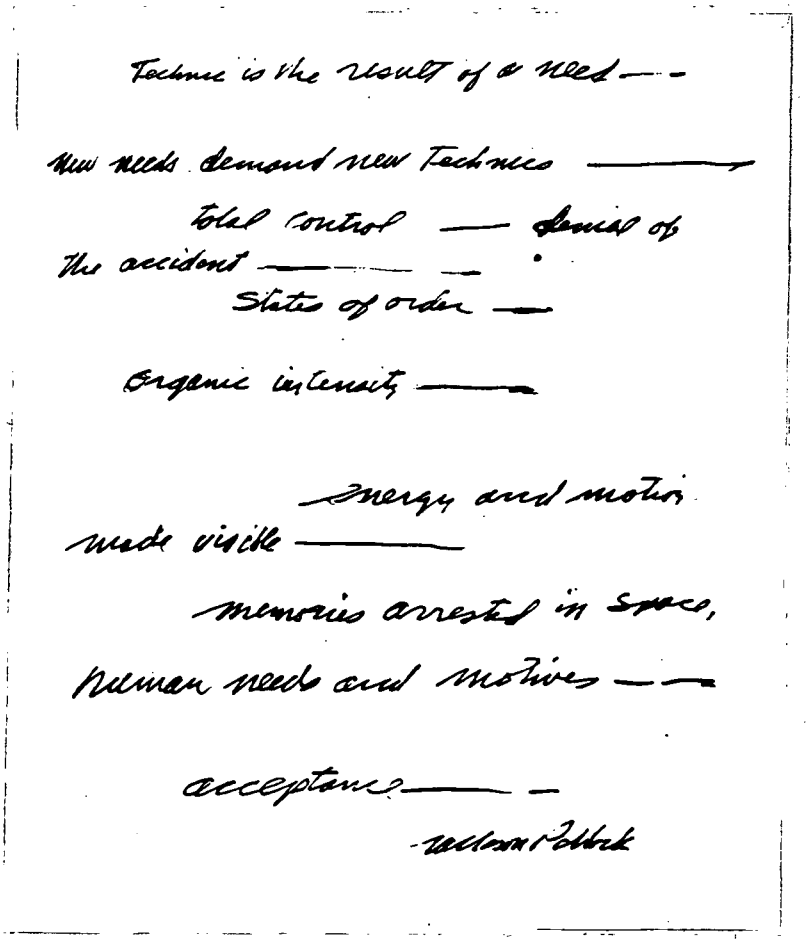

Figure 10 Jackson Pollock. Holograph statement *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 4, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 253.

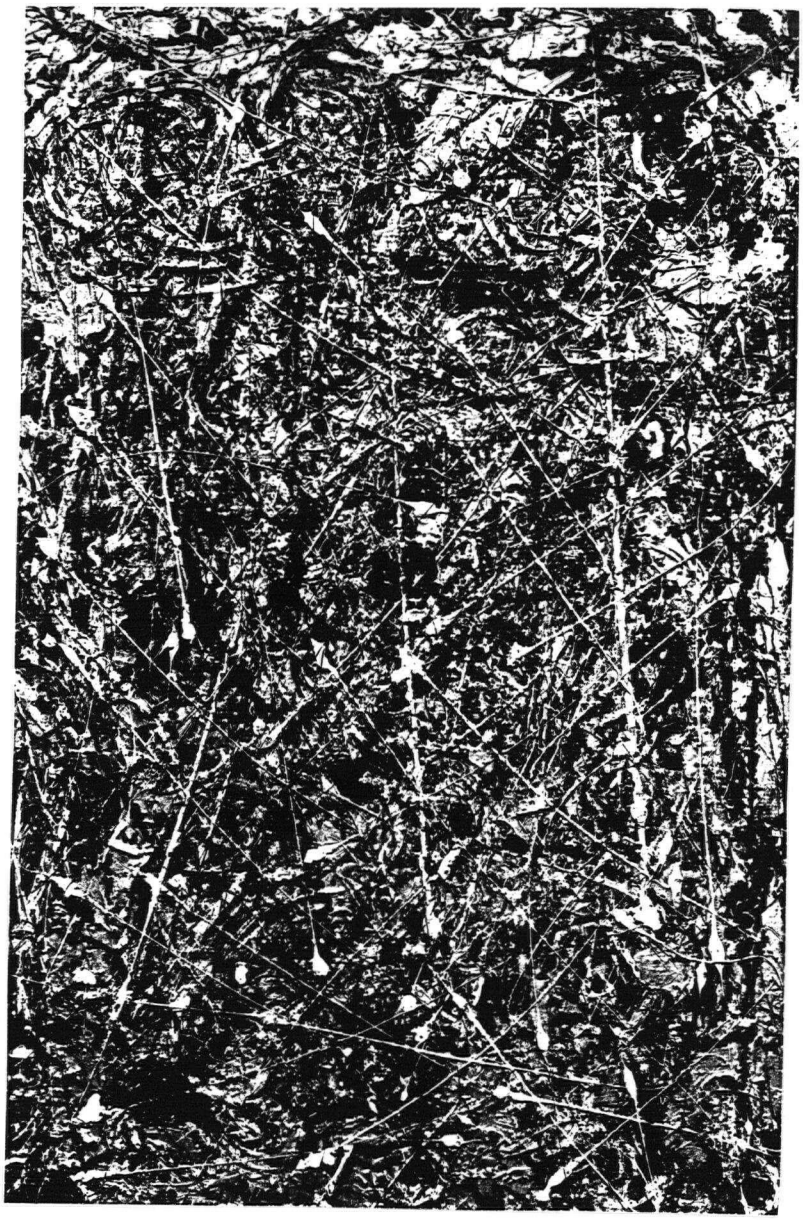

Figure 11 Jackson Pollock. *Phosphorescence.* Oil and aluminum paint on canvas, 44 x 26 inches. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy.

Figure 12 Jackson Pollock. *Number 1,* 1948. Oil on canvas, 68 x 104 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Figure 13 Jackson Pollock. *Detail of Number 1,* 1948. Oil on canvas, 68 x 104 inches. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

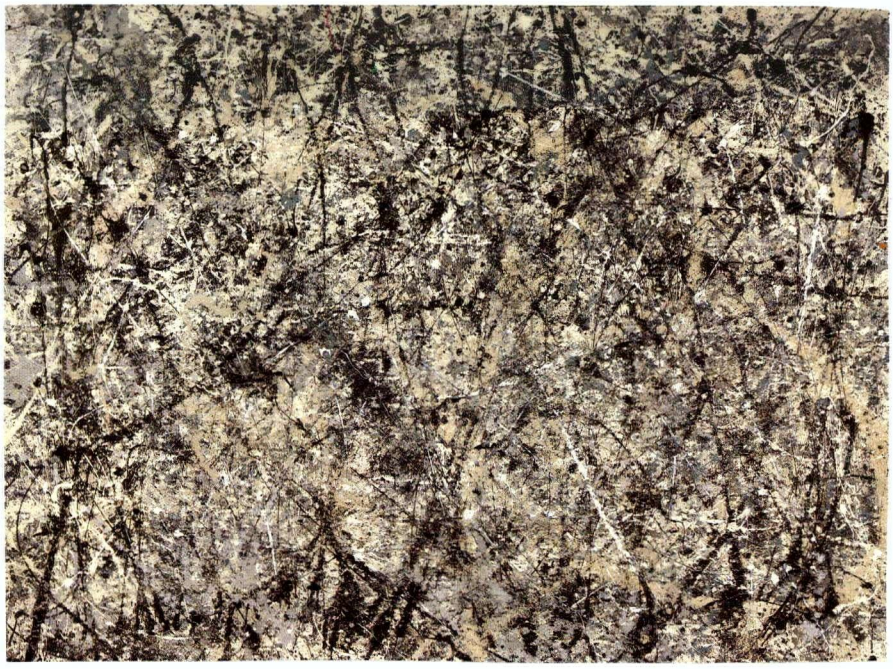

Figure 14 Jackson Pollock. *Number 1,* 1950. *(Lavender Mist).* Oil, enamel, and aluminum paint on canvas, 87 x 118 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

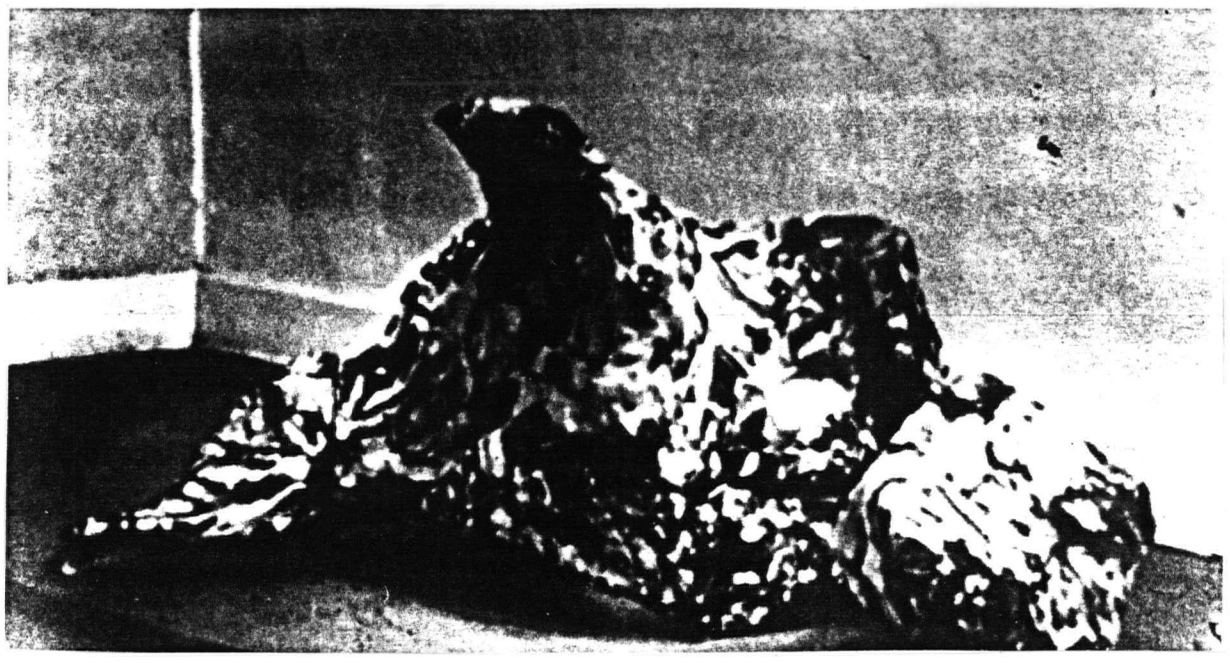

Figure 15 Jackson Pollock. Untitled, c.1951. Ink on rice paper drawings soaked in Rivet glue over chicken wire mounted on wooden door. Length about 60 inches. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 4, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 130.

Figure 16 Pollock in studio, *Number 22,* 1951. Left: *Image of Man* (*Number 3,* 1951) and *Number 15,* 1951, at right: *Number 32,* 1950 on floor. Stephen Naifeh and Gregory White Smith: *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1989, p. 666.

Figure 17 The new paintings from 1951 in Pollock's studio. Tryptich hanging at lower left. (left to right) *Number 6,* 1951,*Brown and Silver I,* 1951; *Brown and Silver II,* 1951. in *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 4, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 261.

Figure 18 Jackson Pollock. *Number 4,* 1951. in *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 2, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 129.

KEY TO THE VISUAL ANALOGY †

SHADING DEVICE	USED FOR: A. *Sectors of Personality* (Durable Personality Organizations; i.e., major motivational systems, such as fear or heterosexual interest)	B. *Shifting Field Forces in a Relationship*
	Experience fraught with anxiety.	Disjunctive force—anxiety, for example.
	Experience not incorporated in the self-system—quite difficult or impossible of access to awareness.	Sudden severe anxiety—uncanny emotion—a disjunctive force associated with outcropping of schizophrenic processes.
	Experience within the self-system—accessible to awareness or recall.	Conjunctive force—tending to improve the relationship.

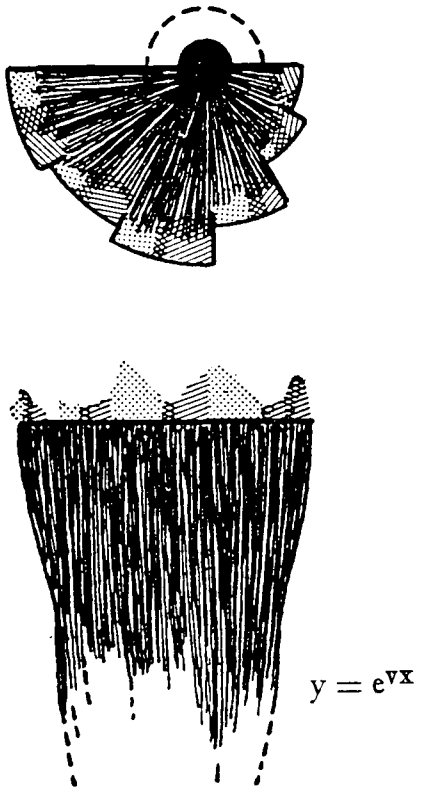

Fig. 1—Schematic of 'Personality'

Figure 19 "... way of depicting a 'personality', the hypothetical entity which we posit to account for interpersonal fields." Schematic of Personality"; and "Key to the Visual Analogy". Harry Stack Sullivan: "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and Life", in *The Fusion of Psychiatry and the Social Sciences.* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1964), pp. 239, 241.

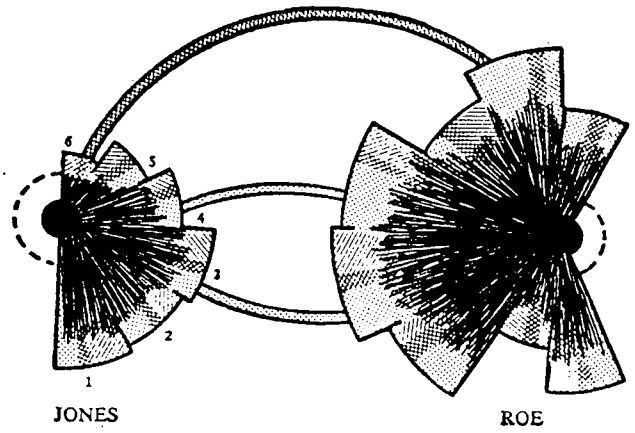

Fig. 2—Early in Relationship

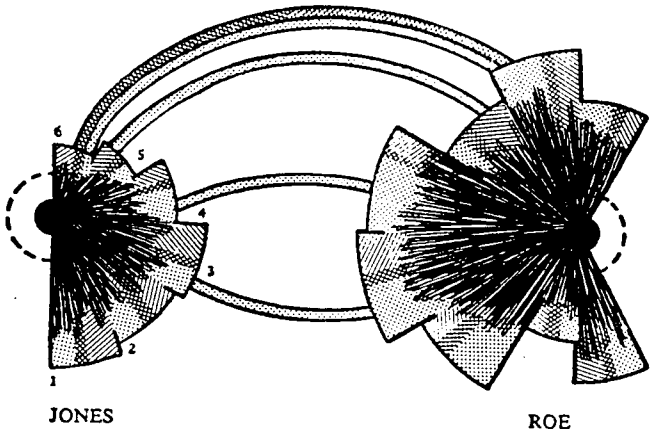

Fig. 3—Later Stage of Relationship

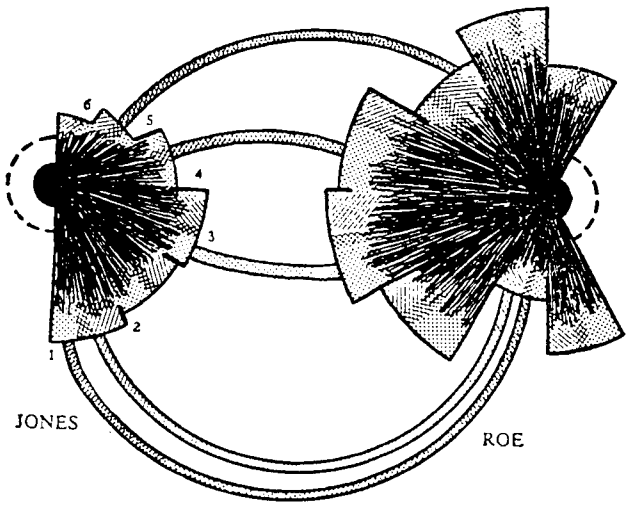

Fig. 4—'As If' Relationship After 'Episode'

Figure 20 "A Schizophrenic Episode Over Time: Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3". Harry Stack Sullivan: "The Meaning of Anxiety in Psychiatry and Life", in *The Fusion of Psychiatry and the Social Sciences.* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1964), pp. 243, 245-6.

Figure 21 Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock at The Springs (1950). in *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works.* v. 4, ed. Francis Valentine O'Connor and E. V. Thaw. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 244.

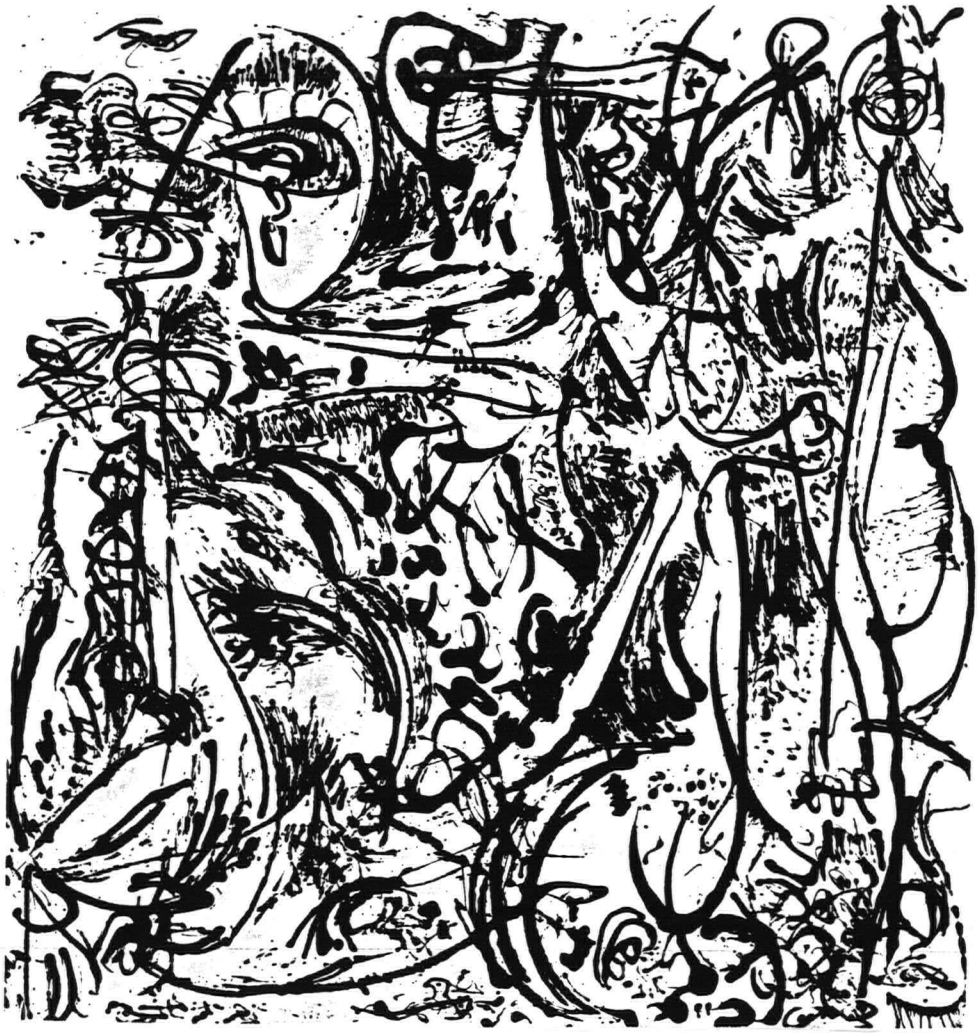

Figure 22 Jackson Pollock. *(Echo) Number Twenty Five* , 1951. Enamel on Canvas, 91 7/8 x 86 inches. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Echo: No. p. 345.

Figure 23 Jackson Pollock. *Number 20,* 1951. Enamel on canvas, 64 x 57 1/8 inches. L. A. County Museum.

Chapter 4

Hangdoggin' in Suburbia, or Plane Drunk in the Time of the Great Flood

> The air I breathe, is the condition of my life, not its cause. We could never have learnt that we had eyes but by the process of seeing; yet having seen we know that the eyes must have pre-existed in order to render the process of sight possible ... contemporaneity (Liebnitz's *Lex Continui*) is the limit and condition of the laws of mind, itself being rather a law of matter, at least of pheaenomena considered as material. At the utmost, it is to thought the same, as the law of gravitation is to loco-motion. In every voluntary movement we first counteract gravitation, in order to avail ourselves of it. It must exist, that there may be a something to be counteracted, and which by its re-action, aids the force that is exerted to resist it. Let us consider, what we do when we leap. We first resist the gravitating power by an act purely voluntary, and then by another act, voluntary in part, we yield to it in order to light on the spot, which we had previously proposed to ourselves. Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing; or, to take a still more common case, while he is trying to recollect a name; and he will find the process completely analogous. Most of my readers will have observed a small water insect on the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook; and will have noticed, how the little animal wins its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion. This is not an unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking. There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language, we must dominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the Imagination. But in common language, and especially on the subject of poetry, we appropriate the name to a superior degree of the faculty, joined to a superior voluntary controul over it.
>
> (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1811)[1]

Imagine the central stain of the final and thinnest sequence of washes beginning to seep down the taut fabric of *Salient*, 1954 (Figure 1) It is perhaps one of six or seven ethereal like suspensions that veil and make up a mysterious, sensuous, aquamarine world. Aided only by the force of gravity, its progress is a fall. Sonorous, it breathes and moves and resonates with its contact, partial union, travel across and down the canvas. With the cotton duck weave inclined at an angle, the darkish stain spreads ever so slightly across through capillary action, and steadily down by the force of gravity over an already existing surface of color. Though it flows over symmetries of pink, green, and yellow, it does not dull their hue. The

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[1]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, v. 7, n.1, (Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 123-124.

Magna acrylic paint has been thinned too extensively with turpentine to do so. It can only leave a subtle shadow of disperse particulate composed of the remnants of a once solid pigment and the utterly translucent layer of the Magna's suspension. While the stain moves under the influence of turpentine's viscosity, that turpentine is involved in a continuous process of vanishing. It evaporates as the stain moves downward and where the stain has come to rest. But rather than simply drying or coming to rest on top of pre-existing hues the stain settles and bonds within these colors; the warm liquid form of Bocours Acryloid F- 10 chemically bonding with the underlying layer and it with the weave of the 10 weight cotton duck canvas.

As gravity pulls the wide apex of stain further downward, the friction generated by the granular remnants of the once solid pigment slow its momentum behind and especially along its sides, where it forms a kind of weightless lateral moraine (Figure 2). Here, particulate mills for a moment in close proximity as surface tension in the meniscus begins to decrease. And, with its creeping, lateral threshold found, movement ceases. All that remains of this sidelong sheer is a concentration of particles that describe the subtlest sfumato, a transition rounding off into unfathomable depth. In a time the central flow reaches past the extant soundings of color and quickly soaks unprimed canvas. This resistance met, the breaking flow comes to an even, abrupt birth at the bottom. Like the fusion's of Bocours Cerulean Blue, Veridian Green, Cobalt Blue, Zinc and Cadmium Yellow above, this shadow seemingly tightens and reduces the cotton fabric in its mineral bath.[2] The fullness of the once dry weave is weighted down and condensed. The minute tailings of thread barely visible to the naked eye in raw canvas just past this threshold dissolve, and otherwise sink into that space that treated canvas as a whole now occupies. Yet, for all this, the repetitious grid-like nature of the weave becomes accentuated (Figure 3). For ultimately, the stain occupies a space below and between

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[2]See "Bocours Magna Plastic Artist Paint" Card. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis: The Complete Paintings, A Catalogue Raisonne,* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), p. 51.

warp and weft, where spun cotton fiber under less strain and tension still retains some capacity for absorption. Thus highlighted, the innumerable skips of weft form a velvety, matte surface that is as vast as it is uniformly consistent. This synthetic and untractable logic -- like the seamless totality that makes up the mediums successive pours -- unifies the otherwise diverse and confounding streamings, diffusions, and passages everywhere else in evidence. The only action left as yet incomplete is that silent creeping and settling of a halo of suspension. And, having pulled down the finest bleed of film, even this oily residue, now still, hangs tremulous, below the color and dangerously close to the edge of the canvas.[3] All that now remains of what was a determinate, finite, and intentional pour is the half-concealed trace of a process that is and was a fall: now one part of a fortuitous totality that is and was a succession of falls.

With these processes over, Morris Louis readies himself to begin again. He finally moves after the absolute stillness and immobility required of the even and continuous pour dictating his technique. He straightens his body and stands erect after having maintained a bent and stooped position over the entire period of the stain's progress. He makes a thousand gestures and motions which I cannot describe: gestures and motions now in the wake of abstract expressionism, necessarily expurgated from a practice of painting that will redefine painting. A solitary figure in the ill-lit dining room of his suburban home, he refills the small trough of stain from which he pours and adjusts the tautness of the canvas. Perhaps he shuffles over a few feet to position himself over top of the next fall line. Or more ideally he only waits for the stain to dry. Perhaps he leans up against an apparatus of sorts to aid the mechanics of the dull inertia at the heart of his technique. Perhaps he turns the unstretched canvas on its side, in order to produce what seems the final and definitive effect: that slight billowing breath of wind traveling across

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[3]Its terminal water mark later to be painted over with a thin white layer of gesso to enhance the overall "continuity of simple pattern and slow motion". Morris Louis, letter to Clement Greenberg, 6, June 1954, Clement Greenberg Papers, AAA.

and down the canvas to the left from the upper right half. It is quiet, he is motionless, and again the artist disappears as the process of staining is repeated. Possessed of all the tension required of a man watching his mind while he is composing, of an insect "winning (its) way up against a stream", Louis' immobility serves as the fulcrum for a further murmuring propulsion. This new stain, its barely audible babbling, its gentle rustling cascade, becoming a kind of sensuous extension of the motorial action of intention itself.

Imagine now John Mourly Vold conducting experiments on dreaming in Germany in the late 19th century.[4] He has a theory which requires testing. He has his assistants carefully strap him down, arms fastened securely to the torso, legs tied to one another and immobilized with a splint; the body is strapped to a bed. It is quiet. He is alone, immobile, and left to sleep, to silently await the unknown and unformed world of the dream. As consciousness wanes and nearly disappears ... a last shudder of thought ... and then ... the Idumaean night. With muscular and motor activity suspended, all movement prohibited, Vold dreams of movement. He would claim that the inhibition of movement stimulated the evolution of kinesthetic dreams, i.e., dreams of movement, of climbing, falling, flying and running.[5]

By the 1950s Vold's early opus on the nature of dreams *"Einege Experimente uber Gesichtsbilder in Traume"* had been altogether forgotten. The core of his thesis, that tension between physical stasis and the kinesthetic dream had however, been thoroughly assimilated into a vast corpus of psychological, psychiatric, and psychoanalytic literature on creativity and the subject. Vold's essential thesis had evolved into a very complex set of constructions defining the creative personality. The cluster of discourses surrounding creativity provides an initial site and

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[4]See Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books, 1970.

[5]J. Mourly Vold, "Einige Experimente uber Gesichtsbilder im Traume", *Zeitschrift fur Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* , 13, p.66.

language for entering the world of Louis' abstractions. Specifically, we take recourse in Hermann Rorschach's study *Psychodiagnostics: A Diagnostic Test Based on Perception.* Along with the numerous other Projective tests that flourished in the suspect atmosphere of the early Cold War, Rorschach's perceptual test had become one of the key inheritors of Vold's investigations. While the Rorschach technique in particular had been a crucial psychological testing device during the war, it was enjoying a marked renaissance during the years directly following upon the war when military prerogatives, especially in Europe, were shifting to the more psychological concerns of stemming "Totalitarianism" through covert propaganda operations.[6] Domestically as well, Rorschach technique was proving invaluable to the burgeoning advertising industry.[7] Yet, if *Psychodiagnostics* did possess a darker ideological legacy, it is worth pointing out that by the late 1940s, this was because it had become a fairly widespread institutionalized practice within psychiatric circles, serving as the key statistical ally and perceptual proving ground for more clinically oriented psychological determinations.[8] But then again, the empirical study of man is never exempt from the abuses to which ends a surrounding culture will employ and impoverish its science.

This chapter focuses on the way Rorschach Psychodiagnostics informed the development of Morris Louis' practice up to his first Veil series of 1954; how it was to inform an early abstract painting like *Salient*; how these discourses served as a crucial entrance or introduction to the kind of philosophical insights that were

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[6]Interesting and equall condemning in this respect are the Rorschach Tests performed on Nazi War criminals during the Nurenburg Trials, see Douglas M.Kelley, "Preliminary Studies of the Rorschach Records of the Nazi War Criminals", *Rorschach Research Exchange*, V. 10, n. 3, Oct, 1946; Theodore Adorno's use of projective methodologies in *The Authoritarian Personality*; the USIS's use of psychological testing material for the success of its propaganda operations in Europe; one also needs to aquaint oneself with the widespread application for mapping degrees of sexual deviance.

[7]See Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, (New York, David McKay Co. 1957).

[8]Most interesting in this respect is the work of Ernst Schachtel, a Rorschach teacher at the Washington School of Psychiatry. Schachtel's Rorschach protocols focus in on the phenomenolgical crux of the test, i.e., the relationship between Color and Movement responses. This approach most fully accommodated the experiential prerogatives of Sullivanian Psychiatry. See Schachtel's "Subjective Definitions of the Rorschach Test Situation and Their Effect on Test Performance", *Psychiatry*, V. 8, n. 4, 1945, pp. 419 - 448.

paramount to Clement Greenberg's reading of modernist painting in the 1950s. More to the point, I argue that the personality as defined by Rorschach protocols was central to Louis' painting and understanding of expression, only in a negative sense. Like the ontology of the kinesthetic dream proposed by Vold, expression for Louis hinged on negation -- the mutually exclusive relation between motor activity and kinesthesia being only one example. The physical and sensuous appearance of surface, in paintings like *Salient, Intrigue* (1951) (Figure 4), *Atomic Crest* (1951) (Figure 5), and *Pendulum* (1951) (Figure 6), is central to this. It is the paradox of a highly formalized technique blissfully unaware of the global dynamics of kinesthetic movement and color it produces. It is the paradox of an aesthetic state believed to function on the far side of the intentional processes upon which it is based.

This chapter addresses the question why the shift to abstraction in the 1950s was surrounded by any sense of urgency at all. Why indeed for one grouping of individuals abstraction was at the core of the only critical relation with the surrounding culture that one might forge. I argue, in accord with Greenberg -- though qualifiedly so -- that a painting like *Salient* was founded upon an antagonistic relation with America's consumption oriented economy, the instrumental nature of the bureaucratic landscape, and the determinate modes and character of a suburban existence. The fact is, a painting like *Salient* was intended as a negation of everything life, society, and culture had come to stand for in the United States of America at mid-century. As the harshest condemnation of that present conceivable, it stood as the most lucid expression of that modernity.

The strange, blandly confrontational look of the painting could only have put even the most sympathetic viewer of Baltimore's arts community on edge. Reviewing Louis' one man show at the French and Company Gallery later in New York in 1960, *Art News* is still at a loss for words. No explanation can be sufficient, it seems, if it in any way reduces the mystery and unfathomable nature implicit. Louis' paintings, the nameless reviewer writes

> ... are non-representational in the sense of not representing any specific thing, yet they suggest natural appearance. In looking for words to describe them one finds oneself stuck with words like orchids, anemones, stamens, ebb tides, beaches. Some are very simple ... Others are complex ... They are bland paintings. They seem to have drifted into the gallery, pulled in by a sixth-floor sea, and, like anchorites, attached themselves to the walls to remain there when the tide ebbed.[9]

If painting was "to remain cogent or relevant at all", in Greenberg's words, it had necessarily to become supremely bland and distanced. To become bland it had of necessity to make expression other-wordly. Painting had to remove expression to the ambiguity of a kind of intertidal zone, where the sign or gesture of abstract expressionism could no longer claim any secure existence. It was a question of expurgating the discreet allegorical sign from painting, in order to distill the symbolic nature of the mark. It was a question of replacing the representation, sign, or gesture of experience for experience itself. In Louis' Veil paintings the symbolic is entirely determined by the controlling metaphor of totality. If painting was now to be cogent, if it was now to be experience rather than merely a representation of experience, it had necessarily to remove expression from the affectation of the gesture or sign and exile it to the level of form, i.e. to the unity, homogeneity, immediacy, or synchronic aspect of surface. Any and all discussion of Louis' painting must begin with a recognition of the expressive complex as such; a problematizing of the complex that Louis himself was both supremely aware of and scrupulous in guarding.

In my argument the expressive or symbolic complex that surface metaphorically represents, does not fulfill the parameters of a critical project as it did for Louis or Greenberg. Rather, in my reading, the metaphor of totality only serves as a departure for a historical reading. Which is to say, in distinction to the founding premise of Greenberg's reading of modernist art, that expressivity (that aspect of immediacy or all-overness) rather than territorializing a wholeness beyond or on the far side of ideological totality, is actually the only moment when that totalizing

[9]L.C. *Art News*, May 1960, p. 14.

system is encoded whatsoever. In this respect the formal reading of the work, form as the controlling metaphor of totality, can remain as the principle imperative in art historical investigation, a position it has otherwise been excluded from in the vast majority of examples that social art history has offered up in the past two decades and more. Rather than a utopian space beyond meaning and the sign, a space of pure presence, expressive quality, what have you, the immediacy and wholeness of painting's surface is that space where historical process is most fully encoded. The labor which is implicit to making the medium a metaphor of totality is what Adorno calls "the social labor" of "synthetic apperception".[10] In this sense, a reading of the work as social contingency remains intact, but only insofar as the social is acknowledged as the mystery behind the instantaneous moment of "synthetic apperception", that which Greenberg localized as the expressive potential of the surface.

Psychodiagnostics offers an especially revealing entrance into the Kantian problematic of "synthetic apperception", that upon which Louis founded his assumptions of the aesthetic state. In a sense, the affective status accorded kinesthetic movement and color in the Rorschach test isolated the Kantian moment of apperception in terms of verifiable perceptual cues. For Louis, the symbolic moment of becoming, a moment before and other to consciousness was blindly constituted by the relations struck between successive washes of stain. The expressive content of painting resided thus in a determinate negation of the processes that brought it into being. Louis' painting is about the paradise regained after the Fall. It is about a state of grace made up of a mobile flow of metaphors all the same, dead metaphors, metaphors without life, movement, or distinguishing features. The paradise of immediate apperception is the time of the great flood. For if it is a paradise without likeness, the impossible moment of enlightenment, the constitutive moment of the subject, it is also the greatest illusion, a topoi at least as

[10]Theodore Adorno, "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy", trans. S.W. Nicholsen, in *Hegel: Three Studies*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 25-28.

powerful and deluded as that of Vold's early discovery and investigation into the dream of a symbolic realm of movement. A serious study of Louis' painting must necessarily begin with a bow to and an acknowledgment of the unity and seamlessness that makes surface, the critical nature of a project fueled by the dream of totality, only to proceed by a mortification of the work.[11]

To begin this work of mortification we need to understand certain developments in Louis' practice up to the point of the first Veil series, specifically during the period from 1948 to 1953. This five year period is decisive to the emergence of the Veils. This, despite the fact that it is a period devoted principally to drawing. Nevertheless, the shift in Louis' practice in the wake of these investigations into drawing is dramatic. Indeed the first Veil series is a shift described by Michael Fried as a "breakthrough", a "repudiation", and a "revulsion against that (previous) work and its assumptions".[12] The radical nature of this break will be crucial to our argument as well. For it is a point where personality or a theory of identity serves as a departure for the non-identical or symbolic space of movement and becoming. In this regard the works from 1948 - 1953 appear as a kind of testing of discursive limits focused entirely upon the qualities of line. They verge on a series of mathematical proofs that attempt to methodically territorialize expression through the medium of drawing. As we will see, line and drawing prove ultimately inadequate to the task.

Consider Louis' first one-man show in April of 1953 at the Washington Workshop Art Center Gallery. He had begun teaching classes in painting at the liberal arts center earlier in the year and had evidently established himself there as a force on the faculty. The key figures behind the founding of The Washington Workshop Art Center were Leon and Ida Berkowitz. Their politics were Democratic

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[11]Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, p.
[12]Michael Fried, *Morris Louis*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1979, p. 12.

and aligned specifically to the hopes of Adalai Stevenson.[13] Their project was for a community based arts center with a therapeutic orientation. Courses in photography, music appreciation, painting, and radio broadcasting were established under the great auspices "of the kind of thinking which recent researches and activities of psychiatry have fostered" (Figure 7).[14] An early prospectus for the center, written by Leon Berkowitz, ably captures what I think the tone and enthusiasm of this small collective of Washington's finest must have been like.

> Our emotional instabilities called normal to our times by Karen Horney, require emotionally satisfying experiences, so that we may become whole and stable personalities. The United States Army found it increasingly necessary to provide recreational and creative experiences for its soldiers. Inside and out of clinics, the arts have been playing increasingly significant roles as therapy for emotional disturbance. It seems pathetic that emotionally satisfying experience should be denied an individual until his imbalance has reached the proportions of pathology. As compensation for the regimentation of modern life, experience in the creative arts, constitutes a need recognized by psychiatry and felt consciously or not by most people.[15]

The Washington Workshop Art Center was, simply put, one small enclave within a wider culture in the environs of Washington D. C., profoundly influenced by the understanding of modern psychiatry, and deeply under the spell of the possibilities it held for social life. The faith Berkowitz places in the new science of psychiatry is not overstated. The belief in the efficacy of its understandings among a number of the faculty ran deep, Louis included (Figure 8).[16] The works chosen for Louis' one man show at the Center were not an anomaly in this kind of environment either. Running through them all is a consistent set of concerns -- certainly they are veiled and cryptic but concerns nonetheless -- which hinge on the rubric "of the kind of thinking which recent researches and activities of psychiatry" had fostered. On the whole Louis' works retrace a very personal account of

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[13]See letter from Adlai Stevenson to Ida Berkowitz. Leon and Ida Berkowitz Papers, AAA.

[14]Leon Berkowitz, "A Program of Action for the Arts in D.C.", 1947?. Leon and Ida Berkowitz Papers, AAA. p. 2.

[15]Leon Berkowitz, "A Program of Action for the Arts in D.C.", pp. 2-3.

[16]As late as 1957 Louis would help organize a series of art exhibitions at the University of Maryland's Psychiatric Institute. The first of such shows was comprised of Louis' painting students and was entitiled "Stages in the Creative Process". See Kenneth Sawyer "Stages in the Creative Process", *The Baltimore Sun*, Sunday, May 4, 1958, Sec. A, p.7. And Sawyer's "Exhibit at Psychiatric Institute", *The Baltimore Sun*, Sunday, Apr. 12, Sec. A, p. 4.

modernism's historical progress of form and political engagement. They span from the surrealist inspired *Charred Journal Firewritten II,* 1951 (Figure 9) an overtly political condemnation of Nazi book burnings,[17] to the collage-like effects of the *Tranquilities III,* 1952-53 (Figure 10), a homage to Motherwell's *Elegies to the Spanish Republic.* Finally as a kind of culminating moment, there are Louis' Selected Drawings from 1953, representing his most contemporary contribution to that point, one totaling the sum of a crucial three year period of work.[18] Apparently the exhibition offered Louis the opportunity to reconstruct a history of modernist painting and synthesize a statement *in extremis* .

Unlike the later drawings, the political message of the early paintings is clear, perhaps naively so. They are more or less didactic political statements. They stand as a clear signpost to Louis' knowledge and engagement with the general batch of concerns we have described as part and parcel of liberal politics in the 1950s; part and parcel of the concerns of a painter of already forty one years, well read in Sigmund Freud, Hermann Rorschach, David Riesman, and Harry Stack Sullivan;[19] part and parcel of everyday life in the atomic age with all its anxieties -- news of "totalitarianism", heightened Cold War tensions, renewed support for McCarthy amidst an ever expanding middle class, unbounded consumerism and the encroachment of middle brow culture. With all this in mind the trajectory marked out by the exhibition is intriguing, less in terms of the stark contrast between the mediums of painting and drawing than in the continuity I have alluded to, that exists between them. One wonders first of all if the same big political issues impinged upon and informed the later drawings of 1953 as they had the earlier paintings. Or if the sketchbook and loose-leaf-style drawings, with their purely formal concerns, were instead offering a retreat and haven from the troubling times,

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[17]This is noted by Diane Upright Headley (*The Drawings of Morris Louis* , p.52.) and was as well conveyed in conversation to me, by Marcella Brenner, May, 1993.

[18]See John Elderfield, *Morris Louis, The Museum of Modern Art, New York,* (Little Brown and Co., 1987), pp. 10-11.

[19]Marcella Louis Brenner Interview.

a turn inward that prophetically foreshadows the later mature stain painting. The bulk of the literature on Louis is certainly of this latter opinion. It is an assumption implicit to the Kantian bent of most formalist criticism.

To state it plainly once again this chapter's argument, the argument of this thesis as a whole, turns on a reassessment of certain Kantian assumptions of high modernist painting; that indeed there is a deep interconnectedness between the avowedly antithetical spheres of the moral and the aesthetic. One way of beginning to trace the development of Louis' notion of expression is by looking at the works from the Washington exhibition as a whole, for a possible link which might unify them. Certainly one thread of continuity which spans the entire five year period is Louis' concentration on the complex of issues surrounding drawing and line. The question is clear enough, I think, with regard to the group of works entitled "Selected Drawings". But what about the earlier canvas'? Was line or drawing a concern here? Take one of the early paintings, *Charred Journal Firewritten II*, (1951) (Figure 9) for instance. This is easel painting fully aware of surrealist inspired automatic writing in the paired down form of Juan Miro. Equally, it is fully conscious of abstract expressionism, most obviously Pollock's abstractions in which line and drawing carry the burden of expression. What is interesting though -- and as we will see it is as persistent a thematics as that of drawings' surrealist legacy -- is the problem of drawings' cubist heritage. In *Firewritten I* this cubist inheritance only just surfaces in the subtle patterning which organizes the background. By pressing squares and lengths of toilet paper into the wet black paint, Louis has laid down a gridwork that structures space on the cubist model. In all the works between 1948 - 1953 Louis struggles with this double inheritance, an inheritance which is increasingly distilled out by 1953 as an irreconcilable tension that we can only label the dual ontology of line: line as "mark" which is related to the totality that is the

medium, and line in its graphic form as discreet sign.[20] Ordinarily conceived of as distinct from the history and teleology of modernist painting, drawing in Louis' first solo exhibition is placed in an explicit and definitive relationship with it.[21] For Louis, drawing and the quality of line addressed a set of problems that the traditional easel painting was then facing, problems which Pollock's abstractions had in large part precipitated; problems that Louis felt, at least in 1953 had psychologically oriented solutions.

Leon Berkowitz's "Statement on the Artist", from the 1953 exhibition, undoubtedly provides the best entrance in this respect (Figure 11). Despite the almost mystical and cosmological undertones of Berkowitz's own understanding of Louis' perspective, the implications of his reading stand as a significant signpost as to Louis' own thoughts. Certainly Louis would have okayed the statement, and undoubtedly the nexus of issues taken up by Berkowitz would also have been central to Louis' own conceptualizations. Transcending "material and means", Berkowitz writes, Louis' work ...

> ... moves with the dizzying speed of cosmic forces, sometimes slowed to the beat of a human pulse -- the line weaves, explores, pauses, searches ... discovers. One sometimes is reminded of Miro's sureness of control, sometimes of Klee's finality of linear statement. But unlike these artists, Louis' work has the temperature and feel of interplanetary space rather than the familiar world, space or time.
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> To say, however, that the canvases are cold would be inaccurate. They move and stir emotion with a kinesthesia that seems to stem from forces outside of us -- forces that one associates with the natural energies of the atom and distant planets or the mysterious electricity generated by touch and sense. There is a mystery here -- a surrealism that is neither fearful as in Dali nor lyrical as in Ernst. It is pure -- clear, not dreamlike -- but wide awake. The work is a research into the mysteries bound up in movement, as though the artist has become a catalyst through whom the complex dynamics of our world has poured new meaning.[22]

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[20] I use Walter Benjamin's distinctions here. See "Painting, or Signs and Marks", in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913 - 1926.* Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 83 - 86.

[21] This argument is, of course, nothing new; it follows in the wake of Greenberg's and Fried's contributions. Michael Fried writes: See Michael Fried's catalogue essay in *Morris Louis* . He argues correctly that drawing and specifically drawing in Pollock is at the crux of Louis' achievement in the first "Veils".

[22] Leon Berkowitz, "Statement on the Artist", *Paintings by Morris Louis,* . Washington Workshop Art Center Gallery, April 1953. Morris Louis Papers, AAA.

As "a research into the mysteries bound up in movement", Berkowitz's summation of the artist's project seems conclusive in the confidence of its account. In a work like *Firewritten I* not only does Louis' calligraphy "move with the dizzying speed of cosmic forces" ... it ... "slows to the beat of a human pulse". His "line weaves, explores, pauses, searches ... discovers". His canvases themselves "move and stir emotion with a kinesthesia". For Berkowitz movement was the central feature unifying all of Louis' work. It was the decisive quality in both Louis' painting and drawing up until 1953. Movement as a function of line in its two-fold aspect was at the heart of Louis' researches. But what exactly do we mean by movement as a function of line?

Take *Geometry of a Fish* (1953) (Figure 12). I take it as a pivotal moment in Louis' practice, ultimately a moment when the dual ontology of line -- both its cubist and surrealist heritage -- is diagramatically laid bare, the divergent functions of each are held in tension. Inscribed at lower right, "Geometry of a Fish Jan. 1953, Louis", we are pointed toward what is apparently one of the two divergent possibilities that line possesses: its linguistic function. Art historically the references are clearer; the architectonic gridwork of cubism or of some geometric abstraction offers a counterpoint to a kind of surrealist derived automatic drawing. It is as if Alfred H. Barr's classic genealogy of "The Development of Abstract Art", with its distinction between Geometric Abstraction and Non-Geometric Abstraction, is presented here as the great aporia facing modernism. What is important here, though, is less the discreet components of the work than the way these irreconcilable oppositions are placed in tension with one another. Certainly the juxtaposition of a quick and loose drawing over top of a grid work appears unresolved and preliminary. But despite this, what strikes one about the drawing is the way that this awkward combination of styles accommodates one another. Look, for instance, at the way the local inflections of line in the service of a biomorphic figuration are sublated by the homogeneity of line in the service of gridwork. When

we look at the drawing this operation is almost forefronted, perhaps even forcedly so. The tilted plane going off into depth emphasizes both the loosely conceived gestalt form, and simultaneously the background grid. This tension betwixt and between is absolutely central to grasping what Louis' practice was trying and struggling to achieve during these years: what we might describe as the sublating of lines graphic character to its capacity for expression as "absolute mark".

I think Berkowitz's focus on movement is helpful here. He also pinpoints two types of movement. A first which "moves with the dizzying speed of cosmic forces, sometimes slowed to the beat of a human pulse", and a second type not "cold", but that "move(s) and stir(s) emotion with a kinesthesia".[23] The implications are clear. Line in Louis' painting and drawing works on two levels. A first type of movement that is local, specific, and particular, and a second level of movement equated with kinesthesia operating in terms of the medium as a whole. In *Geometry of a Fish* both types of movement, a literal and a figural movement if you will, are present. Real physical speed and force is manifest in the automatic configurations that a system of signs might enforce, while a second potentiality is housed somehow by the homogeneity or wholeness that the mark as part of a gridwork possess. It is because the two-sidedness of line is placed in such lucid tension that *Geometry of a Fish* represents such a crucial moment in Louis' practice. It aligns his intentions and his understanding of expression with that of Pollock. If we recall Pollock's achievement, for Greenberg at least, was to spectacularize the motor pleasure of line to such an extent that line's graphic possibility was in fact negated by its all-overness. Built up layer-upon-layer from the thick and complex textures and weaves, line in Pollock's abstractions loses the sense of its traditional function as discreet sign or figure and gains an identity only in relation to surface totality. Or at least again, this is as Greenberg would have it. For Pollock's line possesses a literal or physical presence as surface totality, only insofar

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[23]Leon Berkowitz, "Statement on the Artist", *Paintings by Morris Louis*, April 1953. Workshop Art Center Gallery.

as it simultaneously encodes activity or mobility at the local level. Quite to the contrary of what Greenberg or Fried would argue, it seems line always implies and implicates the figure/ground relation.[24] Line's velocity, pressure, speed, and direction was a possibility existing alongside its expressive potential. Even in the smallest format, say from Louis' sketch book, the linguistic power of line could not be avoided: the varying pressure of pen on paper, soft at times and hard at others, invariably becomes a cipher of muscular activity, or signification of identity. Only insofar as line functioned as the "cold", dead sign of a linguistic system could it, as Berkowitz noted, "move and stir emotion with a kinesthesia."

If line's capacity to mobilize the figurative was activated through a number of perceptual processes involving focal differentiation, localizing prejudices, directional discriminations identifying physical movement, indeed any and all cues constitutive of that accelerated accumulation of data making up the gestalt effect, Louis practice up to 1953 was an attempt to undo these tendencies through the construction of an image which functioned to negate these various impetus. Line would sublate its very function by the equivalence and homogeneity it was forced to assume; wholeness and totality was to combat the racing act of focal attention which characterized the gestalt process, even if that gestalt process picked up on the gesture of abstract expressionism. No aspect of the surface would be privileged any more than any other, lest that aspect gain some momentum and take a fuller flight into meaning.

The tension between a kind of slow languorous movement equated with expression and the racing speed of an eye reading details for meaning is not unimportant. The Veils remember are positively bland. They are as boring as painting gets. They are about as exciting as watching paint dry, which is precisely what Louis did for the majority of his time in the converted dining-room studio of

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[24]One needs to read Clark's great passage on the dilemma's involved in reading Pollocck's abstractions to get any sense of the urgency of this debate. T.J. Clark, "Jackson Pollocks Abstractions", in *Reconstructing Modernism.*

his suburban home. Perhaps the logic of Louis' picturing proceeded thusly: if the linguistic possibility of line was to be stemmed, then line's graphic possibility was to be forced into a subservience to the whole, thereby assuring that surface would remain at a consistent and dull speed. Perhaps this is all very mundane, boring, and banal, but for someone whose faith in dialectics promised a salvaging of the symbolic by way of a Kantian aesthetics of detachment, it was all very emotionally charged.

In this regard *Geometry of a Fish* represents less a resolution than a dead end or stalemate. For in view of Louis' radical shift in production with the first "Veil" series later that year, we can safely assume that any attempt to isolate kinesthetic movement or expression alone was bound to be a failure. Perhaps *Geometry of a Fish* was made in full light of the fact that this was so. Perhaps it was made as a final statement, a statement in *extremis* meant precisely to lay bare an unresolvable contradiction. For in effect, this final penultimate work from the period puts line to the test of refusing its own function. At the same time that Louis acknowledges lines primacy in the perceptual process, as always already a sign for muscular speed, direction, force, or intensity, he attempts to combat this supremacy for the antithetical end of expression. What we can say with some certainty is that in the aftermath of its production Louis realized that line or drawing was ultimately at odds with distilling the "emotion of kinesthesia"; that drawing, given its inherent linguistic dimension was antithetical to the specific requirements of distilling the medium's expression.

This is claiming a lot for one drawing, even claiming a lot for Louis' work during the period. However Louis' practical and theoretical knowledge of such perceptual problems was extensive. We know, for instance, that in 1949 he had collaborated with Dr. Ira Lewis at the United States Public Health Service on what was known as The Tuberculosis Project.[25] A rare collage from Louis' collaboration

[25]Louis' wife Marcella worked at the Tuberculosis Center. She was the editor of publications.

shows a shadowy figure that is perhaps a little too film noirish for the purposes of the U. S. Public Health Service (Figure 13). This was, as the proposal for the project states, research into the "development of uniform techniques and criteria in order to increase consistency and reliability of interpretation" in Tuberculosis chest x-rays.[26] In the introduction to his background essay for the project, written in 1950, Louis outlines the way psychological understandings, specifically Rorschach's understanding of kinesthetic movement, might aid the project.

> The practice of psychiatric medicine and intelligence testing in clinics as well as in normal institutions, such as colleges, has given further use of the Rorschach test to our society. The kinesthetic basis for the test is well established by its author in Psychodiagnostics, and the broad possibility for personality index(ing) and intelligence testing based on the rapport (between) the subject and pictures has focused great attention on this work. It is perhaps of value to note that Rorschach scored the responses to his inkblots with the same priorities that an artist who makes a painting gives to it. Of first importance to building a picture is the necessity of dealing with its forms (the form content), color for shock value or other purposes in the painting is usually secondary, and line development comes about with the gradual stages of the painting.[27]

This is a rich historical document. Louis ascribes "forms", i.e., a paintings "form-content", what Rorschach test protocols more commonly refer to as kinesthetic movement, the principle role in "building a picture". We have to be careful here. The phrase "building a picture" is somewhat misleading. For as Louis remarks "building a picture" was contingent on "dealing with its forms". Which is to say, while the parts were intentionally dealt with, the "form-content" itself arose from an unintentional con-joining of the parts. Apparently kinesthesia's were the product of an unintentional totality resulting from an intentional working with surface. If pinpointing kinesthesia's were the decisive category in Louis' approach to painting this had a more practical application as well. An understanding of

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[26]Ira Lewis, " Form 1: Public Health Service Research Projects and Investigations Proposed for Fiscal Year 1951". National Institute of Health, Office of the Director, Office of Research and Planning. Subject files, 1948-56. RG 443, Box 41, NN3-90-89-3, National Archives and Record Administration of the United States of America.

[27]Louis Writings, 1950, Tuberculosis Project. Archives of American Art. p. 1. There are two drafts of this essay in the Morris Louis Papers, with only subtle grammatical alterations in each.

kinesthesia's offered the possibility of a fail-proof method for x-ray film reading. Louis continues ...

> . . . having determined the validity of using certain pictures in the Rorschach method of testing personalities, it is wise to investigate further possibilities, of other types of pictures . . . what would be the spectator's reaction in terms of shock to either the right or left identical half of (an) inkblot, totally destroying its symmetry, after being subjected to the serenity of symmetries? . . . In Radiology , there is the ever-pressing doubt of film readings. The kinesthetic reaction of one radiologist to a certain x-ray film is apparently too frequently not the response of his fellow reader . . . there exists the possibility that the ailment of this profession may be attributed to the fundamental approach of x-ray reading in which the abnormal is looked for on the films. Perhaps the opposite approach, that of giving prior recognition to seeking out the normal in place of the abnormal, would lend itself to less disagreement among the readers as to what does exist on the plate.
> . . . So far too little work has been done in attempting to discover why there are these visual difference's and no one has yet employed artists' talents on a scale sufficient to come to any conclusion, even the conclusion of eliminating form evaluation in the x-rays as an important deterrent. Assuming that a certain group of radiologists have similar form kinesthetic apportionment, the possibility that either personality differences between the readers or obtuse methods of reading the films persist. For example cannot the visual area of the readers be detracted by the fact that they are reading the films and simultaneously being physicians and making diagnoses; perhaps the two areas of the work should be split. (Let the one with greater kinesthetic perception read the films even without the medical degree and have the physician diagnose on the basis of the abstract or absent reading. What of the possibility that the ailments of the profession may be attributed to its adolescent stage of learning to read films [28]

Whereas conventional wisdom relied upon actually scanning or reading x-rays for abnormality according to a set pattern of looking in grids, Louis' proposal for detecting the abnormal tubercular lung involved a process referred to as "gestalting". For Louis, if radiology was to become a pure science, the act of focal attention or reading had to be "eliminated" from the interpretive process. Taking the image in at a glance by gestalting might end the inaccuracies and pitfalls of the profession. The short, hard glance, was a way of looking that was all too familiar to those in the intimate circle of Greenberg. Recalling Louis' work on the Tuberculosis project Marcella Louis Brenner recalls that Ira Lewis (the head of the project and personal friend) was an advocate of "looking in grids". Louis doubted the efficacy of this technique and "preferred a total image technique" ... one taking "in a visual image at an enormous speed" .[29]

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[28]Louis Writings, 1950, Tuberculosis Project. Archives of American Art. p. 2.

[29]Marcella Louis Brenner in conversation, May 8, 1994.

> It was very interesting to go to the museum with Morris, because he looked very fast. He would physically move quickly and he gave a fast intense look and then looked away ... and looked at something else ... and looked away ... and you had the feeling that he had the whole thing in his mind. As a matter of fact he had the ability to look at a disk on a record player and read it. It was an ability to take in fast what one sees.[30]

The way Greenberg would look at paintings depended on the same fast, hard look. Apparently just after Louis' death, with a large number of rolled canvases not as yet seen by anyone, Greenberg had come to help with matters of the estate. Marcella describes the way Greenberg had viewed Louis' canvases on this occasion.

> Clem would sit in the kitchen, with a glass, and wait to view the paintings. We would call him ... and he would come in to the living room being careful as not to look at the paintings being unrolled ... he would only wait for the full image or painting to lay on the floor ... at which point he would say a few words, and then go back into the kitchen.

The short, hard glance that took in the painting as a whole, avoiding detail, was a decisive tactic. It allowed for a way of looking which ultimately permitted a small window of opportunity before reading took place. In so doing it localized a moment when the eye took in the "total image", the only moment when kinesthetic movement was a possibility. This mode of looking had, as we have seen with regard to Greenberg's own aesthetic priorities important repercussions in regard to visual production. Insuring or encouraging the fast, hard look, Greenberg's "first fresh glance", or "instantaneous shock of sight", was absolutely critical if expression was to be distilled from the medium of painting.[31] The medium's expressive content was framed exclusively by this possibility. Anterior to any processes of interpretation, the moment of spontaneous affect, encapsulated a temporal instant when the materiality of sensation had not as yet dissolved or become suppressed by the operations of consciousness. It embodied a somatic response to the image, a moment during which sensations still retained some more essential fullness and plenitude.

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[30]Marcella Brenner on Morris Louis. Oral Histories Collection. AAA.
[31]Greenberg, "On Looking at Pictures", p.34.

In sum, we can say that a notion of kinesthetic experience was central to Louis' efforts of "increasing the consistency and reliability of interpretation" in X-ray reading.[32] As the sole imperative for Louis' method of x-ray reading it theoretically offered an irreproachable technique that accessed universally applicable laws which the artist with "good kinesthetic apportionment" was able to utilize. Importantly it was the complement of a very specific approach to looking at painting. And as much one pole of a tension at the core of Louis' painting and drawing between 1948 - 1953. In what follows I argue that the same notion of kinesthesia remains central to Louis' painting from 1954, is indeed the crucial tension that Louis' paintings from the first Veil series depends.

With regard to Louis' specific understanding of kinesthesia Hermann Rorschach is helpful. In his 1921 book *Psychodiagnostics: A Diagnostic Test Based on Perception* he outlines the inverse relations existing between kinesthetic movement on the one hand and physical mobility on the other hand. The mutually exclusive nature of this relation bears, I think, an important perspective on Louis' investigations. According to Rorschach the "otherness" of the short, hard glance, which instantaneously grasped the total image and militated against focal differentiation, directly accessed the physical substantiality of the mnemic system.

> Perceptions arise from the fact that sensations, or groups of sensations, ecphorize memory pictures of former groups of sensations within us. This produces in us a complex of memories or sensations, the elements of which, by virtue of their simultaneous occurrence in former experiences, have a particularly fine coherence and are differentiated from other groups of sensations. In perception, therefore we have three processes; sensation, memory, and association. -- This identification of a homogenous group of sensations with previously acquired analogous complexes, together with all their connections, we designate as "apperception".
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> If perception can also be called an associative integration of available engrams (memory-pictures) with recent complexes of sensations, then the interpretation of chance forms can be

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[32] This way of looking processed the visual data of the x-ray using the unmistakable and spontaneous symmetry inherent to the lungs and the human body itself. Similar to the symmetrical constructions implicit to the Rorschach blots, the mirrored or doubled image forced the viewer to process the visual stimuli at a glance and hence as a totality. In the lung unbalanced by contagion, the discreet component of viral swelling would disrupt this seamless process: the peculiar kinesthetic dynamics of the non-symmetrical field falling short of memory engrams. A "kinesthetic reaction" resulting from imbalance, one presumably possessing a "shock value" after the "serenity of symmetries", would in the long run lead to more efficient and reliable identification of Tuberculosis. The tubercular lung would force the viewer into a projective act of interpretation.

called a perception in which the effort of integration is so great that it is realized consciously as an effort. This intrapsychic realization that the complex of sensations and the engrams are not perfectly identical gives the perception the character of an interpretation.[33]

The difference between "apperception" and "interpretation", as defined by Rorschach, is crucial here. At a certain threshold the distinction between an "unconscious" and a conscious process becomes complete. Difference hinged upon an assimilative effort, an active and engaged set of associative processes requiring projection. That is, the subject when confronted by a new experience, assimilates that experience by accessing engrams of experience that immediately codes it in terms of sets of similar and homogenous experiences: hence "apperception". When the effort to assimilate new experience is great enough an associative activity of combining sets of engrams was required. In this latter case, what is important is that there is a kind of combining and mixing of the new experience with older sets of experience in terms of an "associative integration". Such a description must have provided an important guideline for artistic practice in a culture where middle brow culture and all experience was always-already digested and packaged as a commodity. Such a description must have provided a very appealing defense of the absolute necessity of art that only pursued new experiences for the likes of a psychological and philosophical milieu steeped in neo-Kantianism. It is enough to note for now that the associative potential registered as a function of the (M)ovement response in the Rorschach test is invested with a decisive importance in Louis' painting.

Because Rorschach *Psychodiagnostics* studied and hinged upon the interrelationship between the different layers of the personality, the test offered an especially rich account of the subjects "apparatus for experiencing". The Rorschach test's ability to map this apparatus was based on interpreting a subjects response to a number of inkblots. It had originally been developed as a tool for diagnosing

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[33] Hermann Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics: A Diagnostic Test Based on Perception.* (Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1951.) pp. 16-17.

schizophrenia in precisely this manner. Rorschach had found that the typical schizophrenic response to his inkblots involved the delusional transfer of memory pictures from the deepest level of the "apparatus for experiencing" to the conscious level. In effect, the schizophrenic would confuse and equate the "subjective reality" or perceptual experience of a card, with an "objective reality" or threat. The product of an inner fantasy life was thus transformed into an unmediated delusional conception of reality. In the schizophrenic subject conscious, structuring processes were either entirely absent or debilitated to the extent that a kind of reality testing was rendered patchy or obsolete. Rorschach's famous example of this was the schizophrenic patient who feared injury or felt the stab from the sharp protrusion or edge of an ink blot.[34]

The schizophrenic response provided a kind of standard via which other psychical disturbances and normative processes could be gauged. Schizophrenia represented one extreme pole of a continuum of possible kinesthetic (M)ovement responses; one extreme pole of a continuum of possible interrelations between surface and depth. The scizophrenic's mistaken identification between surface and depth is an important guide for positioning Louis' practice within a more general context. If for Rorschach the schizophrenic response involved the complete substitution of depth for surface, the response of the creative personality -- who also shared an animated phantasy life -- presented the perfect tension between surface and depth. Greenberg's notion of the decorative should be recalled here, for in this situation it operates in analogy with a mapping of ideal subjects "apparatus for experiencing. While the schizophrenic was at the mercy of his or her perception of (M)ovement -- movement creatively perceived being viewed as movement felt

[34]Rorschach notes that one of his schizophrenic patients, upon seeing a pen lying on a desk, had the sensation of being stabbed in the abdomen by the point of the pen. Rorschach, "Reflex halluzination und Symbolik", Zentralblatt fur Psychoanalyses und psychotherapie, 3, (1912-1913), p.122.

threatening --the depressive or anxiety ridden subject was altogether lacking any capacity to perceive kinesthetic movement.[35]

The correlation between the lack of a (M)ovement response and anxiety or depression was specifically used by Leon Berkowitz in his capacity as an art therapist during the war.[36] As the project head of the arts and crafts section of an Armed Forces occupational therapy clinic at Camp Lee Virginia in the mid-forties, Leon Berkowitz was intimately familiar with Rorschach protocols.[37] Indeed his particular perspective on art and its formal aspects was fundamentally shaped by Rorschach's conceptualization of kinesthetic movement. Undoubtedly, it was in large part a mutual interest in Rorschach's particular take on perception which had drawn Louis into the orbit of Berkowitz's Washington Workshop of the Arts in the first place. In addition to having probably undergone the test, it appears that Berkowitz as in the case of Louis, had had direct access to Hermann Rorschach's book on Rorschach technique *Psychodiagnostics.*

In general terms Berkowitz's understandings were a mix of theoretical knowledge and practical experience culled from contemporary dialogue and debates. If we were to pin down specific debts however, both men's knowledge seems to have originated almost exclusively from Rorschach influenced perceptual theories, and secondly the broad cluster of discourses surrounding Sullivanian interpersonal psychiatry. A project attempting to localize kinesthetic movement in terms of a perceptual response to the total field would not have been an anomaly in the early 1950s in the United States. Variations of the Rorschach Test were being used in a wide variety of fields; from advertising, corporate screening and personality tests, to psychological warfare and, of course, in the clinical environment. I think we can safely assume that Louis was well aware of these uses and abuses. In one curious

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[35]For now, it is worth noting that the perception and understanding of kinesthetic movement was one of two determinants -- the other being color -- at the core of the differences between schizophrenia on the one hand and depression and anxiety on the other hand.

[36]See document: Roy Shafer, Rorschach Diagnosis: The Menninger Clinic, US Army Art therapy Project, Box 2, AAA.

[37]See Louis' writings for the Tuberculosis Project. AAA

document entitled "Modern Drugs and Victorian Advertising", Louis uses his knowledge of psychodiagnostics as an entrance into the thorny question of improving the effectiveness of drug advertising in medical journals.[38] Little surprise that contemporary art, with its focus on medium and formal issues, offers crucial lessons to the ad industry. With insightful commentary on advertsising campaigns waged by the Abbott Company, Ciba Pharmaceutical Products, Mead Johnson Co., and the Upjohn Company, one must wonder why high modernist painting never entered the vernacular in trade journals such as *The Lederle Bulletin*, the Abbott Company's *What's New*, and *The Ciba Symposia*.[39] We know that with Ira Lewis, Morris Louis had had an extended dialogue on the problems of looking, and that this involved specific discussions revolving around Gestalt and Rorschach theories.[40] And, we know that Louis' wife Marcella was actively involved in the Washington School of Psychiatry, where she would eventually earn her Ph.D. in the educational applications of interpersonal psychiatry.[41]

The particular Rorschach methodologies in place at the Armed Forces clinic at Camp Lee, Virginia, where Berkowitz worked, offers a good entrance into the general climate of educated opinion. A scoring and administrative guide to the Rorschach Test from the Menninger Clinic in the Leon and Ida Berkowitz papers would seem to confirm that the Armed forces were following prerogatives set in place by the Menninger. It is safe to surmise that in following the Rorschach scoring guide of the Menninger Clinic, Camp Lee's specific Rorschach protocol, and hence Berkowitz's own understanding, was designed to accommodate definitions of

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[38]Louis, "Modern Drugs and Victorian Ads", Writings for the Tuberculosis Project. AAA.

[39]Louis, "Modern Drugs and Victorian Ads", p. 8.

[40]See Louis' notes on the Tuberculosis Project. In conversation with me Marcella described evening discussions with the Lewis' on the relative worth of Gestalting X-rays and other problems concerning visuality.

[41]Marcella Brenner conversation, May, 1993. Mrs. Brenner told me that while Louis had not taken any courses at the Washington School of Psychiatry, that they did indeed discuss Freud, Riesman, and Sullivan at home. Marcella would also go on to teach a course in interpersonal psychiatry at both the University of Washington and Jefferson University.

neuroses and psychoses as understood by Sullivanian interpersonal psychiatry.[42] The Clinic was widely known for its work with Rorschach techniques and more generally for its openness to psychotherapy. Sullivanian analysis would have comprised a large percentage of its practice in such a therapeutic vein. Among the array of perceptual tests which existed in the 1940s and 1950s, all springing up in the wake of Rorschach's original method, the basic Rorschach blot test dominated most clinical practice. In fact, it greatly informed theories of personality construction in numerous disciplines from psychiatry to anthropology. Generally speaking by the 1940s and 1950s Rorschach Psychodiagnostics and Gestalt theory functioned interdependently within a framework supplied by Sullivanian Interpersonal Psychiatry.[43] It would have been within this general framework accommodating both theories of the mind, that Louis and Berkowitz had their grounding.

It was in Berkowitz's capacity as director of the arts and crafts section at the camp to use art, specifically painting and especially finger-painting, as a therapeutic tool. Rorschach Psychodiagnostic Technique was especially useful in the type of therapeutic arena Camp Lee and psychiatric practice in the 1940s and 1950s in general promoted. Indeed, Camp Lee was one of a number of psychiatric wards in the Armed Forces using Rorschach methodologies as a critical aid in the diagnosis of mental illness and the subsequent tracking of recovery from illness. Though the Rorschach technique did not possess any therapeutic benefit, the test permitted a kind of mapping of the relation between layers of the subject's personality. That is, it mapped the tension between conscious and "unconscious" process, i.e., the interface between surface and depth where experience was crystallized.

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[42] Given that there were a number of 'schools' of Rorschach thinking in the United States at this time this alignment is significant. Jackson Pollock would go there in the late 1940s for treatment. See Roy Shafer, Rorschach Diagnosis: The Menninger Clinic, US Army Art therapy Project, Box 2, AAA.

[43] From its inception in the 1920s Rorschach technique had accommodated the perceptual protocols of the later established Gestalt theory. Indeed, the Rorschach (F)orm response was a kind of Gestalt response *avant le lettre*. (F)orm as the fourth Rorschach determinant was a function of consciousness and perception.

Take Berkowitz's comments on Subject C (Houston), submitted as part of the clinic's monthly report:

> One of a number of patients whose style of drawing changed from imitative work to free expressive drawing after finger-painting. This patient drew stiff unimaginative figures in his first attempts at the clinic. His drawings after finger-painting were rhythmic in line and movements were more complete and richer in expressive content. He showed a surprising tendency, not only did his linear movements become more fluid but he borrowed (probably unconsciously) entire schemes of organization from the non-objective finger-painting for his realistic charcoal drawings. [44]

The initial tendencies toward static movement and rigid organization, restricted and "unimaginative" explorations, was a function of "coartation", or a restricted associative capacity. In the case of the depressive or anxiety ridden subject, the lack of a (M)ovement response was the result of a general "flattening of affect". More essentially it was the result of a rigid differentiation, or non-permeability between layers of the personality. While the schizophrenic response was dictated by a total passivity to the projective nature of perceptual experience, the depressive and anxiety ridden response blocked these processes altogether, actively structuring stimuli to the extent that a creative interaction or response was rendered obsolete. In the Rorschach test, the intricately searched and scrupulously conceived (F)orm responses of depressives were scored as a confirmation of this. In effect an over-zealousness with finding meaning repressed the imaginative aspect of the response. We can assume that in Berkowitz's position at Camp-Lee post-traumatic depression and anxiety would have constituted the principle locus of patient illness.[45] In subject C (Houston) this was more likely the case. The repressed or "coartated" first attempt at painting, a function of an overly active concern for mimeticism was decreased after the therapeutic process was under way. In this sense, the therapeutic process contributed or increased subject C (Houston)'s capacity for kinesthesia's.

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[44]See "Typical Responses to Finger-painting", Art Therapy Project, US Army, 1944-45, Box 2 of 3, Leon and Ida Berkowitz Papers, AAA.

[45]It was treatable, convalescence was conceivably speeded up by imaginative activities, and this progress was mapable using Rorschach theory.

Evidently, the typical progress of therapy or convalescence paralleled a tendency away from static representational practices, toward the "looser", "more fluid" parameters given over to kinesthetic movement. The mucky infantile-like play that finger-painting promoted worked against inhibition, repression, or "coartation", processes typically at the core of wartime neuroses and psychoses. Preliminary concerns with factors of conscious gestalt perception, of "getting a single image down", and typical of the Rorschach (F)orm response would, with treatment, give way to a work against the primacy of the figure/ground relation, and ultimately toward an increase in kinesthesia's -- an ease for working with and looking at the whole or totality. It seems that the art therapy project was compensating well "for the regimentation of modern life".[46]

The therapeutic process worked to undo a rigid or restricted interaction between surface and depth. With the restricting and inhibiting processes of consciousness relaxed, the imaginative or associative faculties would apparently be able to gain a better expression in both the life of the individual and in the painting process. An increase in the freedom of association was thus inversely proportional to a decrease in inhibition or repression.[47] Subject C (Houston) was a paradigmatic example of such recovery. His convalescence represented a path toward a normative psychical construction, one increasingly showing a "loosening up" of the barriers between the layers of an "unconscious" and a conscious process, the crucial interface where the kinesthetic movement response arose. In sum, the process of recovery and the path toward a paradigmatic relation to the world was complicit in a loosening of the barriers between these categories, or at least the building of a kind

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[46]Leon Berkowitz, "A Program of Action for the Arts in D.C.".

[47]Rorschach notes that association is of primarily unconscious origin, while concentration is primarily an emotional conscious phenomenon. He writes: "The opposite of this stereotyping tendency is freedom of associations, the ability to withdraw from associative acceptances which lead to stereotypy. Both situations are expressions of the concept "looseness of associations", which must neither be too constricted nor too free in normal thinking. Too marked looseness in associations inevitably leads to unsteadiness, scattering and flight in the associative process; too little freedom (looseness), to stereotypy, confining to one category of engrams." Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics*. p. 62.

of middle zone in between.[48] Needless to say, the model of the artist provided a kind of paradigmatic example of the ideal personality toward which the infirm could work. As a personality construction, it was a function of balance, wherein the passivity of affect would be equally countered by the subject's active structuring of affect. This balance of the (M)ovement response was a crucial indicator of mental fitness. It functioned as a first indication of the way in which the subject was relating to the world, i.e., how creatively the subject was experiencing.[49]

It was Hermann Rorschach himself who had first postulated that the production or visual interpretation of kinesthetic movement was an indicator of "the capacity for inner creation ... (M)ovement responses (were) characteristic of those subjects whose interests gravitate more to their own intra-psychic life than to the world outside."[50] Most (M)ovement responses were interpreted by "persons given to phantasy".[51] (M)ovement revealed a mode of experiential processing which shared more in common with the prototypical infantile experience than with the strictures of conscious bourgeois life. Rorschach notes:

> "Artists, imaginative subjects, and abstract thinkers interpret the most (M's). Two other categories lie between these extremes: practical subjects who are more imitative produce few (M's); a larger number are interpreted by theorists, the more "creative" subjects. These findings would tend to indicate that (M) responses are characteristic of subjects who function more in the intellectual sphere, whose interests gravitate more toward their intra-psychic living rather than toward the world outside themselves".[52]

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[48]For a general sampling of the Rorschach literature on creativity see Gardner Murphy, "The Freeing of Intelligence", *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, v. 10, n. 2, Mar. 1946, pp. 47-55. Anne Roe, Painting and Personality, *Rorschach Research Exchange*, v. 10, n. 2, Jun. 1946, pp. 86-100. Joseph A. Precker, "Summaries: Painting and Drawing in Personality Assessment", *Journal of Projectice Technique*, v. 14, n. 3, Sept. 1950, pp. 262-286. Edward Burchard, "The Use of Projective Techniques in the Analysis of Creativity", *Journal of Projectice Technique*, v. 16, n. 4, Dec. 1952, pp. 412-427. Margaret J. Rioch, "The Use of the Rorschach Test in the Assessment of Change in Patients Under Psychotherapy", *Psychiatry*, v. 12, n. 4, Nov. 1949, pp. 427-434.

[49]As we will see, it encapsulated part of that more decisive balance struck between (M)ovement and (C)olor responses in the total personality.

[50]Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics*, p. 65.

[51]Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics*, p. 60.

[52]Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics*, p. 64.

By the 1950s Rorschach's original conception of movement had not changed all that much: however, its mechanism, implications, and resonance were greatly expanded. This was in large part due to its assimilation within the broad vogue for character analysis, social psychology, and a clinical practice dominated by Interpersonal psychiatry. These various alignments were not a coincidence. Rorschach's original scoring of formal protocols perfectly accommodated the tension upon which Sullivanian Interpersonal Psychiatry was founded. In essence, both saw kinesthetic movement as a central function in determining one's relatedness to the world. As a function of projection, it played a determining role in the understanding of others. No surprise then, that the capacity for projection or kinesthetic movement was the crucial potentiality that Sullivan believed to be operating against increasing interpersonal and international tensions.

Ernst Schachtel, who taught classes in Rorschach method at both the Washington School of Psychiatry and The New School for Social Research, offers the important perspective in this regard. Because of his specific project integrating Rorschach protocols into the larger framework of Sullivanian interpersonal psychiatry his methodologies are especially useful. He defines projection as: "that psychic mechanism by which one attributes qualities, feelings, attitudes, and strivings of his own to objects (people or things) of his environment."[53] The kinesthetic movement response was thus part of a process which placed the precept or object in a dynamic tension with the subject. It placed the subject in the stimulus' "field of experience". This projecting of "qualities, feelings, attitudes, and strivings" was an essential factor in man's capacity for creative experience -- which in Schachtel's veiled terminology included living in peaceful co-existence. Projection was the basic determinant in Sullivan's working understanding of the infant's "prototaxic mode" of experience, a mode completely dependent on empathy or affect. In a sense, Sullivan's non-partisan politics -- especially his participation in

[53]Schachtel, "Projection and its Relation to Character Attitudes and Creativity in the Kinesthetic Responses", *Psychiatry*, v. 13, n. 1, 1950, p. 73.

the UNESCO Tensions Project --, Berkowitz's humanist and therapeutic orientation, and finally Louis' own retreat from the political, all hinged on the political possibilities they invested in the capacity for projection.

(M)ovement was a register of the mechanisms that were at the core of personality construction, a personality construction understood within the parameters of interpersonal relations. Linking all humanity together, projection was at the heart of all empathic behavior; whether schizophrenic or normative, this mode of experience presupposed a universally operative language of communication based upon somatic based signifiers. It was a kind of language or primary communication, based in the symbolic, that theoretically resisted the specific determinations of culture and history, which cut across boundaries of nationality, race, and gender, and thus pre-existed consciousness. Rather than focusing on difference, the faculty of projection promoted the intuing of sameness. In sum, the Rorschach (M)ovement response isolated a type of experiencing in the world, that apparently held some promise in negotiating or at least lessening the increasingly hostile climate of the early Cold War.

The post-exilic associations that living in the present held for Kafka are not at all inappropriate here. They help define Louis' retreat from politics in terms of a more shaded and subtle level of engagement. For Louis, as for Greenberg -- whose own interest in Kafka we have already explored -- living in the present, participating in the goings-on of the surrounding culture meant living in a state of sin. The state of sin was an acknowledgment of expulsion from the symbolic realm of paradise. Living in a state of sin meant complicity in all the most heinous forms of violence and aggression that the climate of the early Cold War spawned. In a sense, guilt drove Louis, like it drove Greenberg and Kafka, to embrace a wholeness or totality conceived of in terms of movement and becoming. Aesthetic withdrawal was simultaneously an acknowledgment of expulsion and a concerted attempt to live in grace once again.

"The link between guilt and atonement is a temporal and magical one", Benjamin writes, "this temporal magic appears in the mark in the sense that the resistance to the present between the past and future is eliminated, and these, magically fused, descend together on the head of the sinner."[54] Louis' investigations into kinesthetic movement were his link between "guilt and atonement". Beyond any graspable structure, programmatic procedure, or intentional strategy, movement felt as the "temporal magic of the mark" was the foundation of "synthetic apperception". Kinesthesia isolated the moment when matter and meaning were still magically one. For Louis, living in the present meant necessarily painting without even the hint of a gesture or an action; it meant expurgating physical movement from the process of painting altogether. How else was one to distill the mark of guilt -- the antithesis of physical activity -- that was expression? How else was one to keep meaning open? How else was one to distill the associative activities that went hand in hand with opening up new experiences?

In this regard, Rorschach's conclusions on the relation between physical movement and the dream seem less a tool for the clinician than a warning to the artist: a warning to Louis the motionless painter.

> ...the supposition arises that it may be this urge to activity, the increased motility, which prevents the functions of freedom of association and energy of associative activity from appearing as expected in elation. The absence of this urge to activity in "good humor" allows full play of the functions in question, freedom of association, energy of associative activity, and ability for "inner" creation.
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> The supposition outlined in the last paragraph above leads to the assumption that the factors which are essentially "inner" or self determined and are expressed primarily in sensations of motion in the test, are in some way opposed to physical motility, the actual execution of motion.
>
> I would like to add an example so that this conclusion is not simply left hanging in the air. Dreams are "inner" or self-determined productions and kinesthesia's play an important role in them. On awakening, necessary movements, physical motion, begins at once. This movement sets the dream aside. There is, however, a way to recall dreams: lie perfectly motionless on awakening in order not to cover up the kinesthesia's of the dream by present physical movement. This scheme works if it is not negated by an attempt to consciously direct the attention, for this would oppose the revealing of the more unconscious functions. That is, if one immediately upon awakening sets up the goal to lie quietly by conscious effort, the kinesthesia's are likely to be cut out at once.[55]

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[54]Benjamin, ""Painting, or Signs and Marks", p. 84.

[55]Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics*, pp. 71-72. Rorschach acknowledges Mourly-Volds contribution in the passage quoted.

Physical activity, any and all activity, was completely antithetical to the symbolic. Activity, any and all activity, including consciousness, especially consciousness, was tantamount to the state of sin that was living in the present. The practice of drawing prohibited the encapsulation of Rorschach's purer conception of imaginative or associative activity. A practice reliant on drawing was always-already condemned, and condemned with its guilt only half visible. For if line potentially possessed the mark of guilt, it was also simultaneously the most graven image, idol, gesture, allegory and sign. For Louis, only the dream-pour possessed of that grace to be found solely on the far side of consciousness, would suffice. For Louis, only a negating of the present for a time of plenitude and of wholeness would suffice. Only the mark of guilt alone, that mark felt at a glance, would suffice.

But then again, focusing exclusively on the gravity of Louis' practice is perhaps a bit too melodramatic and altogether missing the point. The kind of expressivity Louis was after -- that which was constitutive of the aesthetic state, that quality magically summoned out of the sufferance of a surface -- had absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to the movements of gravity of which each individual stain was the embodiment. Rather, Louis' aesthetic privileged only that metaphor most favored by the synchronic art of painting: that of light, the flash or flood of a brilliant light, the utter transparency of lightness, light-heartedness. Out of falleness Louis' aesthetic summons a poetic transcendence: out of sufferance, gravity, melancholy, and heavy-heartedness, a state of pure grace, cheer, and joy. Remember Rorschach's fateful warning to the motionless painter of emotion: Only "the absence of this urge to activity in "good humor" allows full play of the functions in question, freedom of association, energy of associative activity, and ability for "inner' creation."[56]

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[56]Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics*, pp. 71-72.

In a painting like *Salient,* the dynamics and tensions of movement, are of course only one half of the picture. Someone might reasonably enough ask, "What of color?". And rightly so! *Salient* is a painting composed of the richest and most sensuous aspects and assortments of color. It is indeed a surface formed of the rarest and most precious quantities and blends. There is perfumed color. Colors with the hint of cinnamon, olive, and lavender, those tasting of wine, and those rising as vapors from steaming saffron, greens, and lemon. There is that range of colors held in black opals, blue icicles, and those colors possessed of a dew suffused with light. Pastel colors much truer to their origin. The gaudy shades of the worst of Baltimore's shag rugs. Glib and artificial primaries now thinned down to the phosphorescent blue-green of household detergents. The plastic colors of Bocour's Acryloid F- 10 magna acrylic paint, manufactured in New York, circa 1953, and of "The Highest Grade Artist Pigments, Fast Drying, Brilliant and Permanent" -- Bocour Blue, Oxide of Chromium, Alizarin Crimson, Rose Madder, and Permanent Green Light. In sum, color's thinned down so extensively with turpentine that they can only leave the subtlest shadow of disperse particulate, the barest trace of a once solid pigment -- colors ultimately beyond description.

We need, I think, to complexify our picture of Louis' painting and theoretical position in terms of color. Specifically, we need to understand kinesthetic movement in relation to color. For in the perceptual discourses which are our concern, the emotion of kinesthesia was typically an imperative set against the affects of color. As a pairing, their antagonistic affects are however most fruitfully understood in terms of a mutual opposition to consciousness: a mutual opposition to consciousness that founds consciousness. Consciousness was a contingency or representation that the pairing produced. The tension between kinesthesia and color localized an impossible moment of plenitude when matter and meaning were not as yet distinct. As a structural tension the moment of plenitude must necessarily be

conceived of as framed by the immediate. In a sense the tension between the affective status of projection and that of color staged or dramatized the synchronic aspect of surface. The importance of staging the surface in terms of a momentary experience cannot be emphasized enough. Ultimately it enabled Louis to address the tautological quality of a symbolic time, the melancholic time of the great flood.

Within both Sullivanian practice and Rorschach methodology movement and color constituted the most essential dynamics of the field relation. While Rorschach notes that (F)orm, (M)ovement , (C)olor, and (S)hading responses all revealed how the subject experiences, it was the relation between the kinesthetic (M)ovement and the (C)olor responses in particular which represented "the most essential components of the apparatus for experiencing."[57] While (F)orm responses, as dictated by Gestalt theory were predicated by conscious processes (C)olor and (M)ovement responses were the expression of the mnemic system, that most fundamental layer of subject constitution. The relationship between (M)ovement and (C)olor responses were an expression of the very structure of personality, i.e., the "apparatus for experiencing".

Rorschach would call the relationship between (M)ovement and (C)olor responses the experience type or *erlibnistypus* .[58] In Berkowitz's Camp Lee handout for the administration of the Rorschach Test this relationship was the important one as far as clinical testing for recovery went.[59] The relationship between (M)ovement and (C)olor responses in any one subject was a fixed determination; it was the more or less enduring expression of character type or personality. During

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[57]Patrick Mullahy describes Sullivan psychiatry in similar terms. He calls it "the study of processes that involve or go on between people ... We are always interacting with and in the world; we are always undergoing experience. In fact we are our experience". Mullahy's understanding is insightful, for it reveals just why Rorschach theory was so amenable to Sullivanian psychiatry. The focus of both was to understand how the subject experiences. Mullahy*Oedipus: Myth and Complex* (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948).

[58]Rorschach is careful to note that these influences, whether kinesthetic or color, are not in themselves the apparatus (for experiencing), but simply represent it in the test. The relationship of the numbers of M's and C's is, therefore, the expression of what rorschach called the experience type. Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics* , p. 87.

[59]Roy Schaffer, "Rorschach Diagnosis". Box 2, Leon and Ida Berkowitz Papers, pp. 1-2, AAA.

the therapeutic process of recovery this numerical relationship would remain static while the absolute number of (M)ovement and (C)olor responses would increase. Paralleling Subject C (Houston's) "loosening up" of associations thus, would have been an accompanying rise in the absolute number of color responses.

The *erlibnistypus* was a two-fold measure of the subject's personality. A relative predominance of (M)ovement responses, the so-called introversive experience-type carried the masculine associations of the psychically active and imaginative, while a predominance of (C)olor responses, the so-called extratensive experience-type was associated with a passive and non-productive feminine construction. The differences between introversive and extratensive experience types were not in themselves constitutive of gender, rather they mapped out different levels or directions of psychical potentiality. In fact, the normative or maximum of both introversive and extratensive types could coexist side by side in the same subject. The "highly talented" creative artist on the Rorschach Test, for instance, would interpret a maximum number of (M)ovement and (C)olor responses.[60] The creative artist, if one were to believe such constructions, perfectly balanced the active and passive experiential modes. Thus the corpus of literature on Louis that positions him between the sensuousness of color in Helen Frankenthaler and the strident, aggressive masculinity of Pollock.

In terms of Sullivanian understandings the (C)olor response was a measure of one's capacity for relatedness to the world. Unlike the inwardly directed, or subject centered relationship which the (M)ovement response encapsulated, the (C)olor response was the hinge pin of an object centered relation. Unlike (M)ovement, the (C)olor response did not function as part of any projective interaction. Rather, it encapsulated or was an expression of "the emotions, the affects", or a "more general disposition ... the total affective pattern". The (C)olor response was an indicator of passivity or the excitability of affect, i.e., how easily one

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[60]Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics,* p.77.

was affected, or to what degree one's relation to the world was passive and reactive. The (C)olor responses, Rorschach continues,

> ...probably do not represent an individual constitutional tendency in the same way that the (M's) were found to. They seem to represent, rather, a more general disposition which may be influenced, in some of the subjects at least, by the setting up of a conscious goal, so that (C)olor answers may be aroused, increased, or inhibited. This "general disposition" is the total affective pattern, the affectivity. Interpretation of kinesthesia's and the affectivity are peculiarly bound together. It is difficult to suppress either alone; it is easier to suppress both at the same time. [61]

What interests us especially here, I think, is the way in which the "interpretation of kinesthesia's and the affectivity are peculiarly bound together". Remember that this relationship founds Rorschach's conception of the *erlibnistypus*, the very essence of the subject's "apparatus for experiencing". Take Louis' drawing, *Geometry of a Fish* one last time, paying special attention to the abstruse presence of color. Like the gridwork behind, the faint pastel squares of color unbalance and distract the eye from the tracing of outline or form. The eye is immediately caught by color. Perhaps even, before meaning is made! In viewing the drawing, color, and to a lesser extent totality, strike the eye first. And if it doesn't, the fishy form dissolves upon noting color. Or perhaps the point is, no matter how incomplete and meaningless a constellation of lines on a surface might be, there will always be a relentless attempt to make meaning of them. And further, (C)olor and (M)ovement, in whatever tension they might be placed with regard to a figure or gestalt form, operate on a principle of mutual exclusion. Consider Schachtel's comments on the effect of a drawing consisting "only of outlines, without any shading, of some figures" and with a patch of color in one corner. The color,

> ...thrusts itself on the observer, even on the quite casual glance; he cannot help but noticing it at once, whereas he has to look at the drawing much more carefully, has to follow the lines drawn by the pencil much more closely, to recognize the figures in the drawing. Also, the red splotch will tend to unbalance the entire picture and to distract the attention of the observer from the penciled outlines. The "red" strikes the eye, but the eye observes, studies, seeks out the lines of

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[61] Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostics*, p.69.

the pencil. The "red" cries out, the forms are "silent". The color seems to take possession of the eye, the forms demand more active observation. The color at once affects the eye of the person, looking at this imaginary drawing, the forms await his attention. He is aware at once of "something red" -- the red impresses him -- but he has to look and recognize or understand the forms outlined by pencil. Color seizes the eye, but the eye grasps form.[62]

For Schachtel, the active implications of gestalt perception are placed in contrast to the passive nature of color's reception. The awareness of color as "something red", like that of kinesthetic experience, is more often than not conveyed instantaneously. In Schachtel's passage above he emphasizes the passive processes involved in color's affect. The eye is 'struck by', 'impacted' upon, 'moved', and 'affected' by color.[63] For Schachtel this affective relation -- along with the repercussions of gendering it apparently speaks to -- literally touches the core of the psychical process itself. He continues,

...the essential passivity of the affect experience can be understood dynamically on the basis of Freud's view of affect. According to him, the unconscious instincts are represented in consciousness by ideas and by a charge of affect. This affect charge finds expression in processes which are sensed as affect. Affects are thus, together with ideas, the representatives of instincts in consciousness; they are furthermore a discharge of instinctual energy. I would extend this view and say affects are representatives and discharge processes of all drives, whether of instinctual or other origin. The element of passivity in the affect corresponds to the relation of the ego, the conscious control, to the totality of instinctual and other drives and is an expression of this relation. The drives are the motivating forces over which the conscious direction of the ego, with more or less success, tries to exercise some measure of control. The more the ego succeeds in channeling the powerful energies of the drives toward an adaptation to reality, the less noticeable will be the element of passivity in the experience of the affect in which these drives are discharged. Yet even the experience of the most controlled drive retains something of this passivity. The subject is "driven" to do this or that; he is "affected" by this or that feeling in yielding to or resisting, or drive. The degree to which he is entirely passive -- swept away by the affect -- or to which he succeeds in integrating the drive and its discharge in affect with his conscious, controlling functions resembles, in Rorschach's test, the relation between the sheer impact of color and the degree to which the testee succeeds in integrating the perception of color with actively structured form.[64]

In relation to the primacy of the "affect experience" all else is contingency. The affect is primary, it is the necessity via which the "subject is driven to do this or that". Despite the emphasis on color in the passage above, we need to remember,

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[62]Ernst Schachtel, "On Color and Affect", *Psychiatry*, 1943, v. 6, p. 394.

[63]Schachtel, *Experiential Foundations of Rorschachs Test*, (New York: Basic Books Inc. 1966), pp. 163-64.

[64] Schachtel, *The Experiential Foundations of Rorschach's Test*, p. 164.

that projection was also an expression of these primary drives, even if its repercussions as far as "individual constitutional tendencies" worked against the "general affective disposition". What is important is that the relation between colors affect and the projective aspects of kinesthesia are "the motivating forces over which the conscious direction of the ego, with more or less success, tries to exercise some measure of control".

In the framework provided by the *erlibnistypus,* Louis found a kind of topos for the symbolic. As the irreducible moment of experiencing -- a conjuring of meaning out of nothingness -- the topos mapped out a zone of dynamic interaction. As a structural tension between the subject and object, it embodied the mystery behind "synthetic apperception". Neither inside nor outside, both active and passive, simultaneously matter and meaning, the in-betweeness of the topos gave material substantiality to a conscious world of veils and illusions. As the constitutive moment of subjectivity it encapsulated a wholeness of which consciousness or allegorical representation was otherwise devoid. The paintings of Louis' first Veil series are an attempt to develop a visual language that might grasp the paradoxes of this symbolic moment. They are part of an attempt to develop a language that might lay bare what Coleridge named the contradictions of contemporaneity. It was a language that might somehow represent the "limits and condition of mind" -- "a symbol (which is always tautegorical)", in Coleridge's famous description,

> ...characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the especial, or of the universal in the general. Above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enumerates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative,[65]

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[65]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Lay Sermons", *The Statesman's Manual,* 1816, p. 661. See Fred Orton's comments on this passage in *Figuring Jasper Johns,* pp. 200-201, and de Mans own insights in "The Rhetoric of Temporality", in *Blindness and Insight,* pp. 191-194. I am indebted to both these readings.

The Veils are a contemplation upon the structural tensions implicit to a kind of middle zone, not unlike Coleridge's "intermediate faculty", the imagination. The difference is that they were to embody the momentary coordinates of the apparatus for experiencing through a determinate negation of the self. Having undergone the same processes of apostasy and demarxification as Greenberg and the American Left more generally, disillusion with the possibility of a dialectic in culture and society has here shifted to a dialectical reconciliation within the self. As a temporal zone existing between the sensuousness of experience and the cold abstractions of thought the project was for all intents and purposes a success.

If we recall Louis' almost naive optimism in 1950, when the artist's particularly good color and "kinesthetic apportionment" would provide for his working role in a new society, by 1954 this hopeful vision is altogether absent.[66] The whole can of moral problems that social psychology, character analysis, and interpersonal psychiatry saw as complicit to a culture of conformity, consumerism, and increasing violence, were recognized as ultimately unresolvable. The staid, cool, and slow contemplative feel, that a painting like *Salient* possesses, comes from a realization that such a productive integration, indeed any and all such enlightened social engineering, could only be a failure. For Louis, the structure of dyads he would begin to investigate in the Veils was the very essence of a temporal moment altogether inimical to the surrounding culture. Certainly the polarities of a phenomenal and nuomenal world were to merge, with sign and meaning to coincide, but this was precisely the modernist imperative within that painting. To put it simply the instantaneous unity of such a plenitude was felt to be a denial of historical time. The expressive potential that was localized as the medium's surface totality was conceived of as a denial of the present. Indeed it is painting about negating the present: the time between the past and the future. It is about time. Time slowed down to an intolerable pace, wherein hanging tremulous on the edge

[66]Morris Louis, Tuberculosis Project, 1950. AAA.

of the abyss, the past and future become paradoxically linked together in death. It is the time of the great flood.

We need, only compare the Veil paintings with Rorschach inkblots to recognize the intensity and lengths to which an antagonism and refusal of the present is pursued. Take the obvious comparison between *Spreading* (1954) (Figure 14), *Terrain of Joy* (1954) (Figure 15), and *Untitled B* (1954) (Figure 16) all from the first Veil series and all remarkably similar to Rorschach blots, and Card Numbers VIII (Figure 17), IX (Figure 18), and X (Figure 19) actually from the Rorschach Test. What first strikes one in this comparison is the relative ease of making sense or identifying objects, figures, or animals in the blots. The color areas are themselves discreet and distinct. Like a kind of elementary water-color they betray a clear procedure. Each application of color is laid on top of the white background and thence preceding colors in a way that reveals a clear-cut layering. Indeed, the notion of medium as surface totality is sublated entirely by the figural or sign-making possibilities of the color areas. With the white backdrop serving as ground color, alone and in combination, assumes the role of a figural possibility. Because the blots lack the uncharacterizable plunging in and out of depth that the Veils possess, distinct forms emerge from the white background that are clearly defined entities and discrete objects in themselves. So whereas there is a certain perceptual stability in Card Number VII that provokes the recognition of pink bears, or blue scorpions in Card Number X, or the tan elk with its prominent antlers in Card Number IX, in *Terrain of Joy* no such discreet figuration emerges (Figure 20).

Whereas in the Rorschach Card's different hues of color seem only to accentuate and highlight points or anchors of focal attention, the multiple fusion's and interpenetrations of color in *Terrain of Joy* prohibit this process. The kind of space that is produced seems to exist only as a function of the whole. That is, there is a kind of organic quality to the image that suggests the effusion of color is born of

the medium itself. It is Goethe's dream as Ur-experience. What we see is the moment before a pink bear, a blue scorpion, or an elk can be recognized. Perhaps, as the title suggests, it is the emotional delight that might carry or bring one to see such a thing as a pink bear or blue scorpion materialize out of nothing in the first place. *Terrain of Joy* is a painting of utter delight. It is a painting that tries to tap into ones associative possibilities, by forcing one to feel rather than look for meaning.

The non-mimetic character of the Veils, is absolutely crucial in this respect. It was undoubtedly the single most decisive issue that Louis felt he had to broach. The problem seems to have hinged on making a surface that stemmed the interpretative process itself. In a painting like *Terrain of Joy,* (Figure 15) for instance, the possibility of any final interpretation, which is more or less locked into the form of the Rorschach blot, becomes altogether confounded. In effect, the possibility of deciphering any meaning whatsoever is entirely prohibited. So if my own quick interpretations, entirely subjective interpretations given to the cards are stable or certain in any way, this finality or conclusiveness is always deferred and postponed by the always obscure, unformed, and only half-emergent shapes in Louis' painting. In *Terrain of Joy,* nothing is significant or concrete enough to grab on to. There are only transparencies and suspensions receding into depth and projecting outward into some infinite space.

Fair enough in the context of the 1950s. The indiscretions and abuses to which such interpretations were used in the service of needs no embellishment. Rorschach interpretation had become a thriving growth industry, with the naming of pink blot as pink bear revealing anything from the non-creative Organization man, to the authoritarian personality, and latent homosexuality. The distance Louis places between his work and the possibility of such scurrilous uses need be of no surprise. In the context of the Cold War the cause for freedom Psychodiagnostics was fulfilling through psychological screening in the corporate world, in the armed

forces, politics, the civil service, universities, and in the public school system, represented a wider and deeper malaise in conscious everyday life more generally.

The fact that in *Spreading*, for instance, the central portion of the canvas is blatantly smudged, smeared, or flooded, so as to efface a distinction otherwise present in Card Number VIII, renders *Spreading* entirely antagonistic to the project, uses and abuses of Projective Technique. The fact that in *Untitled B*, the relative degree of autonomy or integrity of form is intentionally obscured and even negated by the awkward twists of color and finally by a sort of diluted spill renders it first and foremost a negation of processes precipitating conscious gestalt perception. That there is a kind of dull, bland luster inhabiting the center of *Salient* which performs a similar duty, or that there is a transverse erasure which blurs the burst of streaming color in *Breaking Hue*, marked out for Louis, what I think, functioned as an unwavering critique of the surrounding culture. That there is at the very center of the pictorial space in all the Veils a kind of over-saturation that remains indecipherable and obscure, that suspends meaning by placing a kind of stop gap to interpretation, only speaks to a negation of the present that is a metaphoric quest for the time of the great flood.

What we are presented with in paintings like *Salient*, *Terrain of Joy*, *Longitude* (1954) (Figure 21), *Breaking Hue* (1954) (Figure 22), *Intrigue*, *Spreading*, *Atomic Crest*, and *Pendulum*, is the inner-world of the day-dream, where materiality is apprehended directly without mediation. It is a world apparently uninfringed upon by the outside. Yet one where we feel in our bones that the smell of grass clippings and the whir of a neighbor's mower are close by. In a sense, and these synesthetic associations are an integral part of the argument I mount for and against these paintings, the world offered up is a thoroughly suburbanized version of the utopian vision. Because the bland, prosaic quality at their core is no accident; because individuality and character structure are intentionally sublated to the

impersonal through the mechanisms of a dialectic located within the self, difference and distinction fly out a window already opened up by a horizon of standardized lawns, ranch style homes, Buick Special's, and gray flannel suits.

The paradox of Louis' painting, is the paradox of America's suburban dream.[67] It is the paradox of a "sensuous bureaucracy", Marcuse's "aesthetic dimension", ruled over by the "principle of a non-repressive civilization, in which reason is sensuous and sensuousness rational."[68] It is a "world all middle" where nature and civilization meet, and when the intellect and the senses intermingle. Yet, a world as far from the realities of life in the 1950s that can be imagined. What Louis was after in these paintings was a kind of topos where "freedom of association" and the "energy of associative activity" would be given absolutely free reign. A nuclear free zone one is tempted to call it, where the mind could happily stray from the anxieties of life in the 1950s. And so a painting like *Atomic Crest* can be an absolute refusal of the world out there, yet on some other level -- the expressive level, the only level that mattered to Louis, a level distilling out the instantaneous dynamic interaction between kinesthetic movement and colors affect -- a critical perspective on it.

Ironically, the contradictory nature of such claims are all a part of the illusion that was America's suburban dream. It was no less integral to the sense of self with which Louis conducted his affairs and conceived of his practice. Even if the Veil paintings were founded upon the determinate negation of his personality, there remains a thoroughly suburban charm to them after all is said and done. Do not forget that the dining room of Louis' home doubled as his studio, or that his modest abode was in a quiet respectable suburban neighborhood in Baltimore. No less revealing were his working hours, the normal 9:00 to 5:00 shift of any poor working stiff. Louis' shift however, was that of the housewife. He did the shopping, stayed

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[67]See Edwin Muir's 1949 poem of the same name. There is a similar kind of slow motion and limpid ease about it, that Louis' paintings share. Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems of Edwin Muir*, (New York: Grove Press, 1957).

[68]Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 148.

at home, cleaned the house, and cooked up his batches of stain on the kitchen stove. As a very private, secretive, motionless, and self-consumed practice, the technique of staining stood as an utter disavowal of the social realm of action and the public sphere outside. And so, precisely because Louis was a kind of Proustian figure, holed up, motionless in his dining room, all the rich and horrible sensations of a world out there -- a world that is the very antithesis of everything a painting like *Atomic Crest* stands for -- are distilled out.

A world where the ideological does not manage to seep in and saturate, even a vision of modernity such as this, is a beautiful dream indeed. For the symbolic topos of unmediated expression is where the social is encoded most fully. The totality that is conceived of as the expressive moment, is indeed the only place where historical process is figured forth. When the dream of capturing totality and wholeness hinges specifically upon building-in the synthetic or constitutive power of the mind as the metaphor of surface in the first place, this proposition seems less radical than simply expedient. At a moment such as this, we are up against what is the single most difficult stop-gap to the critical study of high modernist painting: none other than the controlling metaphor of the expressive totality. It is a moment when the aesthetic state gains a certain resonance that is all to troubling in the highly charged political atmosphere of the early Cold War. For the impersonal forces that speak to a Kantian notion of "synthetic apperception" were forces that constructed the United States of America as the best of possible worlds. It was not. The mistaken claim here is that the expressive nature of the medium, the medium used metaphorically to distill the aesthetic moment, <u>can</u> serve as a totalizing negation of the presentness of a surrounding culture. If high modernist painting is guilty of complicity in the ideological battles of the Cold War thus, it is not guilty of indiscretions intentionally pursued, but only insofar as the totality sought as the aesthetic state, is in the end, modernism's most frightful and troubling dream.

The tension we are interested in, operates on the far side of this dialectic. Following both de Man's and Benjamin's call for a criticism that is the mortification of works, we need to search for a rhetorical machinery beyond the essential reconciliation the unity or totality of the decorative promises. This problematization of paintings expressive complex, a problematization that takes Greenberg's premise of the medium's expression as a departure, serves as the beginning of what I consider an advanced formal criticism. In the case of Louis' Veils we need to focus on the way the unity or immediacy of surface is constructed. We need to remember that as a dynamic intermingling of kinesthetic movement and color, surface itself was a staging of a moment of plenitude that possessed the irreducible elements of experience. To read Louis' Veils, one needs to be attentive to the way little intentional floods -- and here I mean the successive waves that in sufferance build the whole -- are constitutive of a surface, that is the utopian promise of the great flood. For if nothing else, the intentions behind a painting that is to metaphorically stand in for the time of the great flood, can only be to capture a wholeness which is prohibited by consciousness, that is the dream of totality.

Fallenness as the most irreducible aspect of Louis' new style was not a coincidence. It was a much labored after technical development. As perhaps the fundamental trope of Louis' mature practice -- for it figures centrally throughout his paintings between 1954 - 1961 --, falleness, carried a rich set of associations. Certainly there were those psychological associations, that posited the self as a fiction and mere contingency of a more primary "apparatus of experiencing". But further, there were biblical and literary precedents blended into this pessimistic appraisal of the human condition as well. Precedents similarly concerned with returning to a symbolic realm of necessity. Precedents similarly consoled by the salvation potentially inhering to what one might call a late appendage to Romanticism's

"apocalyptic history of consciousness".[69] Think of the example given by Coleridge: a "man watch(ing) his mind while he is composing" and better a small water insect winning its way up against a stream "by alternating pulses of active and passive motion". Think of Kafka's resolve to build a fence against history by founding a writing in that movement which was a continuous state of expulsion: a movement with a grave teleological imperative, but which nevertheless was the only paradise whether we know it or not. Think of Kafka's flight from the falleness of a state of sin and confinement, "to a wide open, inside a closed and stifling world".

Think of falleness for Louis, as the state of the present from whence all attempts to transcend the fixity, stasis, and immobility of ones character or personality would begin. Think of falleness as a veiled thematic for middleclassness. A kind of penetrating physiognomics of the suburb defined through and against its antithesis: uprightness. Think of it as a critical posturing made all the more resonant by the simple procedure of turning a figure of the good, upstanding citizen on his and her head. Think of the vertigo inherent in the trope as a measure of the daring possessed of the imaginative or associative act itself, in a culture of conformity. Think of falleness as a way of marking intention as both a limit and condition of mind, and think of the refrain of the repeated fall as a mobile flow of dead metaphors that render a surface, like consciousness, as fluid and seamless as an illusion. For that matter think of consciousness as a surface awash in a sea of instability. Think of the Veils as a kind of maritime event: a naval exercise fought with depth charges that well and plumb the unfathomable. But in so doing, do not forget that if these metonymic associations make for the most profound picture of a melancholy predicament, we would be entirely missing the point. For beside a pervasive sense of gravity, there is some indefinable merryness and delight that wells up within these paintings. A delight not operating on the level of the wash

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[69]De Man, "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist", *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 267.

that is a fall, but rather functioning in terms of the make up of a surface, i.e., the interrelation between fallen attempts that make up the whole.

For Louis, the fall from grace was that particular contingency upon which a self-reflexive movement back again toward the necessity of the aesthetic state hinged. After all, Louis' painting is about the paradise regained after the Fall. But regained -- and here is the rub -- only by virtue of founding a practice that was devoid of intention. Throwing one's arms up in the air at a paradoxical refusal of consciousness such as this will do no good. The obvious is right at hand. One need simply ask the rhetorical question: What on earth might be fulfilled by relinquishing intention? Ultimately, nothing, absolutely nothing on earth. For the gravity of the fall divorces it entirely from the wordly and the present, from phenomenality. This is the beauty of the metaphor of the fall. As the beginning of a rich metaphoric chain that can link the action of liquid to the action of light, through the verb to flood, to the moment of the great flood, which is the flash of a divine light, that is the birth of the self, the fall is perhaps the materialist trope *par excellence.* Think of Louis' delight upon discovering such a technique. A technique that completely defied the cult of action painting, and moreover fulfilled its historical destiny without moving a muscle. Think of Greenberg's delight with a practice weighed down by gravity, seriousness, heavy-heartedness, and melancholy, yet simultaneously achieving a surface with the look of weightlessness, a dew suffused with light, divinity, a state of pure grace.

Only by virtue of founding a practice in the movements of gravity, a movement antithetical and running counter to the aesthetic state, could painting offer up an unmediated form of experience, could it attain a state of pure, cool, detached, grace. The irony in such a statement, indeed the irony in Louis' Veils is so staged, forced, and so plain to the eye, that one is easily blinded to it. In a work like *Atomic Crest* or *Breaking Hue,* one need only note the way in which the forcedness of the expressive image is utterly at odds with the traces and evidences of process.

One is forced, if one is to make sense of the image, to confront the dilemma of time which Louis himself faced. Only through an appeal to that which precedes, an appeal to beginnings, a shame-faced allegorical movement "towards the presence of the present" are answers given.[70] But even these are veiled. For what kind of answer to the question of poetic transcendence, imaginative flight, joy, uplift, elation, delight, is the force of gravity. What kind of cryptic language has recourse only to the repeated and predictable trope of the fall? Certainly it is a grave indictment of the present, but what possible consolation are the physics of the gravitational constant? Is it Louis' own far reaching attempt to put into the blandest most prosaic images possible, what Greenberg took to be the crux of Kafka's writing, its "tautegorical" quality?

We need to look again at the Veils. Look at the burst upward in *Breaking Hue* (1954) (Figure 22), the marvelous levitation of *Intrigue* (Figure 4), the spontaneous solar flowering of *Iris* (1954) (Figure 23), the elation of *Longitudes* (1954) (Figure 24), or the utter release from an earthbound gravity in *Spreading* (Figure 1) and *Terrain of Joy* (Figure 15). In each case a release from the constraints of an earthbound destiny, is built out of the most creaturely, unartistic and mundane of procedures: the repeated spill, that is in effect only paint running under the force of gravity. It seems the only technique that was in any defensible for painting the modern moment, was absolutely mechanical, where everything was already decided and predetermined. It is as if poetic transcendence is itself acknowledged to be only an illusion. That, any ascent of the imagination, that any sense of attainment, achievement, or insight, places the self and the world on the brink of another collapse or crises, and by doing so changes nothing. Hope and possibility, as it were, ride an *Atomic Crest* that is always only built upon the veils of illusion. Magnificent as the pluming mushroom of pigment captured at the

[70]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka: Some Sources of his Particular Vision", p. 203.

absolute apex of its graceful crowning motion might be, the fall earthward of its irradiated particulate is as threatening.

Compared with a transitional work like *Trellis* (1953) (Figure 25), painted just prior to the Veils, this kind of absolute moment of tenuous balance is absent. As an image of the kind of bower or grape arbor that hung from the eaves above the kitchen window in the backyard of the Louis' home, there is the sense of the fleeting moment, but fleetingness of an entirely different species. In *Trellis* fleetingness is spatial in kind. The moment itself is not loaded. Rather it has the ephemeral quality of a visual impression just caught on canvas. The feel of the quick glance sideways, or the object caught just out of the corner of ones eye. A nature outside becomes the subject of an associative relation with an inside of feelings and emotions, sensory objects stand in for non-concrete experiences. In a work like *Terrain of Joy*, this symbolic correspondence, a circuitry founded on the perceptual metaphor and a God given universe, becomes itself the object of investigation. Imaginative flight does not carry one toward a reconciliation with the object in nature, but rather backward toward a reconciliation with the temporal nature of experience. In *Terrain of Joy* a temporal structure premised on the progressive accumulation of washes paradoxically leads one backward toward the time of the great flood.

Under modernity, remember, the symbolic universe where matter and meaning neatly fit together in some immaculate order, had become altogether problematic. Desire in the consumer economy of American Capitalism had robbed the present of its symbolic potential. The relay between matter and meaning, or the eternal and the temporal, because supplanted by ideological forces had made wholeness and totality no longer graspable. The symbolic framing proposed by Coleridge "... of the special in the individual, of the general in the especial, or of the universal in the general" was no longer a given. To make sense of the world anymore, required a balance between the self and the world.

The Veils are founded upon an attempt to grasp wholeness once again, to give modern experience the thickness and fullness it once possessed. In effect, Louis saw the problem as solvable in terms of making the surface a metaphor of experiencing. This entailed superseding the notion of surface as a metaphor of knowing or seeing, one that is which inferred a spatial correspondence. Helen Frankenthaler's *Mountains and Sea*, 1952 (Figure 26) is important in this respect. Louis has called it a "bridge between Pollock and what was possible".[71] The comment is all too revealing. For it neatly categorizes the debt owed to Pollock's work in terms of the masculine associations of projection, and that owed to Frankenthaler in terms of the passive and affective status of color. In *Mountains and Sea* and *Trellis* alike, there is an over-powering sense of the affect of the immediate. In *Trellis* especially, the affective status of the immediate defies a structuring of it. There is the distinct sense of an exhilaration or inspired creation which overwhelms the self. In complicity with a gendering that allows Frankenthaler to stand as a "bridge" between Pollock and what was possible, a work like *Trellis* is finally too affected. Too affected and over-powered by the moment to enable a complementary and dynamic interaction between the self and the world, which compositional balance in the Veils metaphorically localizes. In *Trellis*, the instantaneous act of structuring affect is absent. The struggle and active engagement -- that process of inner-creation, association, or as de Man calls it "self-reading"[72] -- required of conjuring meaning out of the nothingness of affect, is absent.

Obviously enough, this marks a crucial moment in Louis practice. It suggests that with the first Veil series the analogical relation posited between sign and meaning, as in the symbolic universe of *Trellis*, is finally recognized as corrupt. As a function of coming into the consciousness of the present, *Trellis* was nothing less than a contingency of the consumer economy and Cold War politics. What was

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[71]Morris Louis quoted, in James Truitt, "Art -- Arid D.C. HarborsTouted 'New Painters'", (*Washington Post*, Dec. 21, 1961), p. A20.

[72]De Man, "Reading (Proust)", in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, p. 67.

ultimately lacking in *Trellis,* which the Veils would provide, is what Clark calls a "self-making capacity".[73] If painting was to remain cogent, what was required was a surface able to metaphorically embody the instantaneous moment of the self conjuring meaning out of nothingness. Or, to put it in more familiar terms, what painting had to do, was stage the double aspect of a self struck by the affective status of color, and a self structuring that stimulus in an act of projection as a complementary movement in an ironic moment. The paradoxical balance struck as a function of the synchronic effect of surface accomplished precisely this. The form of the Veil stood as a metaphor of the self conjuring meaning out of nothingness.

It is no wonder that many of the titles from the first Veil series circulate around a thematics of time. Loaded titles, obscure titles, titles heavily embroiled with issues of prescience, inevitability, limit, fleetingness, and doom, name a plenitude or sensuousness that in every case is literally overloaded to the point of collapse. Titles such as *Salient, Pendulum , Longitudes, Atomic Crest, Breaking Hue,* and *Intrigue ,* are a part of a self-conscious use of artifice and stage work that permitted a representation of the immediate in the first place. Take the specific example of *Salient.* As the title suggests it is both a striking and conspicuous image. While surface matter is certainly substantial enough to offer up an image, it seems only just captured and only just preserved. What we see is the loaded instant, the instant absolutely flooded with tension just before the whole thing disintegrates. A sense of the utterly momentary permeates the fabric of the Veil. In the blink of an eye, the downward pull of gravity will exert its force anew, wreaking havoc on the delicate flow and gentle balances achieved. An invisible solar wind carrying a disperse particulate across the surface, (now) gently pluming it, seems poised to charge its diaphanous folds with enough movement to unhook it from its moorings. If there is the possibility of a kind of endless seeping expansion after this

[73]T.J. Clark, "Notes on Benjamin's Trauerspiel."

nameless event, it is suggestively counteracted by a gentle to and fro that emanates from deep within the Veil. The subtle flaring colors at the left and right hand edges only aid this finely wrought tension. They tack down a billowing sense of volume devised in the center by way of unveiling the spare and planar means that are actually employed.

In *Pendulum* collapse seems more immanent. Perhaps it is the result of the exaggerated arcing movement that has reached a more tenuous and impending limit. Or is it a function of the threatening shafts of black particulate, ready to detach from the finer dilution's and washes of color underneath? And what of the multiple banks of gray cumulus hanging heavy and rain soaked below these. Are they a prediction of the deluge to come, or another piece of evidence of the lightning struck flash we are in the presence of? What are dark clouds doing here anyways? And for that matter, why do these pillowy forms hide beneath them the barely visible arc of a rainbow? One sees this traditional symbol of the link between heaven and earth in *Salient, Iris, Longitudes, Atomic Crest,* and *Breaking Hue.* As a favorite trope, perhaps it contains some kernel of truth deserving further investigation? Whatever the case, both rain and shine are in the forecast today for the Baltimore region. Weather is indeed as certain an eventuality as the gravity which is waiting in the wings to propel the harmonic motion of *Pendulum* onward, which is to say, backward on the path which brought it to light in the first place.

In *Pendulum* the balance struck is a penultimate one. The moment captured one of pure apotheosis. What is pictured defines the absolute limits of composure and balance. Indeed composition and balance is so forefronted, so staged, and so forced that the tensions constitutive of the surface lend it an utter necessity and immediacy. Outside of this temporal instant absolutely nothing is secure. *Intrigue* dramatizes a similar instant. We are, as the title suggests, very much in the thick of a mystery still unfolding. Perhaps it is that loaded instant within time that the self-conscious painter, the self-proclaimed anti-muscular (and thus intellectual?), tries

incessantly to sustain. Perhaps it is the continually unfolding time of a dialectic. A time before the figurative imperative takes hold, on its next damming trajectory. A time before thought has gained the footing, or "momentary fulcrum" as Coleridge calls it, necessitated of a "further propulsion". How else might one represent the symbolic, if not through a kind of circuitous recourse to that traditional Romantic representation of the minds functioning: the flow of a river? How else indeed might one represent matter when it still has yet to take flight into meaning? How else might one capture the moment when meaning is still running, tacky, wet, and sticking to the matter from which it is formed?

If this is the case, and I think it is, then a sense the Veil, any Veil, is a battle of wits, fought on the surface of a gently flowing stream or brook. For the ironic predicament of consciousness can only fail successively to access the realm of continuous motion. Yet it does so nonetheless by fooling itself, by reinscribing its source that is forever running dry into the seamlessness of a surface which is the metaphor of the incessant process of a dialectic. Undoubtedly, the mystery we are in the thick of here and now, is that interminable duration beyond the apparent mutability of nature, which Goethe calls "*Dauer im Wechsel,*" and what de Man names as the central problematic of Romantic thought.[74]

Take the example of *Iris.* The title would appear to refer to the flower of the same name. Indeed, it is tempting to pick out the distinctively shaped leaves of the plant at left. Though it must be admitted, that picking flowers out of a dense and mossy undergrowth such as this will never get one anywhere, much less providing evidence for a metatemporal state beyond any apparent decay in nature. It seems the figure of the "iris" is utterly inseparable from the ground out of which it grows. Perhaps the title is to evoke the colored part of the eye that encircles the pupil. Optical metaphors are always revealing when it comes to painting. This is especially true in the case of the Veils, which go a long way to thematize and stage Greenberg's

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[74]De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", p. 208.

notion of the "shock of sight" or the "first fresh glance". What is interesting about the "iris" is that it calls up a whole spectrum of colors (blue, brown, hazel, and green) while at the same time obviating the fact of sight. For remember the word refers to the area around the pupil and not the function of the pupil which acts as an aperture for controlling light and dark. In a sense, the title *Iris* is a very clever and selective optical metaphor for a type of painting concerned only with color. A type of painting that was to supersede abstract expression by rendering its use of the value contrast obsolete. Little surprise that Greenberg named the Veil *Iris* himself.

The metaphoric chain that is already linking a type of ungraspable nature to a kind of colored vision does not end here, though. *Iris* also refers to the Greek word for rainbow. The rainbow is always an elusive figure. It is rain, dew, or mist, suffused with light. It is a kind of aerial projection within falling water that structures light to produce rays of color. It is a shape drawn out of color by virtue of water shot through by light. If both water and light is shapeless matter to begin with, the rainbow as a kind of shimmering and translucent figure is all the more miraculous an event for it. After all, it is a figure that hinges on a kind of light that is a negation of the conventional figure ground relation, a relation built on contrast. Moreover, it is a favored trope for revealing an otherwise hidden yet fabulous relay between heaven and earth. In other words, it stands as a vection between the material and the transcendental, a kind of moment when experience is given light.

If in the case of a series appropriately enough named the Veils, we are to assume that what is drawn is in fact a veil or curtain that hides or covers, it seems in the case of *Iris* we have a veil drawn by light itself. Something it seems, that is normally covered and hidden by virtue of its very appearance is here with the rainbow revealed. Knowing the agony of Louis' earlier struggle with the problematics of drawing, it seems plausible that a veil drawn by light was intended to reveal that which the muscularity of drawing could only hide. In light of this, we can only conclude, that in *Iris, Salient, Atomic Crest, Longitudes,* and *Breaking Hue,*

the infinite, which one is always blinded to, is in fact revealed in a glorious flash of light. The Veil drawn by color embodied the absolute mark of guilt. And yet the Veil reveals what drawing could only destroy, by flooding, blotting out, renouncing, and blinding that which is its central mystery. For if we are given special admittance to a moment Louis obviously cherishes as truthful, a confrontation with the absolute nature of that truth is absent.

The dilemma is a familiar one to students of Romanticism. At the height of what is necessarily constructed as an erotic encounter, there is a renunciation of plenitude. It is as if only upon opening ones eyes to pleasure is the inscrutable nature of its presence and immediacy revealed. No wonder for an art so wholly immersed in the sensuousness of the moment, that in the end it comes off as staid, reserved, cool, strangely distanced, detached, Apollonian. In a sense, the fall from grace, that each and every stain enacts, is nothing less than a shutting of ones eye's to pleasure. Which is to say again that the pour, the spill, and the wash, is not expressive in itself but rather only a dead, limpid metaphor: a stain. It is an admission of subjectivity that ultimately enacts, as a function of the successive nature of the procedure, the drama of a fallen subject. Drama is good. It enacts the nature of the fall again and again. The drama of the fallen subject gives the Veil its power, gives it a forced quality, and makes it stand in for a face-off with God. For if the pour is a source that is forever drying up, that is repeatedly running dry, what is expressive are the interrelations between pours which unintentionally make up the surface. This mark of guilt or absolute shame which is the essence of the aesthetic state, is an immediacy always blinded to the poor wretched souls of a muscular world.

Perhaps we can sum up the logic of the Veils if we return to Rorschach's warning to Louis, the motionless painter. If upon waking, life "cuts out at once" the kinesthesia's of the dream, then awaking to the finite world is only to be blinded, put to sleep, or denied the knowledge of the infinite. Or in Louis' slightly more

humdrum version of the apocalyptic in *Iris* : only upon seeing the light does one really fall asleep or touch the infinite. Louis' secret practice, that was entirely non-productive, for it involved no physical labor whatsoever, rewired a circuitry with the symbolic that was otherwise cut off by waking life. Whiling away the hours and days and months in the suburbs, Louis had only to harbor dreams of labor. His practice epitomizes that reflective labor in the dark of night that Hegel called " the noon day of life".[75] Yet when ones wife and all of ones neighbors wear gray flannel suits, one is never proud of the work they have not done or the fact that they doggedly pursue nothing still. Except Louis the motionless painter, who built a practice around the labor-saving device of the modern day-dream.

In a sense, Louis' practice is founded upon the same anxiety that is harbored by a child who is only able to sleep with the light on. Except that in Louis' case sleeping with the light on meant recognizing that life in the present made working stiff the founding moment of a philosophy of restlessness. Paradoxically, pictures as pretty as the Veils stand for a kind of radicalized position that characterized life in the present, conscious life, indeed any and all forms of engagement in a surrounding culture as nothing better than a form of sleep walking. Given the grave predicament of the decade that ushered in television and all varieties of middle brow culture, what could the critical artist do but embrace the dream of the living, the dream of the suburb, and the dream of America in the 1950s and show to the world what a beautiful illusion it was. Better to found ones practice on the paradoxes of the present than ignore them. How else might the limits and conditions of mind be laid bare?

Time moves differently in the paintings of the first Veil series for a reason. As the opening up of a horizon that exists within the flash of an instant, it is time governed by a negative relationship with that of its historical counterpart. As time

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[75]Theodore Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans Shierry Weber Nicholsen,(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 90.

localized and distilled down to the moment of the cataclysm, it flows with the patient, languorous pace of a day dream. As the impossible time of the great flood it is ultimately revealing of a patience, stability, and constancy, that one finds only at the very center of a maelstrom. But perhaps my recourse to natural phenomenon and cataclysms are somewhat misleading. Certainly the time of the great flood and that of the maelstrom would have been suitable metaphors for Louis' apocalyptic notions of human consciousness. Such biblical metaphors would have been all too appropriate with regard to the apocryphal (read merely gestural and allegorical) works of abstract expressionism, which Louis lumped together with "Picasso and the muscular painters".[76] However, we know that for Louis the time at the center of the maelstrom, the time of the great flood, was not seen simply in terms of the physical relations engendered between man and nature or a post-exilic universe, though these were powerful associations which Louis tried to build into his practice. Ultimately, the "intolerably slow pace" of time was derived from a dialectic that was entirely conceived of in terms of a temporal destiny within the self.[77]

What we can say of the first Veil series is that if Louis did take recourse in the associative possibilities of a stability borrowed from nature, or indeed a set of psychological problematics oriented on the self as an "apparatus for experiencing", or further the links to the Old Testament, all these various resources emerge only as a function of the way Louis made the surface of painting to represent something other than intended. This is neither to suggest that a leap into faith was the final solution to formalizing the mystery behind "synthetic apperception -- a conclusion one is easily tempted to argue in view of the titling of works later in the 1950s. Nor is it to suggest that a psychological mapping of the experiential moment is the crucial nexus that constructed his understanding -- though it must be admitted that this functions certainly as the most historically trenchant framework. Finally, neither is it to frame Louis' work exclusively in terms of the Romantic inheritance

[76]Morris Louis, letter to Clement Greenberg, June 1, 1954, Clement Greenberg Correspondence, AAA.
[77]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 208.

in modernism. Rather it is to argue that all of these imperatives were implicit to the way Louis' technique of working with the medium of painting was attempting to broach the question of the aesthetic state.

The mystery a Veil places one in the thick of, is the mystery behind "synthetic apperception", and the falling off into infinity that is implicit to the leap of faith, as well as that meta-temporal state beyond the mutability of nature. Louis' only wish was to develop a technique of painting that provided a "wide open inside a closed and stifling world"; a nuclear free zone that served a symbolic moment of wholeness and plenitude when the sign was mobile and when meaning was still slippery with association. What Louis had realized in the Veil paintings was that this state of fluid motion was attainable only by relentlessly forcing painting to rest on the impersonal, tautological, and repetitious quality possessed of letting stain fall under the monotonous, predictable, and constant force of gravity. Ultimately thus the tautological aspect of Louis' stylistics found a rich chain of metaphors in the imperceptible movements of nature, the forgotten and undervalued moment of experience, and the biblical associations of a lost paradise before the Fall.

The example of Kafka in this regard was not, I think, unimportant for Louis. The kind of polarities his fiction relied upon, revealed and unfolded a world built only of a tissue of appearances, "figures, likenesses, parables".[78] Kafka's world, was the "state of sin" of a post-exilic world, but in as much it was the oppressive atmosphere of a bureaucratic state, and indeed the drudgery and banality of a bourgeois culture. This multiplicity of possible readings was precisely what Louis was after. Openness hinged on a certain mannered or forced quality to the stylistics. It was manifest as a facticity or "circumstantiality that belongs more to description and logical exposition than to narrative. By dint of being manipulated the details manage to move the story, but at what is often an intolerably slow pace. Kafka's scrupulousness, governed by so anxious a vision, risks appearing mannered at

[78]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 204.

times, and the manner risks boring us."[79] For Louis, the problem of the symbolic -- and as much for Greenberg who wrote the above passage with the symbolic in mind[80] -- hinged on the creation of an intentional texture of equivalence. Indeed, working exclusively within the bounds of the prosaic, routine, redundant and tautological was so important, that it reinvigorated an otherwise looted form of anxiety. Here is Greenberg again.

> ...at the same time, the ultimate and the immediate, the exceptional and the everyday, the crucial and the incidental, intersect everywhere and at every moment. Hence everything exerts equal pressure and requires, in the telling, equal emphasis. But it is not, on the face of it, exaltation which level everything upward. The vision that produces the words of Kafka's fiction tries to fix most literally, most anxiously, everything that happens to be the case ... The prosaic may be heightened, but it is not deprived of the quality of being prosaic. What exaltation, or rather eloquence, there is in Kafka is ironical and comes at the point where the facts of the case invite a summing up that must, inevitably, be inadequate to them.[81]

The point is this. The symbolic --"what exaltation, or rather eloquence, there is" -- was realizable in representation only as a function of the ironic form of the whole. Only by rendering the narrative movement, that is more a "description and logical exposition", a function of repetition, could the expressive unity of the symbolic be given force.[82] If in Kafka everything falls into place as if in a dream, not that is to reveal the mystery behind a greater whole but only to accommodate the inscrutable logic that its necessity determines, Louis took this commandment literally. In the Veils "everything exerts an equal pressure", "everything has already been settled", and "actual life only recapitulates a point made somewhere else"[83], because that which is exerting the "equal pressure", and that which is doing the "settling", is nothing other than the force of gravity.

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[79]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 208.

[80] Ironically when Greenberg wrote on the "Jewishness of Franz Kafka" he was in the possession of a number of Louis' paintings from the first Veil series.In mid to late 1953 Louis' paintings had been rejected by the Pierre Matisse Gallery, and with Greenberg as the go between had ended up in his apartment during the fall and winter of 1954. Though the two men had met only just prior to Louis' one man show in April of 1953, the relationship between Greenberg and Louis was already a close one.

[81]Greenberg, ibid, p. 203.

[82]These terms underscore Greenberg's argument and occur throughout his article. Greenberg, ibid. See especially pp. 203- 205.

[83]Greenberg, "The Jewishness of Franz Kafka", p. 203.

Look at *Salient*. Look at how and from what Louis makes his surface. This is painting paired down to essentials. It is thinned down Magna Acrylic paint and white cotton duck canvas. That is all. Far from being a purely formal conceit though, the way Louis forefront's the factitious quality and physical substantiality of pigment -- through gravity --, is ultimately for accessing the rich set of associations governing the aesthetic state. Factitiousness is spectacularized for the specific purpose of revealing a process that is in itself the necessity we will never comprehend. Yet for all the Veils verifiable and empirically secure nature, taking an inventory or methodically compiling and categorizing the subject matter is impossible. No aspect of the surface can be privileged more than any other, lest that aspect gain some momentum and take a fuller flight into meaning, which is precisely what the Veils prohibit.

The blending and mixing of colors into a continuous streaming surface is much of the effect. The stark oppositions and rigid, crusty polarities of Pollock are here transformed into buffed and polished transits of color, movements between hue, and commingling of pigment. There are no borders, edges, no beginnings or endings, only subtle penetrations, bondings and diffusions all worked up into a confounding relation of equanimity. If the isolated or particular event emerges with any sense of urgency, which is want to happen upon any close reading, these episodes are always swallowed up whole. Fluid transitions and silent agreements are forged everywhere. So for instance the singular fan-shaped episode at upper left instantly echoes with the mute file of triangles composed of a more iridescent nature to its immediate right, these in turn resonating with those two larger consortings of striated hue at upper right, and the strange worm-like curtain rod upon which a succession of purple-red veils are apparently hung. There is the accord struck by columns of particulate: those two speeding and of a dense milling nature, with those others of a finer and more disinterested existence on either side. There are indeed, near repetitions of barely definable types and species repeated all

over the surface, shafts of pinky-red and turquoise animate one another, unfettered hues of purple hovering in only loose tension, set off blue drenched moorings above. Orderly washes and those glimpses of an underneath made radiant by earlier swathes of Zinc or Cadmium Yellow bath and calm the deeper hues and more complex patterns of purple above. Thin, wide, square, gray-black, and purposeful pours, the final and thinnest sequence of washes from whence we began, strike a vibrant tension with streaks, diagonals, and blurrings, left quite by chance.

One needs to imagine the central stain of this final and thinnest sequence of washes seeping down the taut fabric of *Salient* as the echo of a pervious fall. One needs to imagine this finest dusting of particulate as though it were shot through with the most immutable and enduring patterns in nature. One needs to imagine this final, inconsequential, almost translucent aspect of the surface, moving with the same predictable pace as a whole world out there. If *Salient* seems to embody the processes and flow of an origin and its tendency, what is important to recognize is that there is ultimately a damming of that most traditional metaphor of the mind (the river) built within the structure upon which that continuity and movement is sustained; a damming moment wherein self-mystification lies. For the gentle timeless sweep of the river hides within it an entirely lugubrious process: a strained, periodic, discontinuous process of gushes and rapids, still ponds and reflecting pools.

Imagine stain painting as a way of making a whole surface come alive. But think of it ultimately as only one attempt at reclaiming a more essential unity and wholeness always lost. There is no harm in imagining Louis' practice as giving the periodic and discontinuous character of life under modernity the grace of a fluid and seamless motion as long as we recognize that it fails. For the expressive content of a veil is indistinguishable from the repeated refrain of falling water that is its source. And this repetitious refrain ultimately forms a secret history of consciousness, forever repeated and yet forever blinded to the self. The babbling, murmuring,

bubbling, gurgling sound integral to wholeness, is finally built out of a socially mediated making of meaning.

Louis is a figure something like Durer's *Melancholia*, 1514 (Figure 27). He is confronted though, by the hollow symbols of a different era of progress. Rather than those rigid, mathematical, and dryly rational emblems of the early Enlightenment, Louis drowns in the sorrowful form of the commodity that promises everything. Louis' sunkeness is the welter of the backyard barbecue, the swimming pool, the Cycla-matic Frigidaire for the kitchen, or any other of those other modern appurtenances of the good life. For the melancholic all substance is ultimately unattainable in this world. And thus the profound anxiousness of Louis' vision. For the limits of Louis' project are the limits of a life lived in the present. A life lived in a red brick house on a pretty street in Baltimore Maryland. A life concerned with gardening, and shopping, taken up by painting and the daily tasks of running a household. A life outside dictated by the figurative imperative of exchange. Life as "a succession of isolated moments". Life as "a discontinuous material progression toward death."[84] This is the apocalyptic within an apparently incidental succession of pours; the Kafkaesque in his pleasing image of the day-dream. It is the great irony of Louis' post-exilic suburban painting,

The irony of Louis' practice was that the only technique that was in any way defensible for painting the modern moment, had absolutely nothing aesthetic about it. It was domestic, suburban, middle-class, and tasteless. Sure it was part of a rich legacy from the Old Testament, Romanticism, and structural psychology. But it was also just a series of little accidents, only just a little more than spilt milk. For Louis the gravest tautology rested on the unmiraculous fact of the spill, and the mechanical way the spill was repeated over and over again. He knew all to well that he was elevating the shameful spill, that most ever present threat to the good

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84 Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", p. 226. The final phrase is T. J. Clark 's.

house-keeper and the clean and happy kitchen, to the power of the transcendental. Miring painting in conformity was the only way to "build a fence against history".

Think of the Veils in terms of the ponderously slow pace of a time near death and as a way of staring death in the face. Think of them in terms of a religious devotion to a golden age: the time of the down pour; a deluge of transparent meanings, crosswinds and associations, of slippery signs, besotted mists, and dreams of floating drunk. Think of a Veil as the highest moment of poetic transcendence achieved solely through the cumulative effects of an intentional succession of kitchen accidents. The miraculous moment of the aesthetic state -- nothing but gravy -- formed of a whole lot of regrettable spills produced by gravity. A practice hinging on the consistent, predictable, and tautological use of "g". "Gee" for wonder, surprise, delight, elation, and levity that rises to the surface; but also for gravity, seriousness, troubling Old Testament type things, forgotten histories, and the rivers of the mind that run deep. Materialists have always held "g" in the highest and most absolute regard. It has always fruitfully served as a casting off for those earnest few who doggedly hunt down the obscure.

Morris Louis' first Veil series was an advertisement for America in the 1950s with a difference. It gave psychological testing and marketing, the bureaucratic state, and a consumption oriented society, a human face. For the Veil was a sur(face) wholly marked by shame. It was painting heavily flushed with color. A self-portrait of a happy home maker that came with a warning attached: "Stain painting: the latest in labor-saving techniques for painting in the modern kitchen ... But only for those seeking ultimate redemption. Not for use in the mobilizing of a revolutionary working class".

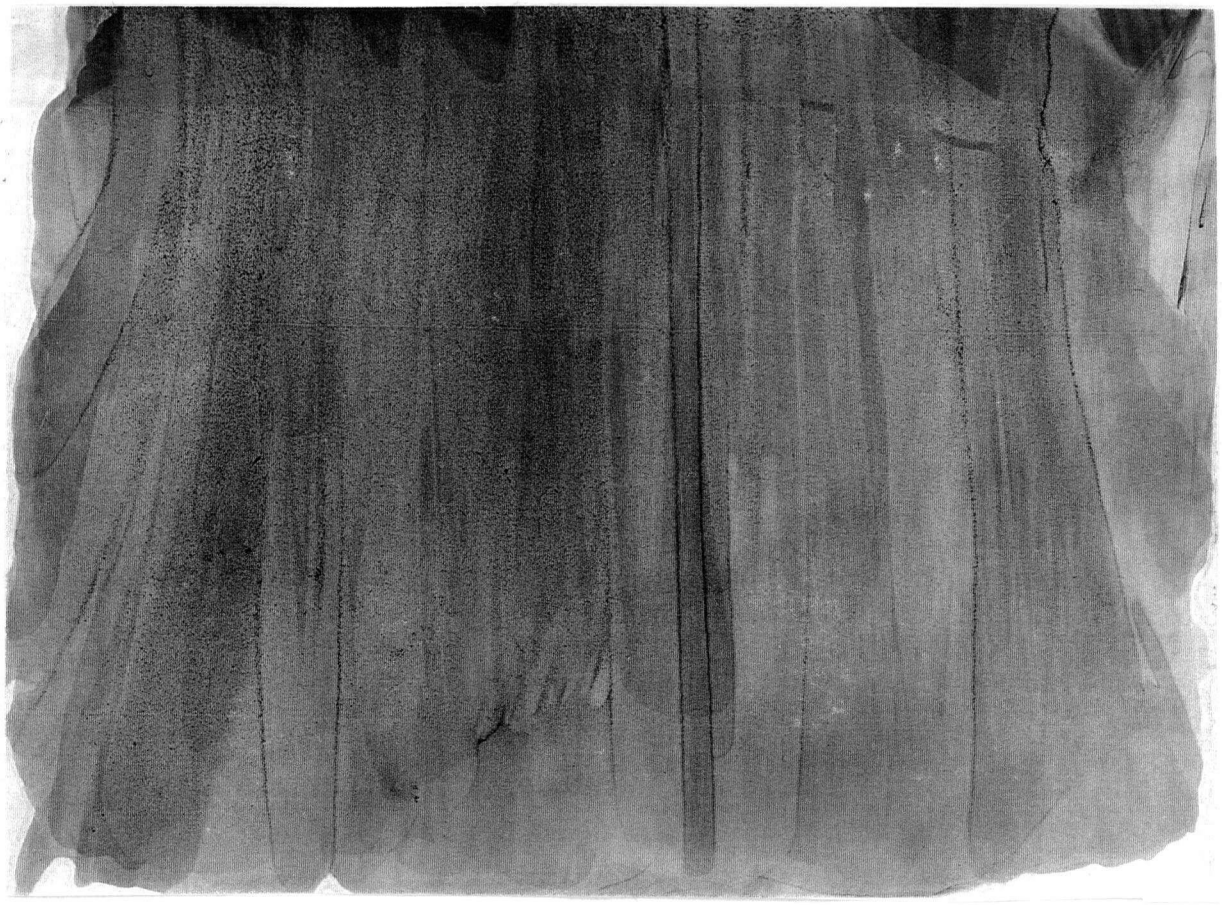
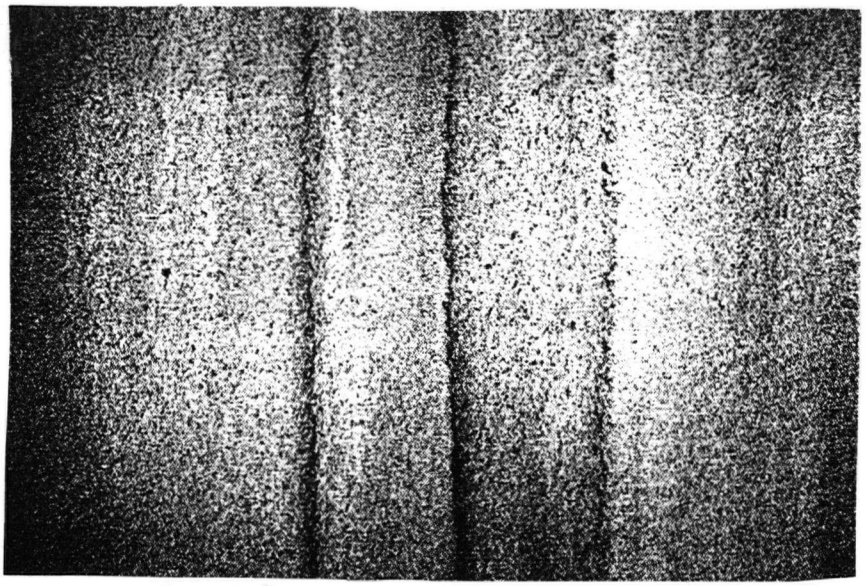


Figure 1 Morris Louis. *Salient.* 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 74 5/8 x 99 1/4 inches. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 66.



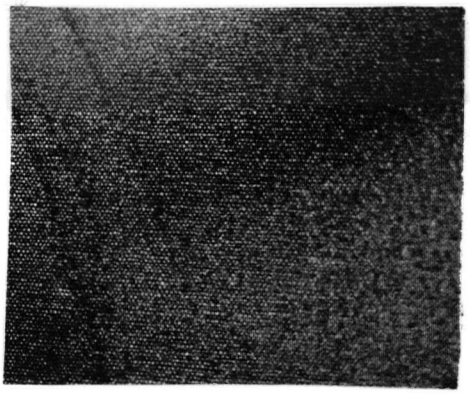


Figure 2 Morris Louis. Detail of *Salient.* Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 52.

Figure 3 Morris Louis. Detail of *Salient.*

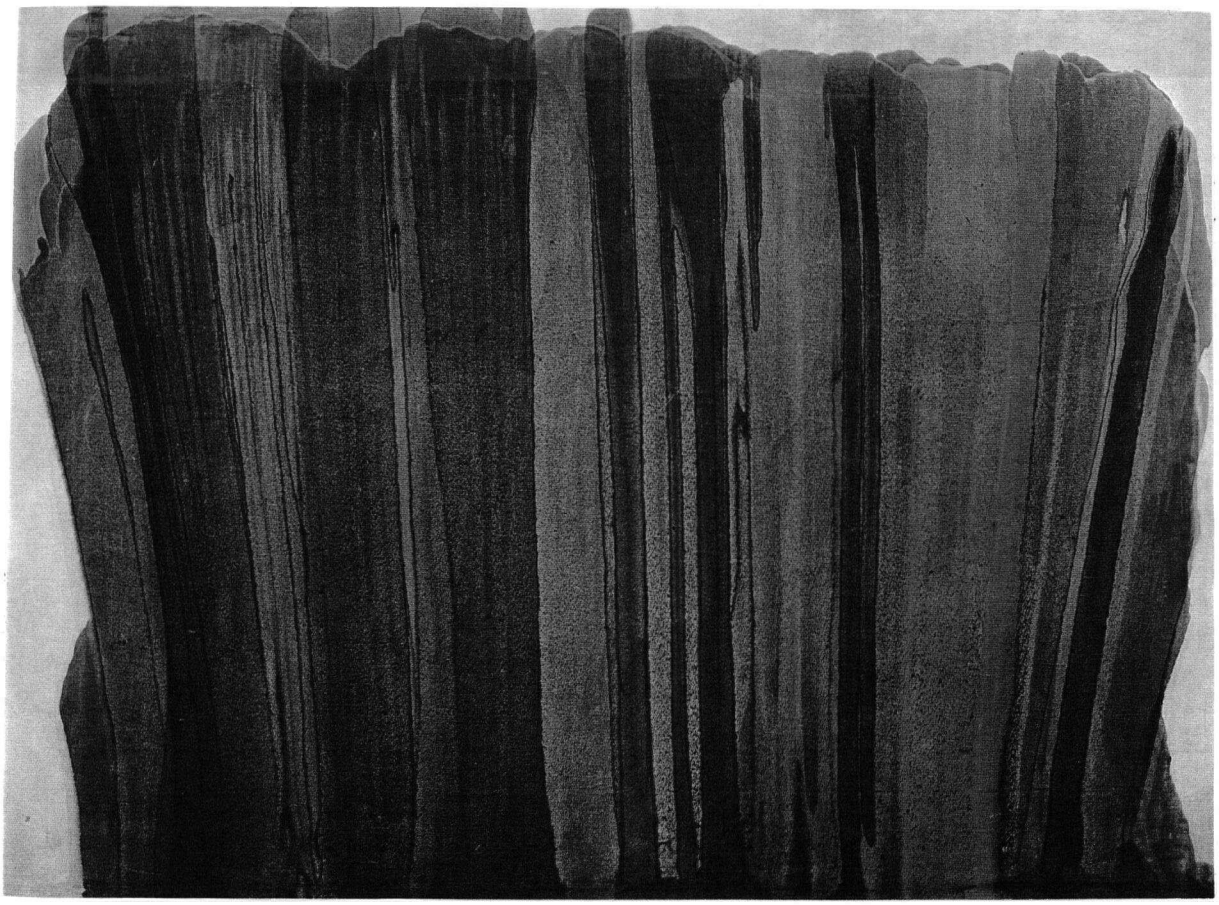


Figure 4 Morris Louis. *Intrigue.* 1954. 75 x 105 inches. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 65.

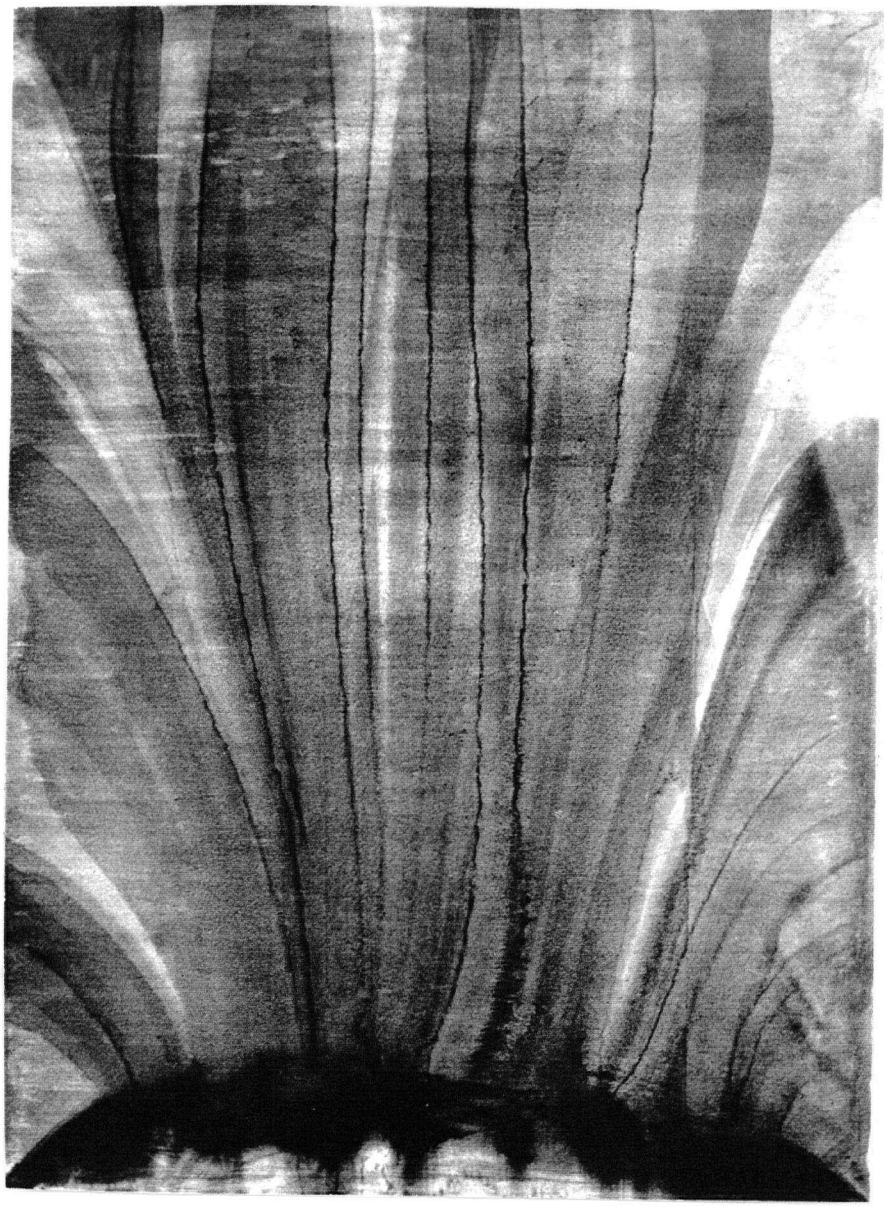
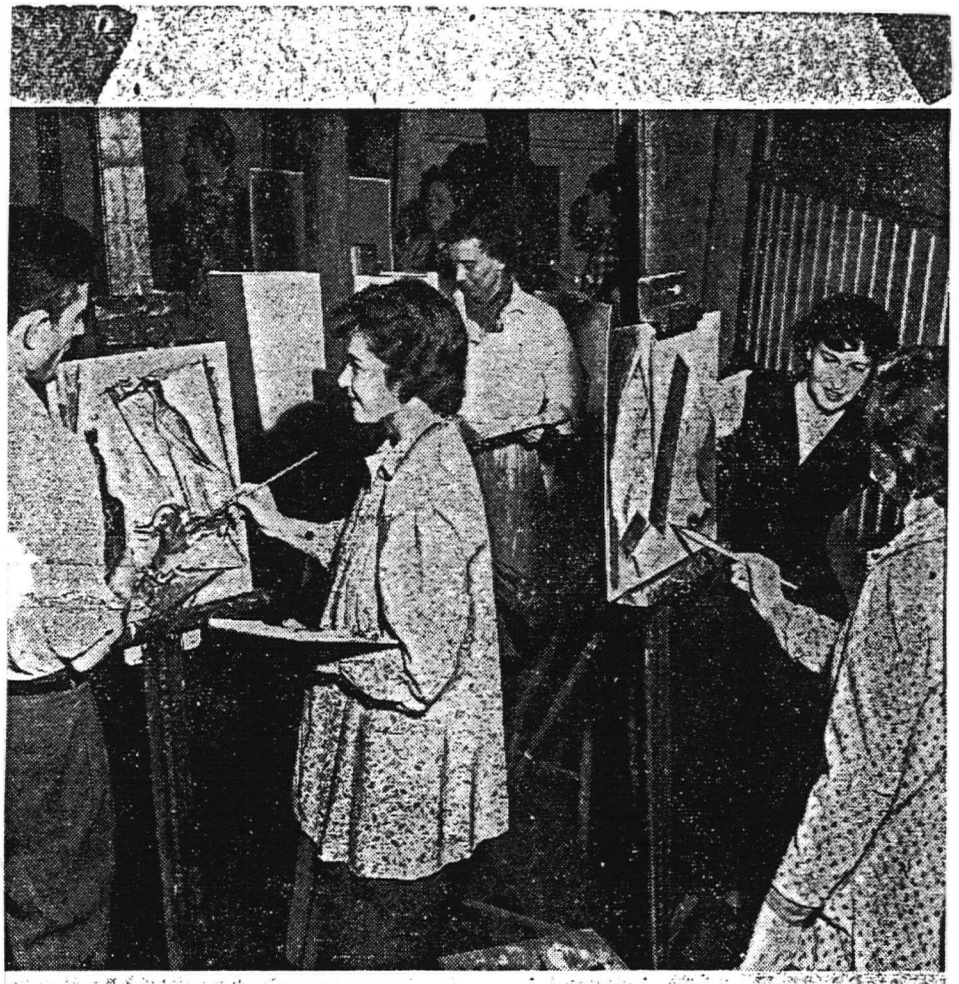


Figure 5 Morris Louis. *Atomic Crest.* 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 79 x 106 inches. The Lannan Foundation.

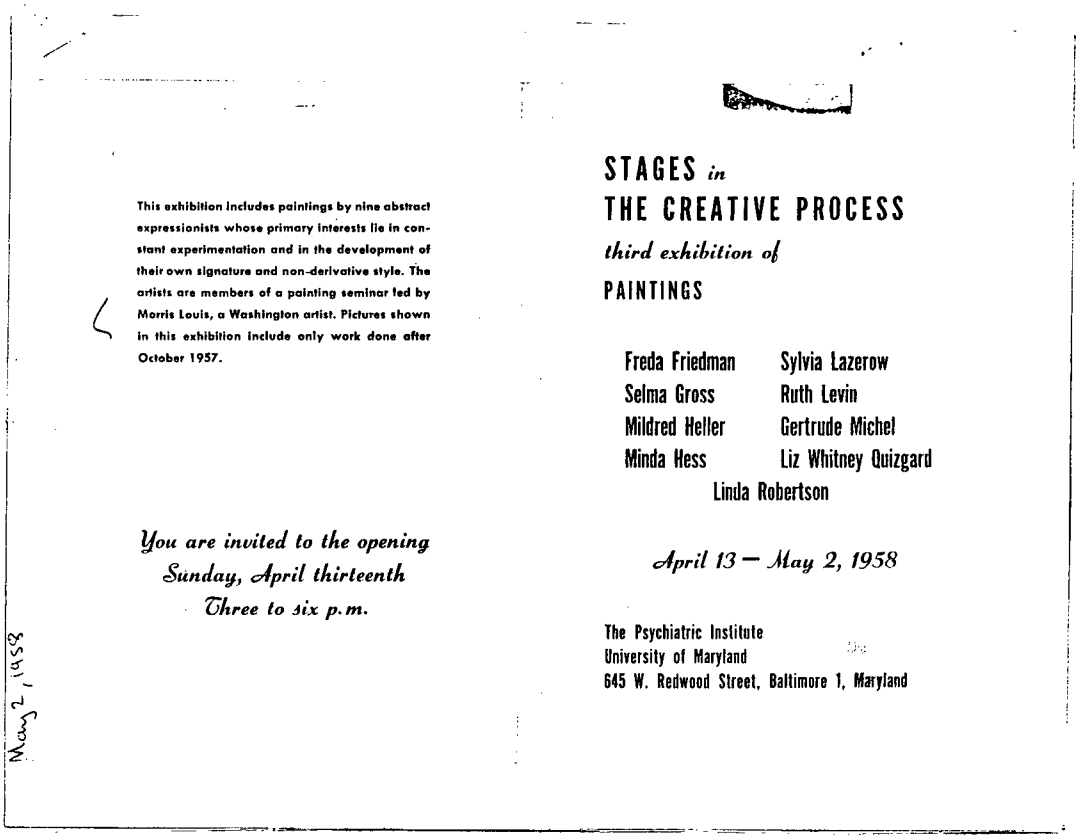
Figure 6 Morris Louis. *Pendulum.* 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 79 x 105 inches. Diane Upright: *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 139.



By Harry Goodwin—The Washington Post

EASEL HOURS—Instead of slaving over that proverbially hot stove, these young housewives are working over an easel. They're enrolled in a new "try-out" series at the Workshop Center of the Arts. It's offered during daytime hours for Washington home-makers. Morris Louis (left) is instructing Mrs. Portia Paradise, while Mrs. Ida F. Berkowitz (second from right) looks over the work of Mrs. Nancy Hamilton. The [illegible] week series, which is starting this week, will include several other art courses.

Figure 7 "Instead of slaving over that proverbial hot stove, these young houswives are working over an easel." Morris Louis. Teaching at the Workshop Center of the Arts. *The Washington Post*, March 13, 1953.



This exhibition includes paintings by nine abstract expressionists whose primary interests lie in constant experimentation and in the development of their own signature and non-derivative style. The artists are members of a painting seminar led by Morris Louis, a Washington artist. Pictures shown in this exhibition include only work done after October 1957.

You are invited to the opening
Sunday, April thirteenth
Three to six p.m.

May 2, 1958

STAGES *in*
THE CREATIVE PROCESS
third exhibition of
PAINTINGS

Freda Friedman — Sylvia Lazerow
Selma Gross — Ruth Levin
Mildred Heller — Gertrude Michel
Minda Hess — Liz Whitney Quizgard
Linda Robertson

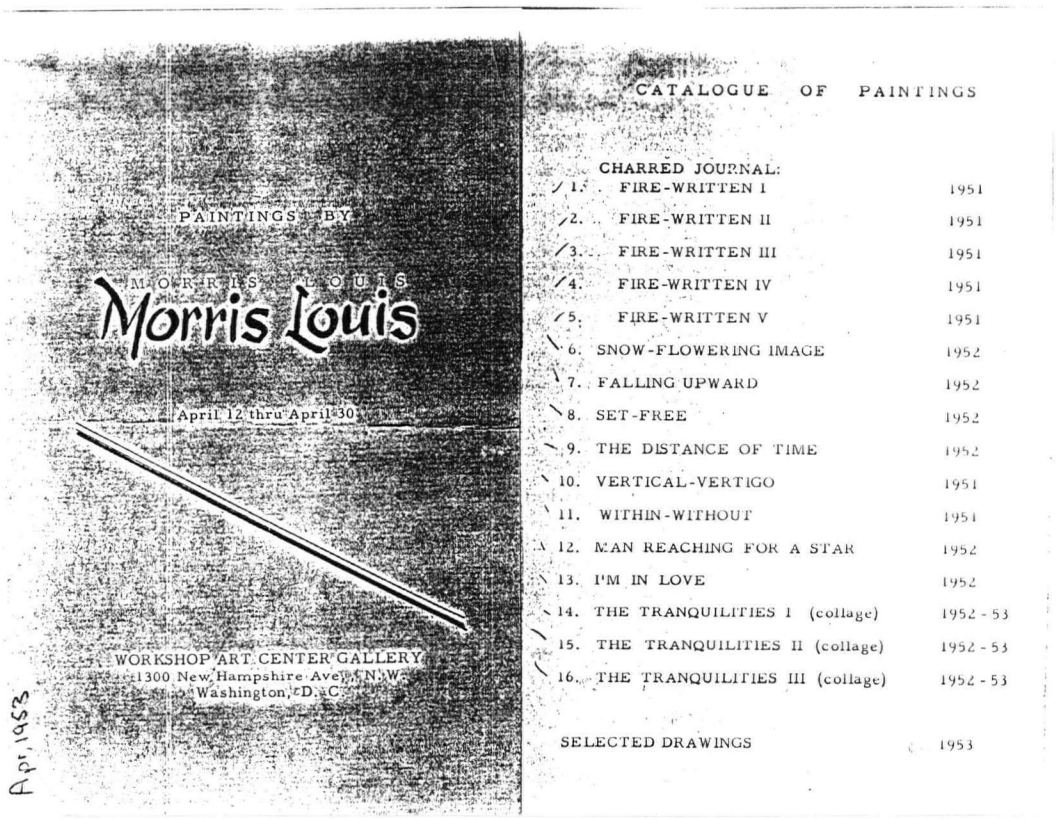
April 13 — May 2, 1958

The Psychiatric Institute
University of Maryland
645 W. Redwood Street, Baltimore 1, Maryland

Figure 8 Exhibition of The Psychiatric Institute, University of Maryland, curated by Morris Louis. "Stages in the creative process". Baltimore, 1958.

Figure 9 Morris Louis. *Charred Journal. Firewritten II,* 1951. Acrylic on canvas, 35 x 30 inches. Michael Fried, *Morris Louis.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979, pl. 14.

Figure 10 Morris Louis.*Tranquilities III.* 1953. Tissue paper, and acrylic on Upsom board, 37 1/2 x 58 1/2 inches. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 136.



PAINTINGS BY

MORRIS LOUIS

Morris Louis

April 12 thru April 30

WORKSHOP ART CENTER GALLERY
1300 New Hampshire Ave., N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Apr. 1953

CATALOGUE OF PAINTINGS

CHARRED JOURNAL:

1.	FIRE-WRITTEN I	1951
2.	FIRE-WRITTEN II	1951
3.	FIRE-WRITTEN III	1951
4.	FIRE-WRITTEN IV	1951
5.	FIRE-WRITTEN V	1951
6.	SNOW-FLOWERING IMAGE	1952
7.	FALLING UPWARD	1952
8.	SET-FREE	1952
9.	THE DISTANCE OF TIME	1952
10.	VERTICAL-VERTIGO	1951
11.	WITHIN-WITHOUT	1951
12.	MAN REACHING FOR A STAR	1952
13.	I'M IN LOVE	1952
14.	THE TRANQUILITIES I (collage)	1952 - 53
15.	THE TRANQUILITIES II (collage)	1952 - 53
16.	THE TRANQUILITIES III (collage)	1952 - 53

SELECTED DRAWINGS 1953

Figure 11 Exhibition catalogue for Louis' 1953 show at the Wotkshop Art Center Gallery, Washington, D. C. Morris Louis Papers, AAA.

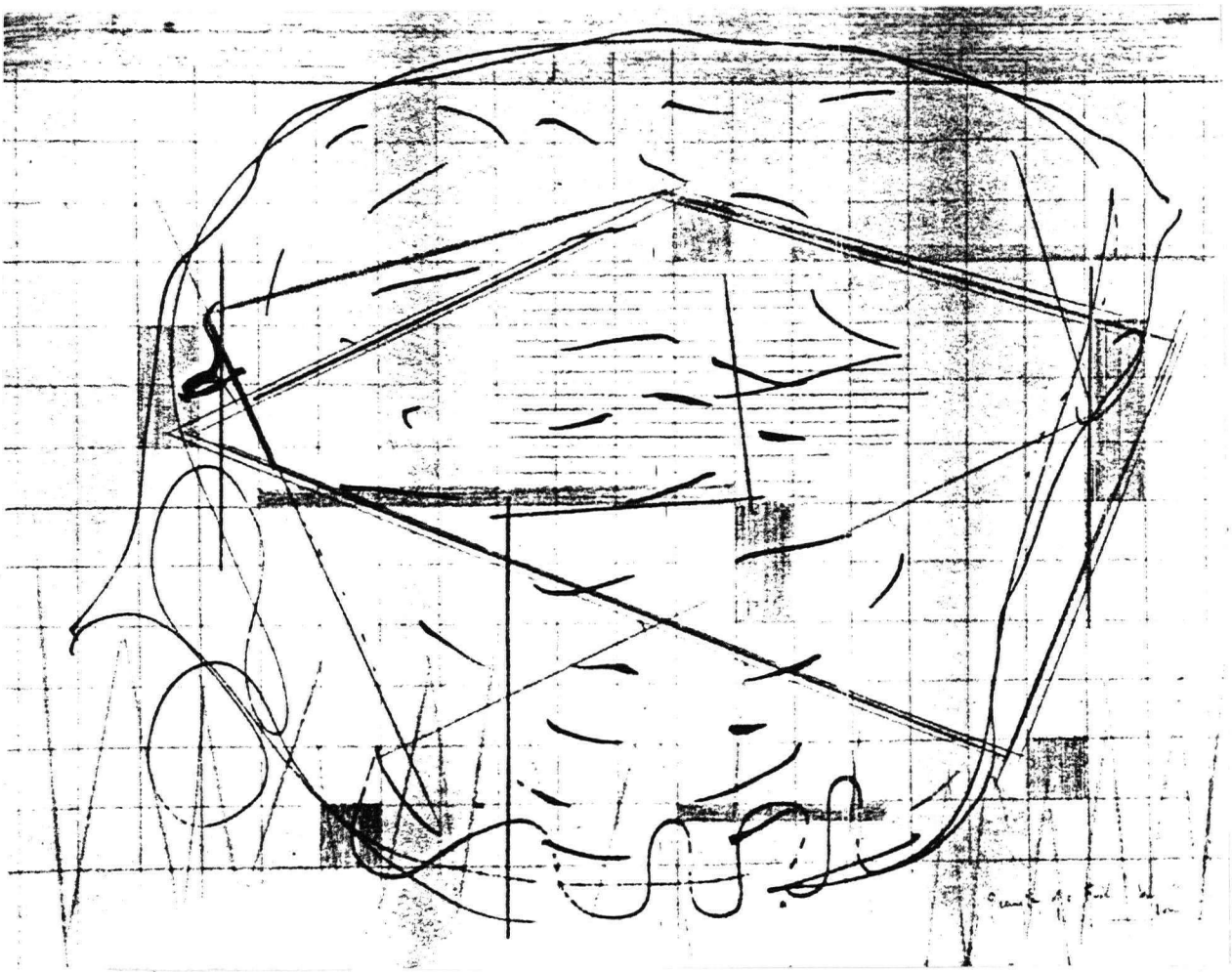


Figure 12 Morris Louis. *Geometry of a Fish.* 1953. Ink on paper. Diane Upright Headley, *The Drawings of Morris Louis.* National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979, p. 54.

Figure 13 Morris Louis. *Untitled photo collage.* 1950. 12 x 9 in. Diane Upright Headley, *The Drawings of Morris Louis.* National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979, p. 55.

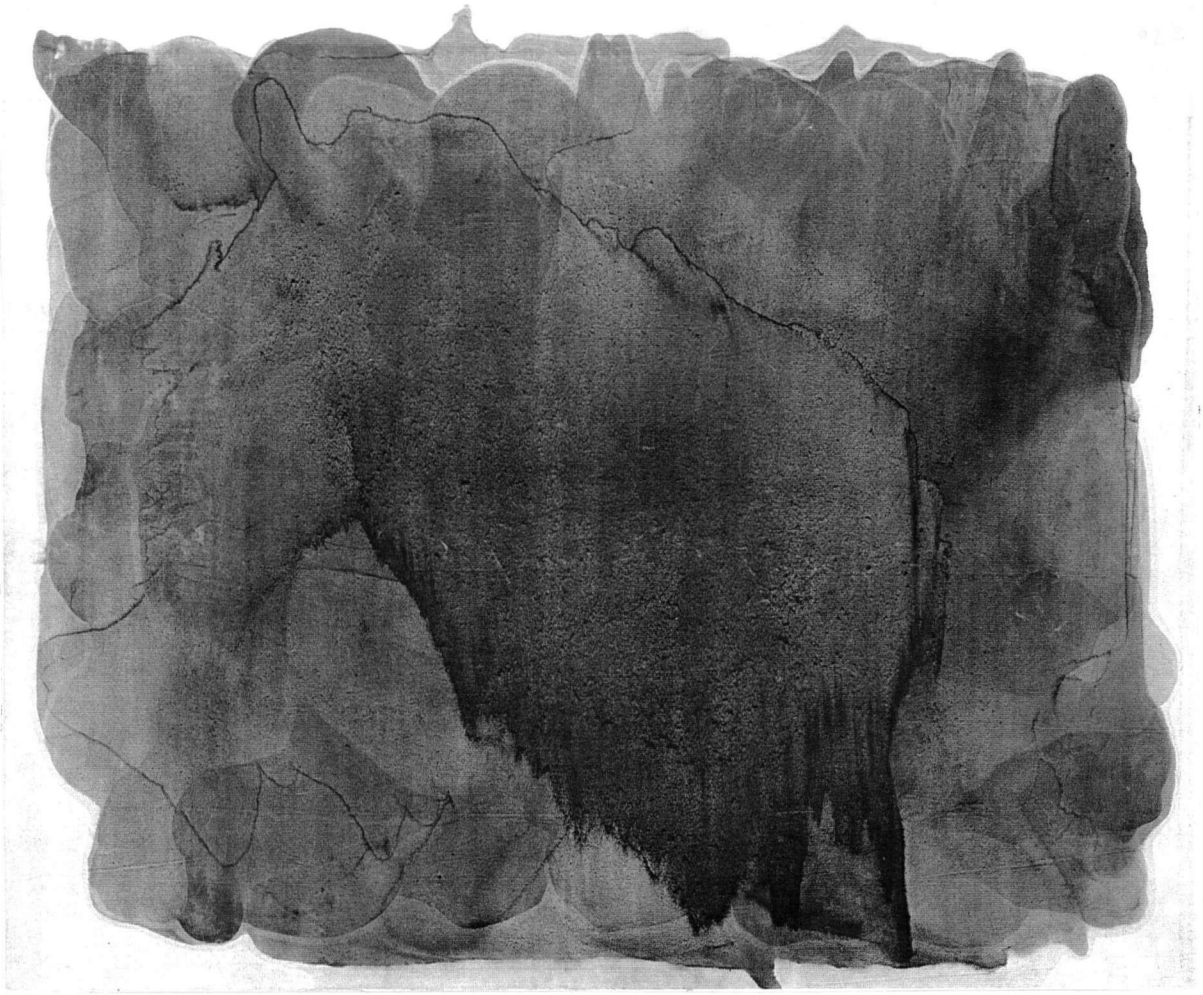


Figure 14 Morris Louis. *Spreading*, 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 79 1/8 x 97 inches. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 67.

Figure 15 Morris Louis. *Terrain of Joy,* 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 79 x 105 inches. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 68.

Figure 16 Morris Louis. *Untitled B,* 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 103 x 90 inches. Diane Upright: *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 139.

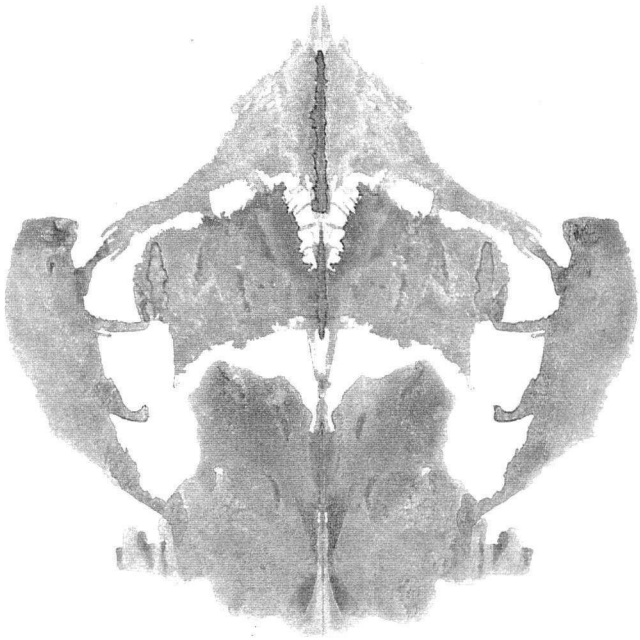


Figure 17 Rorschach card number VIII.

Figure 18 Rorschach card number IX.

Figure 19 Rorschach card number X.

Figure 20 Detail *Terrain of Joy,* Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 52.

Figure 21 Morris Louis. *Longitude*, 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 96 1/2 x 66 inches. John Elderfield, Morris Louis, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1986, p. 90.

Figure 22 Morris Louis. *Breaking Hue*, 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 104 x 78 inches. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 64.

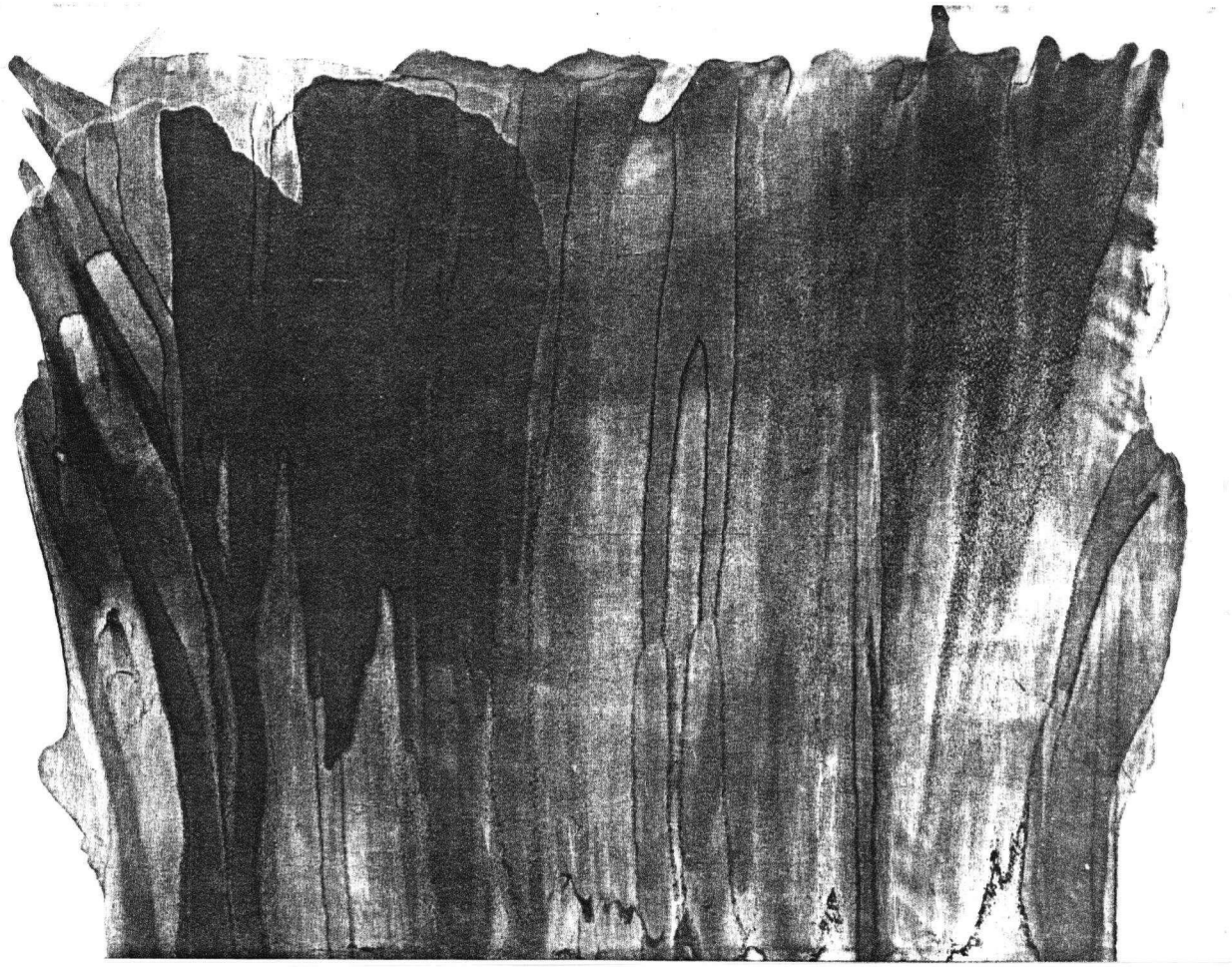


Figure 23 Morris Louis. *Iris*, 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 80 x 106 inches. Diane Upright, *Morris Louis - The Complete Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonne.* New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc., 1985, p. 14.

Figure 24 Morris Louis. *Longitudes,* 1954. Acrylic on canvas, 96.5 x 66 inches.
Michael Fried, *Morris Louis.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979, pl. 24.

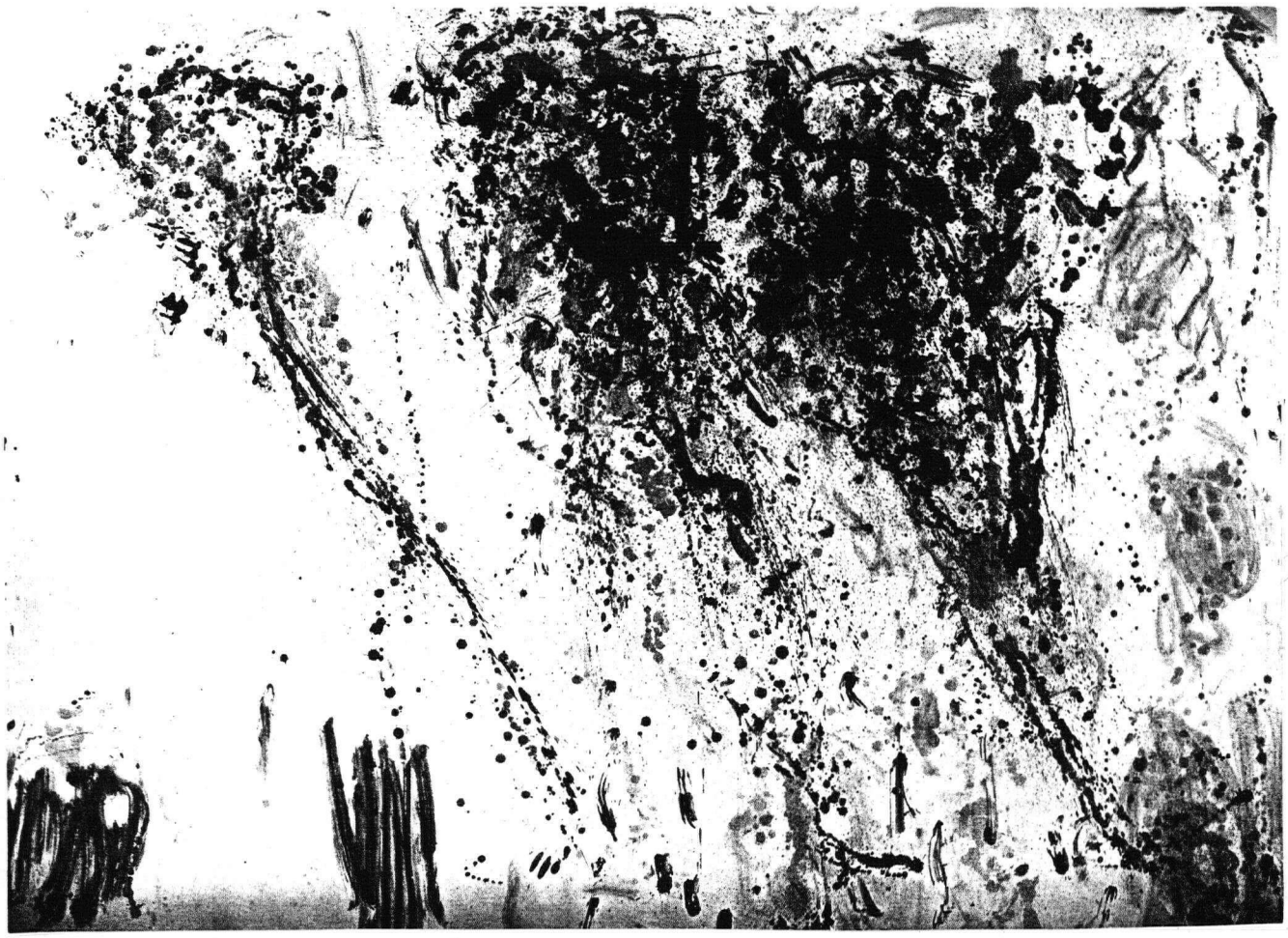


Figure 25 Morris Louis. *Trellis*, 1953. Acrylic on canvas, 76 x 104 inches. Michael Fried, *Morris Louis*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979, pl. 20.

Figure 26 Helen Frankenthaler. *Mountains and Sea,* 1952. Oil on canvas, 86 x 117 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of the Arts, New York.

Figure 27 Albrecht Durer. *Melencolia I.* 1514.

Chapter 5

Love American Style or How to Drive a [Square] Cat Wild (by Kenneth Noland)

> I give you a new definition of a sentence:
> A sentence is a sound in itself on which other sounds called words may be strung.
> You may string words together without a sentence-sound to string them on just as you may tie clothes together by the sleeves and stretch them without a clothes line between two trees, but -- it is bad for the clothes.
> The number of words you may string on one sentence-sound is not fixed but there is always danger of over loading.
> The sentence-sounds are very definite entities. (This is no literary mysticism I am preaching) They are as definite as words. It is not impossible that they could be collected in a book though I don't at present see on what system they would be catalogued. They are apprehended by the ear. They are gathered by the ear from the vernacular and brought into books. Many of them are already familiar to us in books. I think no writer invents them. The most original writer only catches them fresh from talk, where they grow spontaneously.
> A man is all writer if *all* his words are strung on definite recognizable sentence-sounds. The voice of the imagination, the speaking voice must know certainly how to behave how to posture in every sentence he offers.
>
> (Robert Frost to John T. Bartlett, 22 February 1914)[1]

I give you a new definition of painting:

This (Figure 1) by Kenneth Noland from 1958-59, and *That* (Figure 2) also by Noland, done some time during the same period. For all the distance that should separate a "this" from a "that", the similarities between *This* and *That* are striking. All the more so if one compares them with any of the other 150 or so Circle or Target paintings Noland painted between 1958 and 1962. Nevertheless what we are interested in is a kind of relation between *This* and *That* that seems perfectly captured in the phonic tension between the sound of "this" and the sound of "that". Which is to say (rather than to read), both are an extension of the cratylic illusion upon which Robert Frost founds his definition of the sentence. *This* or *That* are as much sounds, and further as distinct sounds as any of the "sentence-sounds" that Frost might collect in his uncataloguable book. That is, *This* is a kind of sound. A

[1]Robert Frost in, Elaine Barry, *Robert Frost on Writing*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973), pp. 63-64.

painting-sound. A kind of look that speaks in acoustic terms. A "sound in itself on which other sounds called words may be strung." *This* is a new sound. *That* is another. *This* and *That* are part of a new cool, a new language of the cool that Kenneth Noland would begin to explore in 1958. Being cool was in. Being cold was not. Being cold was for politicians, spy's, and military men like Eisenhower and Kruschev. Being cool was about jazz, and about painting that was hip to the Apollonian. Noland's new language of the cool was a look as cool as jazz sounded. In fact it was painting about the way jazz sounded, about love and sex, and about color. It was a painting about not being [square].

No cat wants to be [square]. You gotta be cool. You got to get down. You got to swing. You got to be one bad-ass-mother-fucker if you want to cut it. Cause if a cat wants to be cool, he's got to wail. There's no being [square]. That's for the suburbs baby . . . [squares]ville . . . You dig. Its like, Ralph Ellison says, a cats always got to be jamming in the right chili house. You have to be a "trickster" and a "con man", a kind of "practical joker" cum "mimic thrush" all the time, like Charlie Parker.[2] And it wasn't easy being "the bird" when postwar jazzniks and jazzmen alike were all "labeled cats". You had to be careful about not being just another [square] ass-cat-mother-fucker yourself. You had to "take off on the songs of other birds, inflating, inverting, and turning them the wrong side out."[3] You had to be "capable of driving a prowling [square] cat wild."[4] And the [square] cats weren't just those other brothers out prowling for a new sound, or that cast of beatniks in the audience. You were the squarest of the [square] yourself. Because deep down being a "trickster" and a "con man" was about fooling yourself. All us cats were in the same bag. Or at least that is the implication of Ellison's comments on Parker's style. "For all its velocity, brilliance, and imagination, there is in it", he writes ...

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[2]Ralph Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz", in *Shadow and Act*, (New York: Signet Books, 1962), p. 220.
[3]Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz", p. 220.
[4]Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz", p. 220.

> a great deal of loneliness, self-deprecation and self-pity. With this there is a quality which seems to issue from its vibratoless tone: a sound of amateurish ineffectuality, as though he could never quite make it. It is this amateurish-sounding aspect which promises so much to the members of a do-it-yourself culture; it sounds with an assurance that you too can create your own do-it-yourself jazz.[5]

All the familiar tropes surrounding the anxieties of a culture of conformity we have broached in the previous chapters are present in some form in Ellison's account. As an African American writer this may seem somewhat surprising. Yet it is precisely for these reasons that Ellison's white bread account is, if a somewhat slanted account of jazz, also a very astute accounting. His 1953 book *The Invisible Man* articulated the tensions of a similar cross-current; the dilemmas and dynamics of a kind of liberal cultural politics from the margin.[6] Most of the attention, in an essay like "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz" would, I think, have focused on that peculiar blend of pessimism and ambivalence that is typical of the liberal account of art or indeed the plight of the individual in a culture of conformity. The Bird's playing is characterized by "velocity, by long-continued successions of notes and phrases, by swoops, bleats, echoes, rapidly repeated bebop's -- I mean rebopped bebop's -- by mocking mimicry of other jazzmen's styles, and by interpolations of motifs from extraneous melodies, all of which added up to a dazzling display of wit, satire, burlesque, and pathos".[7] But inasmuch, it is also just a posturing and a bowing to the expected, a playing up to his role as "the world's greatest junkie", and the "supreme hipster".[8]

For all its "velocity, brilliance, and imagination" there is a heavy sense of "loneliness"; the "self-deprecation" which accompanies any recognition or knowledge of the self's ultimate constraints; the "self-pity" that follows from that failure to overcome the conformity of one's character again and again; and finally

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[5]Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz", p. 226.

[6]While highly acclaimed by the likes of liberal intellectuals and writers for its critique of popular culture, it was harshly denounced by many quarters of the Black community.

[7]Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz", p. 220.

[8]Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz", p. 223.

what is perhaps a summa of the preceding, a courting of negligence, that comes off as an "amateurish-sounding aspect" in any "do-it-yourself culture". Ellison's account is not all that divorced from Parker's own version, nor indeed Noland's painting.

> I remember one night I was jamming in a chili house (Dan Wall's) on Seventh Avenue between 139th and 140th. It was December, 1939 . . . I'd been getting bored with the stereotyped changes that were being used all the time, and I kept thinking there's bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes but I couldn't play it. Well, that night, I was working over "Cherokee", and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive.[9]

This and *That* are about coming alive too. They do it by "working over" their own version of "Cherokee"; a "layout", as Noland calls it, that is as far a cry from being [square], as the Birds own inimitable style. What is so revealing about the relation between *This* and *That* and jazz is that Noland's version of "velocity", of the "long-continued successions of notes and phrases", of the "swoops", "bleats, echoes, rapidly repeated bebop's", "rebopped bepop's", the "mocking mimicry", and the "interpolations", are as staged, postured, engineered, and negligent as the technical considerations of Parker's model sax play. Why? Because driving a [square] cat wild is never easy. In fact it is bound to fail. The problem of being [square] was not really solvable or reconcilable in any penultimate form at all. Being meant, being [square], being packaged, boxed, or gift wrapped. It meant "giving the thing (Parker) had been hearing a form or a language", and it meant travestying the language used to the point of caricature and negligence. For both Parker and Noland playing the thing they had been hearing meant building repetition into the form of the language necessarily used. It was about the "working over" and the "working over" again of similar change-ups, layouts, similar concerns, similar tensions and problems. *This* in itself is about beginning and beginning again, and *This* and *That,* are about beginning and beginning again as well.

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[9]Charlie Parker, quoted in Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz", p. 225.

This and *That* are a visual language for articulating the new cool. It was a new language, Noland's own language for the [(un)square]. It was all about working over the same riff five, ten, or twenty times, 150 times, all in different ways, all with a different sound. It was about cranking up an old standard, or returning to a favorite phrase and making it fresh. *This* and *That* are about raising the standard of American painting with a fleet solo by the President, Lester Young, but making it honk in alto like "the exciting one", Flip Phillips. *This* and *That* are about making American painting fly higher than Sputnik on a riff blues in tenor, like "the cool one", Charlie Parker, but blowin' that heat in a groove that only Lady Francis could. Noland's new painting from 1958 is about blowing his own sound. It is a sound that could easily be mistaken for a kind of triumphalism, but is actually a most caustic accounting of the American century. "If your sound was somebody else's sound then we (Louis and "I") weren't interested."[10] Noland's familiar recourse to the "sound" of painting is revealing.

We only need to listen to the almost scat style phrasing of *This* and *That* to realize that they have the feel of a jazz session. There is a kind of double-timing and trading of fours between *This* and *That* which is in some way a rhythmic one, easily as musical as it is visual; as much a lick as a look. The sound of "this" with its cymbal-like slide off and down the tongue, and "that" with its more punctual, effect -- the tongue finally dampened on the roof of the mouth, only to release an asphyxiated "ta" like the muffled sound of a high hat -- encourages endless comparison. An endless looking back and forth, between smooth licks, between *This* and *That* -- "This" ... "That" ... "This" ... "That" ... "This" ... "That ... "This" ... "This" ... "That" ... "This" ... "That" ... -- and "This" and "That", which can only precipitate a dawning recognition of the phonetic quality of the look of *This* on the one hand and the look of *That* on the other hand.

[10]Kenneth Noland interview with Shep Steiner, June 15, 1995.

Yet if *This* and *That* are a restaging of Buddy Rich on the skins, narrowing down the visual qualities equivalent to this acoustic precision is another story. They are instrumental arrangements: the dimensions of each painting, the number and size of the rings, the colors of the interior rings, and the space in-between the rings is all roughly the same. What then makes up a *This* or a *That*, thus? That is, what is the essence of "thisness" as opposed to "thatness"? If we discount the fricative "th" sound shared alike, does difference hinge upon "isness" on the one hand and "atness" on the other? Or is the crux of the matter beyond such semantic designations altogether?

Take for instance the dynamic established between the successiveness of rings themselves. In *This* the relation which the hazy outer gray-green ring strikes with the strong succession of pulses skipping from orange to black to blue, and then through a visual deception achieved by the last white ring to gray-green -- a kind of fleet solo before the out-chorus -- lends this outer perimeter the sense of limitless expansion and duration. Its hazy and swirling outside edge seems to sustain, even manifest, the splash cymbal's atmospheric "hiss" of *This* indefinitely. In *That* a sense of closure is more immediate. The yellow and orange rings seem to provide a kind of stop-gap to the expansion or dynamic of the central blue circle and first black ring. Nevertheless, the gray perimeter seems to have leaked out and been manifest as a function of that small expulsion of air off the tongue, following upon the full vocalization of the stop consonant "t" in *That* -- perhaps the kind of tailing-off of vibration that is the peculiar sound of a tightly stacked high-hat. This muffling does not militate against the effect of the whole though, which is like being slapped in the face ... Whap ... There is the acceleration and gaining momentum of the "th" sound; the strike or smack of "that" itself, and finally the sting of the "t" sound. *This. That. This. That.* A series of left and right combinations. Left and right jabs to ones cheek. Turn it again. Here comes another.

The relation between jazz and painting is one thing, that between boxing and painting is quite another. Following the beat of a jazz musician can be fun, getting beat in the ring usually isn't. What is important to emphasize is that phonology has nothing to do with how Noland's paintings look, but rather how they sound. That is, the circularity of *This* has absolutely zero to do with the appearance of a cymbal, nor does *That* relate to the shape of a snare drum. Which is to say, it is the lick, not the look which is important. It seems we are dealing with a kind of writing that makes sound. Perhaps Noland's 150 circle paintings can be called phonographs? Think of the Greek root here. Certainly they repeat themselves like an old worn-out record. *This* and *That* sound just like a blue note original. Just as surely they fit the description of a phonograph, which is a square instrument that houses disks, and makes music from tracings made on these flat round disks. Well ... if not phonographs, then maybe phonygraphs ... Fakes: something that pretends to be what it is not. Say a [square] that is a circle, a box that is a ring, or a painting that sounds like jazz music. A forgery: something that is not genuine; something hiding an identity. A painting that packs one hell of a punch. A painting that sounds like cool jazz. A boring, bland, repetitive, and Apollonian painting that is nothing other than cool.

Just listen to the central orange circle in *This*. It emits a succession of pulses that are at least as much akin to sound as they are to the visual language that frames them. There is the first brash shock wave of black, whose sheen and crispness can only be a function of a certain depth or fullness in the central orange it surrounds. There is the bright shrill yellow that mines what the relation between orange and black apparently hid. It reveals a new intensity or pitch in the central orange circle. The blue ring, consisting of a scumbled and thin central band, and a set of pronounced outside banding's, reveals another set of relations, this time tactile in the first orange circle. The inward and bleeding blue edge sets up a tension with a subtle halo of stain ringing the perimeter of the orange circle. While the thinner,

perhaps runnier inside application of blue echoes what we now perceive as a slightly drier harvest moon shaped area at left in the orange center. In turn, a more aqueous or phantom component in the central orange circle seems to be drifting rightward -- away from the sharper edge which marks the left-hand perimeter. Perhaps it is this floating effect that forces a focus on pictorial incident in the right half of the canvas. Maybe it is the momentum generated by the gray-green upper-cut at lower right. Perhaps it is just the dizziness of being hit by so much color? At any rate, the tensions which the successive color bands set up in relation to the first orange circle lend a kind of wide reaching and multi-faceted variance to that first circle's color, a kind of vibrato effect wavering between degrees and species of tactility, levels of tonality, intensity, and pitch, that constitutes the perfect orange. A perfection only showcased by the wide gray-green and dappled yellow outside band that seems contingent upon all these other relations. Its own dissonance constitutive of harmonies struck elsewhere, here all centrifuged out to the periphery as the out-chorus. A real knock-out!

Undoubtedly a reading such as this will appear forced. In fact, it probably cannot safely go any further than the kind of obscure references to jazz that Noland himself makes. As far as boxing goes, the argument is even more limited. After all how can one make a serious argument for the pun even if there is a continual recourse within high modernism to metaphors of visual impact, like Greenberg's "first fresh glance", or "shock of sight". The problem is that as soon as a specific color dynamic is localized and labeled as a type of punch or species of sound -- not only do 100 other extant tensions emerge, but -- the entire project takes a turn toward the absurd. The question then, is what are we to make of references to jazz and boxing that seem to pile up in conversations with Noland, or discussions about his new practice? What of Noland's long relationship with the East coast jazz scene, from the early jazz club his parents operated in Up-State New York when he was a

child, to his close relations with many of the great jazzmen of his day. Or that indisputable claim taking to a postwar American sound; a kind of right of property to the cool sound of jazz that would foment an interest in moving to South Shaftsbury, Vermont. I mean, let's face it. Only a visual artist with an overwhelmingly phonocentric disposition (if there is such a thing) would purchase Robert Frost's farm and turn it into a studio for painting jazz in the first place. With a name like "(No)land" one does have to place oneself within some kind of history, boundaries, or arena after all.

Perhaps the crux of Noland's painting hinges on his conception of "one-shot painting". I think we can assume that "one-shot painting" implicates metaphors of both instrumental process and powerful effect. We know it evolved out of an earlier conception of painting as a "jam session". Upon returning from their visit to New York in 1953, Noland and Louis collaborated on a number of occasions in sessions they called "jam painting". William Agee's comments are right to the point. "They played off of one another, in a process of mutual give-and-take, questioning everything, assuming nothing, exploring and experimenting with everything they could think of, much as musicians do."[11] *This* and *That* seem to belong to this type of lineage. The kind of tensions they set up echo the process of "give-and-take" that at one time governed Louis and Noland's collaborative sessions. There is a back and forth, a kind of sparring or "a playing off one another", that would make either, in the absence of the other, somewhat bereft of the charge of affect that they seem to galvanize when seen in conjunction. But don't forget that each painting also carries a wallop, a "one-shot" knock out punch.

Noland himself talks about the different proportions, tensions, or relations we noted in *This*, by using a term directly borrowed from jazz: the "scale".[12] The "scale relations", which the first ring sets up, are as numerous as they are

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[11]William Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings*, (The Museum of fine Arts, Houston, 1993), p. 21.

[12]Steiner interview, June 1995. p. 2.

qualitatively different. "Scale relations" of "size" and "shape", informing structure, are balanced or coded against "scale relations" hinging on color as hue, on its saturation levels, i.e., its "coolness", "density", or "transparentness", and on its tactile nature such as "brushiness", the "scuffling or buffing" of surface, the "matte", "shiny" or "rough" look of its handling.[13] "The thing is color", Noland has noted, "to find a way to get color down ... to float it without bogging the painting down in surrealism, cubism, or systems of structure".[14] Getting color down to make it honk, bleat, swoop, sing and bebop was crucial if painting was not to be [square]. The musical metaphor is, I think, precise. For Noland, if painting was to remain cogent it had to come alive; it had to capture the moment of a rising and welling up of breath as an exhalation or violent expulsion of air. For Noland, color had to pack a punch so hard that it not only knocked ones breath out, but knocked ones lights out altogether. And as anyone knows with the lights out, there is nothing left but music.

The bearing and character of color on canvas is the key relation explored, the crucial relation upon which a painting about driving a [square] cat wild was all about. Noland's conception of failure in his one-shot painting is revealing in this respect. If a "painting fails", he writes...

> ... usually it fails on the basis of some color being too thin or too thick or too wide or too narrow, or the picture too long or too high, or the texture of the paint is wrong. And if you go back and try to change -- put another color, cross color (which I do sometimes) -- it's always difficult. And more than likely I fail at it more often than I succeed, because I've changed the texture of the color all the way through, and that extra density of a second application of paint will throw the tactile balance out of whack. Or it will get too shiny or too matte or too rough, and then it'll jump out of the kind of balance that you've made. Space in my work, and color, especially spatial color, is changing all the time. That's really what it's about almost more than anything else. [15]

"Spatial color", an epithet for the way color makes up "scale relations", was the result of Noland allowing himself to be carried away by the momentum

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[13]Steiner interview, June 1995. p. 2.

[14]Moffet, *Kenneth Noland*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), p. 51

[15]Cummings, *Artists in their Own Words*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 147.

generated by jamming with the material itself. Arriving at "spatial color" involved a process which was the result of a kind of unmediated interference by the thinking subject. It was a "process of mutual give-and-take", of "coming alive", of "playing the thing" Charlie Parker had "been hearing". "Spatial color" as Noland calls it in the passage above was a catch-all phrase to describe the qualities making up color's complex tactile nature. It was about the way color carried an impact through space. It was Noland's way of discussing visual euphony; a way of giving what is an otherwise fortuitous relation or association between painting and boxing and the improvisational jazz session, enough substance to base a practice on. The visual repetition of "scale relations" in the form of a surface made up of concentric rings, is at the core of Noland's new definition of painting in 1958. Allowing the material to dictate the end result through the on-going and building up of relations animated between rings of differing size, color, and texture was a new departure for him. The subtleties of intricately working material, in order that one specific color rings' "matte", "shiny" or "rough" look would resonate with a whole other world of qualities, in a whole other world of successive rings, was Noland's solution to the complex of questions surrounding the stale-mate of abstract expressionism.

Obviously the relation between the Orphic myth of poetry and Noland's painting is not as far-fetched as it may at first have seemed. The expressive power or punch carried by the literal aspect of Frost's "sentence-sound" is homologous to a new privileging of materiality and process in Noland's painting. Both Frost's and Noland's work depended in this sense, on their respective medium's physicality. "Spatial color", Noland's use of color, is a reinventing of Frost's particular perspective on the properties immanent to poetry in terms of the medium of painting. Rather than being fostered by semantic configurations of the gestalt or figure, expression in Noland's painting is not what we see or read, but how purely technical considerations look at a glance, i.e. how they sound or how hard they hit home. When Noland paints exclusively in terms of color, and pushes color

exclusively in terms of its visual impact, it is only with painting's physical properties in mind.[16]

Noland's new definition of painting hinged exclusively on its acoustic success. The acoustics of painting were concerned with not what was seen in part, but what was heard as a whole. Noland's new definition of painting was about giving color so much visual impact that it could literally ring ones bell. Evidently, only through a precise exploration of color's effects -- its "thinness, thickness, transparency, opacity, matteness, dryness, sheen"[17]-- only through a painstaking and tactile exploration of the most rigorous kind, could expression be localized; not defined as such, but territorialized through a process of identifying that which it was not. While an exacting and scrupulous care for the physical nature of the color of successive rings cannot hope to delimit or settle the problem of expression, it can as a function of the structural totality bind expression to technical considerations which the latter negates. Expression depends on a structure of occlusion for its existence. As an instantaneous making of meaning or grasping of surface it is the absence at the core of any reading. Though occluded by the very perceptual processes through which we mobilize visual information -- process the fact of a drop of pigment at the left-hand perimeter of the inner orange-red circle in *This* , visually log the fact of a number of blue drips in the raw canvas at upper right and lower right -- it is encapsulated nonetheless. Though the most insignificant trace of stain will leave an irrevocable impression, qualify our experience, and determine the finest nuance of feeling, the recognition of such a detail during the process of reading can only prohibit the total affect.

Locked into a relation of mutual exclusion, expression can only be manifest in the form of a compromise. While it is contingent on the act of reading, it is mobilized by the force of a totalizing glance. In *This* or *That* such a compromise

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[16]"I wanted color to be the origin of painting", Noland recalls, "I was trying to neutralize the layout, the shape,the composition... I wanted to make color the generating force". Agee, *The Circle Paintings*, p. 33.

[17]Moffet, *Kenneth Noland*, p. 102.

formation allows the painting to exist as a tension between the global effect on the one hand and the physical minutiae of painting on the other hand. The key resolution to the problem of form in Noland's Target or Circle paintings was thus complicit in a spectacularization of the physicality of painting. It is the sweet science of painting: an instrumental arrangement of color in order that painting sound like jazz; a physical rearrangement of a face or figure in order that a square arena be called a ring. Obviously there is more at stake in the title of a series called the Circle paintings than first meets the eye. Perhaps the point is, a punch line can be a circle.

This is one reading of Noland's painting. Within the extant literature on Noland's painting there is another more dominant account. If a little less spirited this second formalist account is certainly the most important accounting of that painting. The problem with it, is that it takes much for granted. Because it fails to critically engage with the materialist imperative of these works it has localized the discussion of Noland's painting around specifically formal issues -- questions pertaining to process and the handling of paint. For a more complete and richer accounting of Noland's practice, accommodations must be made to both readings. In other words, we must find a way of rendering the formalist account concomitant with the development of Noland's language for a new cool. To do so, it is necessary to rehearse once again, the essential points of the formalist account and unfortunately this is a tedious process.

All we really know from a formalist perspective is that in 1958 Kenneth Noland would begin again. He would begin to paint in an entirely new manner, repeating a posture and fulfilling a return that had become a model or pattern for modernist practice. Beginning again, like Pollock and Louis before him, Noland would return to the physical properties of painting in order that these properties impose their own logic on painting. He has defined the moment as a return to

"process" and "real handling". Consider one of Noland's earliest Targets, a painting appropriately enough called *Beginning* (1958) (Figure 5). Take *Beginning* as a paradigmatic example of Noland's new painting. It is. It looks the same as all the other paintings in the Target series, and like the others, it is composed of successive rings of color and raw canvas. It is titled *Beginning* for a reason. It has the feel of an awkward first attempt. It exudes a kind of immediacy, naiveté, or negligence that seems to want to register the fact of origination; that it is the first of a series; that it holds a privileged position within the series as a whole; and that it is symbolic of something like a process -- the thing in itself.

In terms of a painting like *Beginning* the return to process and "real handling" (read man-handling) was a breaking free of a "filial" history devolving around abstract expressionism. Michael Fried has described Noland's shift in 1958 in similar terms. Fried sees the Target paintings as a "breakthrough" to a "mature style". The implication being that the overcoming of influence, specifically that of abstract expressionism, involved a return to materiality.[18] More than this however, "breakthrough" to "mature style" suggests that Noland's new painting from 1958 was not simply an implicit rejection and repudiation of his abstract expressionist inspired works, but a working through and a working over of them. Take, for instance, the examples of *Untitled* (1956) (Figure 6), *Untitled* (1957) (Figure 7), and *Untitled*(1957) (Figure 8). In relation to the new painting from 1958, these early works are apparently possessed of the "boring", "stereotyped changes" of abstract expressionism. The irony here of course is that works like *Untitled* (1956) (Figure 5), *Untitled* (1957) (Figure 6), *Untitled* (1956) (Figure 7) hinge on just the kind of frantic and obsessive brushstroke that one might mistake for a "breakthrough" toward a personal, particular, or individual style. In fact, the shift which seems to have taken place is toward the most boring, the most tedious, and the most stereotyped changes conceivable. One is tempted to ask how this is in any way

[18]Michael Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella,* (Fogg Art Museum: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1965), p. 24.

personal or individual? It seems that Noland's kind of "real-handling" or man-handling -- a handling that is presumably as manly as it was in control of its manliness -- was a negation of the more strident and animated form of masculinity upon which abstract expressionism depended. "The question we always discussed", Noland recalls of conversations with Louis, "was what to make art about."

> ...We didn't want anything symbolic like say, Gottlieb, or geometric in the old sense of Albers. The abstract expressionists painted the appearance or symbol of action, the depiction of gesture. We wanted the appearance to be the result of the process of making it -- not necessarily to look like a gesture, but to be the result of real handling. Morris achieved that before me.[19]

Not interested in the "symbolic like say, Gottlieb", or the "appearance or symbol of action, the depiction of gesture", Noland and Louis were concerned rather with a process that might be constitutive of the symbolic, that might make up the "depiction of gesture", or else render the "appearance or symbol of action" in terms of a process. If at all confusing in view of terminology used in the preceding chapters, Noland's passage goes right to the point. A concern for "process" and "real handling" stood in opposition to abstract expressionism's allegorization or personifying of action or gesture. A concern for process and real handling was a way to paint the symbolic. The notion of "breakthrough" implied a superseding of the allegorical impetus one finds in his earlier abstract expressionist inspired paintings such as *Untitled,* (1956) (Figure 6), *Untitled,* (1957) (Figure 8), or *Globe,* (1956) (Figure 9). It implied a new way of working that forefronted the peculiarities of his own approach to materials, over that approach used by others -- the over 500 or so other abstract expressionist painters exhibiting in New York at the time.

Art historically speaking, "breakthrough" suggested that drawing and value contrasts were replaced by a new emphasis on color. It meant that the density and pictorial concentration of these early works was rendered obsolete; that the centered and condensed figurative element of cubism was expurgated and replaced by an "all-

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[19]Noland, John Elderfield, *Morris Louis,* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1986), p.33; Moffet, *Kenneth Noland,* p. 39.

over" form of abstraction. "Breakthrough" suggested a new stylistics founded in a very personal reworking of materiality, a very individual approach to expression. Ones own approach to working with the material was an analogue of the particular, an analogue of the minds functioning. Here is the great paradox of Noland's new language of the cool. For if it is heavy and rich with the associations of a life lived on the wild side in America in the 1950s, Noland's new language of the cool was also the cornerstone of formalism's take on Kantian aesthetic detachment. It is Apollonian coolness, detached and distanced coolness, objective coolness, a clinical and thorough-going coolness which is our focus now: the sweet science of painting more akin to the critique of aesthetic judgment than pugilism or jazz.

We know from various archival sources that the selection of any one canvas, including the canvas for *Beginning*, involved some scrutiny.[20] Attempts were made to ensure a canvas with warp and weft of equal balance. Imperfections in the weave and/or in the whiteness of the canvas mattered, because it was only unprimed canvas which Noland used. As in the case of Josef Albers, canvas texture and whiteness functioned as an integral component of the painting, as a neutral color.[21] In the case of the majority of the circle paintings, work took place on unsized canvas. We can assume these pieces were roughly square. Because the majority of circle paintings measure under and up to approximately 6 ft. by 6 ft., the unsized pieces of canvas would have been larger. Often the raw canvas was spread out and tacked down in a horizontal position on top of saw horses. Those paintings larger than approximately 6 ft. by 6 ft. were in general painted on the floor. *Beginning*, which measures over 7 ft. X 7 ft. square is a difficult painting to categorize, for the size of the outer ring of red remains under six feet in diameter and could thus have been painted either elevated on saw horses or on the floor. This outer ring size, in the case of *Beginning*, is the most significant. The size of a painting was something "physical" to Noland. Noland liked Wilhelm de

[20]Interview with Keiku Seiko, June 1995.

[21]Albers, *Interaction of Color*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 60.

Kooning's statement on size: "If I stretch my arms next to the rest of myself and wonder where my fingers are -- that is all the space I need as a painter".[22] Whether painted on saw horses or on the floor, all the Targets were conceived of as a set. All were of a size that were related to the body.

Like Morris Louis, Noland used Magna, an acrylic resin-based paint from Leonard Bocours of Washington D. C. As a leftover from his earlier practice, Noland also at times used oils in conjunction with Magna. In this blend, the oil based paint was thinned with detergent and given consistency by adding Eylmers glue. Only in some of the early circle paintings up to 1959 were both oil and Magna used. After 1959 Noland would use Magna exclusively.[23] Very thin stain was always used to get "an even lay of color", otherwise the edges would become a problem[24] *Beginning* is one of the paintings in which Noland used only Magna. Thinning the Magna with turpentine was the product of a long and exacting process of blending and mixing. It was a kind of high powered admixture, a "chemistry" of paint, as Noland describes it, in which he would add minute quantities of color to a particular blend for the perfect hue.[25] Sometimes these blends were inspected on small pieces of test paper. But most often saturation of color was checked while still in the mixing jar. It was normal to mix up about 40 different jars of Magna before beginning. More stain than needed was always mixed. Because the same quality of hue could never be duplicated upon a second mixing. Running out of a particular blend of color, meant disaster. In Noland's studio there is always leftover paint, and these leftover jars of stain would remain in the studio over night, covered with tin foil to be used for subsequent paintings on subsequent days.[26]

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[22]Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings, 1956 - 1962.* The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993, p.151. p. 14.

[23]See Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings, 1956 - 1962.* p. 14.

[24] Interview, Keiku Saito, p.2.

[25]Steiner Interview with Kenneth Noland, June, 1995. Steiner Interview with Keiku Saito, June, 1995.

[26]Steiner Interview with Keiku Saito, June, 1995.

With the canvas spread out and tacked down, a process of sorts would begin by finding the precise center of the canvas. Though there was no established rules as to how to determine the center, it was nonetheless an exacting process. It involved both measurement and sighting, but mostly sighting. Noland depended most heavily on eyeing up the center of the canvas by walking around it. The roughly square shape of the canvas would aid in this determination. At other times the center was found by finding the intersection of lines drawn from opposite corners of the canvas. The slight traces of a pencil would mark this intersection. Both procedures were used interchangeably. There was no set method of working, no protocol to be followed exactly. Nonetheless, precision and accountability to the materials at hand was the rule. As with the mixing of paint, it was entirely dependent on Noland's "mood".[27] That is to say, just as choosing a specific color was achieved through an exacting chemistry, the mathematical centricity of the canvas was a function of just liking it enough to be satisfied with it. This aspect of beginning is revealing for two reasons: firstly, "mood" or "feeling" is not posed as antithetical to a mathematics or science of technique, rather it is possessed of a kind of minimal rationality; secondly, the nature of beginning, like the other loose procedures Noland would follow, was entirely alien to a technique or any technique of painting he had learned, had acquired, or gained any facility with. Beginning a painting was based entirely in a continual working and experimentation with the materials. For Noland, this was the legacy of both Matisse and Pollock.

> I got into Matisse when I was in Paris and realized that I was going to have to revise my thinking about how to go about making pictures. Up until that time, you know, it was coming out of abstract art of the Bauhaus cubist kind, and I realized that I had to really ... learn how to paint. Of course that came from Pollock too... How to use materials in a kind of hand way. The cubist abstract way of painting was more like a process of predisposition ... you planned and conceived it beforehand. To paint out of Matisse, or, say, to use color, you have to learn how to use the materials. I think Pollock helped a lot with that, because he experimented more with using materials, with some kind of intrinsic qualities that you could discover from using the materials.[28]

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[27]Steiner Interview with Kenneth Noland, June, 1995.

[28] Kenworth Moffat, *Kenneth Noland*, p. 19.

The priorizing of process and continual experimentation with materials militated against skill or acquired technique. It prohibited Noland from knowing what he did. Losing oneself in a kind of "hand way" in the "intrinsic qualities" of the painting, was a "breakthrough" from planning, conception, thought, or idea.[29] It was, simply put, contingent on his mood or feeling. By using the material in a "hand way" decisions were precipitated and choices made by the actual working process; a "deductive reasoning", as Fried describes it.[30] Method was in a sense, a function of a minimal rationality that any one specific mood or feeling might possess. So inasmuch as the process of painting is forefronted here, it was always contingent on Noland's mood. It was contingent on the body or more simply a kind of dynamic or process oriented functioning of the body. Using the materials in a "hand way" corresponded to the process of the self coming into being as a function of a particular bodily disposition or mood at a particular moment. While Noland's type of materialism militated against consciousness, as such, it encouraged another less definable form of being, a content carried by process and manifest only through a repetitive structure.

As I have mentioned, Noland's faith in materiality as a locus of beginning painting was in part an extension of an early and extensive collaborative period with Morris Louis. It is especially revealing that this intensely productive period followed in the wake of Louis' and Noland's now famous weekend in New York with Clement Greenberg. Working together, the pair would, in rapid succession wipe away and cover the trace of the formers painting. With each successive layer the other would return to the working of surface anew. The kind of crude practical application of repetition, successiveness, or displacement that Louis and Noland would fall upon at this early stage of their careers, was a crucial moment for both. As in the case of Louis, Greenberg's influence was not a totalizing one in any sense,

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[29]In this regard Noland has noted, "I'd rather work directly in the actual size and actual materials that will be the result of what I'm doing". Moffet, *Kenneth Noland*, p. 45.

[30]Fried, "Three American Painters", p. 28.

but worked to crystallize out certain sets of problems and tensions that Noland's practice was already working through in some sense or another. "Morris and I figured", Noland writes

> ...that the best way to arrive at some way of making art that was more personal was to get into a process of changing. We found that this was different from Rothko, Newman and Still, because they had arrived at a way of making paintings that they kept doing. So that was a negative lesson we learned from abstract expressionism: to make changes and to learn to recognize not just to change from one picture to another, but at some point, to throw everything into question and go back, to just rehandle the materials again.[31]

Integrating a process of "change" into the practice of painting, was a strategy to keep in contact with the materials of painting and as much to let an emotional content, even if only in a minimal way, dictate and order formal concerns. Inasmuch, the alternative methods of sighting, measuring, and finding the center of the canvas was a way to stay in contact with process -- a keyword that stands in for an analogical correspondence with the mood or feeling that might drive any choice for a particular procedure.

Having found the center, Noland would paint the first circle or ring. In *Beginning* the perimeter of the central orange-red circle is sufficiently rough or pinched at the bottom left and right to suggest that it was "drawn by eye", i.e., "freehand" with a brush.[32] Painting "freehand", though, was not the rule. In *Circle,* (1958-59) (Figure 10) from later that year, the precise, almost mathematical form of the scuffled red central ring suggests the use of some mechanical aid; the successive nature of the yellow rings following upon this beginning suggests a similar instrumental perfection. We know that sometimes the outline of a dinner plate was used to make the smaller rings. As often the outline of the circles was constructed by a string and compass, the perimeter being traced with a pencil, and

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[31] Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings, 1956 - 1962.* p. 146.

[32] Kenneth Noland Noland recalls the concentric circles "were painted by brush, freehand. I'd take a line and make a ring, but most of all the edges were drawn by eye and freehand." In Paul Cummings, *Artists in their Own Words,* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1979), p.145.

then traced again with stain.[33] Some such manner probably dictated the painting of the initial set of inner rings in *Circle.*

In *Beginning,* though, the inner circle is not quite a perfect circle and clearly painted "freehand". Whereas in *Beginning* the rough look of a kind of botched job is offset by the spectral lines of tension that are emitted outward -- a kind of high velocity spinning effect -- in *Luster,* (1958) (Figure 11) we are presented with an obviously lop-sided circle. What is that green paint on the left side doing there anyway? And what about the clumsy execution of the outside blue ring? Not only is Noland a bad painter, but he must be some sort of slobbering fool as well . . . I think we can safely say neither of the above is true. Obviously awkwardness was a quality Noland was interested in, otherwise the visual perfection of the central rings in *Circle* would have been reproduced *ad infinitum* in his other works. For now, it is sufficient only that we recognize the fact of this kind of slumming in what seems the common denominator in a kind of "do-it-yourself(ness)" that permeates Noland's painting. It is a quality that was meant to raise the ire of any skeptical gallery goer; a quality that was to the next door neighbor's wife in Baltimore to announce that her own child could paint a better one. In any case, what is important to note is that the size of the first ring, whether in *Beginning, Circle,* or *Luster,* was not predetermined or planned. It was arrived at through a practice that actively courted contingency and the chance effect. It was dictated by the particular size of the canvas the nature of the stain used, Noland's particular mode of applying paint, or any other of a hundred factors that might in any way impinge upon someone painting a circle. In sum we are dealing with a whole slew of conditions that are intimately connected to the necessity of whatever Noland's comprehension of a more essential emotional economy consisted of.

The size of the innermost circle once stained was on some basic level unalterable. A strongly held conviction for a "once-and-for-allness of materiality

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[33]Agee, *The Circle Paintings,* p. 15.

insured this. "My idea", Noland notes, "is to make my paintings directly. I almost never paint over. That's my concept. It maintains the attention of the picture for me, my contact with what I am doing".[34] For Noland, the working and applying of materials only once was a kind of shibboleth. If the appearance of the painting was to be the "result of a real handling of materials" and "process", then handling and process could not be concealed by successive layering; a first application of stain could not be hidden by virtuosity, skill, or afterthought. This perspective on process is central to Noland's idea of "one shot painting".[35] "If you were in touch with what you were doing you had to do it only one time. Each thing that you did was just done that one time, with no afterthoughts, and it had to stand. We wanted to have this happen just out of the use of the materials".[36] In *Luster , That, Circle,* and *Heat,* 1958 (Figure 12) all of 1958, the central circle is transparent enough for the viewer to see this aspect of process. In each case the circle is not built up through ever-widening turns of the brush or sponge to suggest readjustment or resizing through enlargement, but consists instead of only a general scuffling or smearing, and a ringing effect at the perimeter. In *That,* this same effect is achieved by the water mark traces of a successive series of spills. In all, the effect is one of enclosure, one suggesting the absolute confidence and finality of the original choice for size.

In *Beginning,* the even saturation of the inner orange-red circle seems to prohibit such a glimpse into process. There is only the slightest suggestion of the ringing effect and only the faintest trace of inconsistencies in the coverage. This evenness and depth of saturation is conceivably the result of the original admixture of stain. Perhaps a relatively large amount of pigment was mixed in with the original staining solution. Or else a kind of second thinned-down version of the same pigment blend was pushed about to fill in the vacancies of the go-round. The slight trace of a meniscus of sorts on the right-hand perimeter, where a particulate

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[34]Agee, *The Circle Paintings,* p. 21.
[35]Noland quotedn Paul Cummings, *Artists in their Own Words,* p. 147.
[36]Agee, *The Circle Paintings,* p. 22.

has accumulated, would seem to confirm this. The size, color, and depth of saturation in *Beginning's* innermost circle is absolutely generative. Though its qualities and relations will determine the qualities and relations of the painting to come, while it provides a beginning that will predetermine the future, it still is only one link in a sequence that presupposes some more essential beginning.[37]

In a sense, the concentric layout of rings, with the central ring at the core and in a privileged position, signals the work's trajectory as one in tension with an origin. Its title alone provokes the viewer to look inward, toward the center, toward what we must assume is itself the beginning; its invitation to a looking in on, or a looking backward and before that will just as inevitably be a scuttling back out. In a sense a reading in syncopates its movement with a writing out, a movement not unlike that tension we discussed in Louis' first veil series, that is a diametrically opposing counter movement. What will be a logic intrinsic to the painting emerges in the central ring in a nascent form, as a relation between size, color, and the materiality or tactility of color. The first ring's saturation, its orange-red hue, its size and shape, thus setting up all manner of proportions or relations in the rest of the painting.

With the completion of the inner circle, what was a strict adherence to the rule of the material (now) shifts to the form of a compulsion and an absolute law. The inner logic given birth with the center or core now gains in momentum and drives the painting on to an inexorable conclusion. We can imagine Noland himself at this moment picking up speed. If perhaps he was at all somewhat hesitant upon beginning in the wake of the first circle, he now works with speed and confidence. Indeed, the time spent working on any one painting was extremely short. While Pollock's painting would sit around the studio for days and sometimes months, "Noland would finish paintings instantly".[38] There is

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[37]"You can be fairly arbitrary about at what point you start", the colors begin to suggest a logic of their own."I pick a color and go with it". Moffet, *Kenneth Noland* , p. 45.

[38]Interview with Keiku Saito, June, 1995. p.1(a).

something to this, I think. Yet this antithetical to the formal tensions a painting like *Beginning* seems to thrive upon. For within the parameters of the whole there is with each consecutive ring of color, a kind of skip in time, a breakdown in the rhythm, rendered visual by the neutralizing effect of raw canvas. This separation between successive rings would seem to mark or signal some type of temporal disjunction which the painting as a whole tries to blind one to. The raw canvas in between rings elongates, segments, and narrativizes the instantaneous aspect of surface that seems so crucial to the conception of Noland's "one shot painting". In a sense the painting of each concentric ring coincides to a kind of beginning again. A repetition of the same, yet different in the context of the instantaneous moment.

While on one hand we have a kind of visual repetition which negates the nature of the ring as discrete entity or part and which promotes homogeneity and equivalence, on the other hand there is the fact of a disjunctive series of stops and starts, a repetitive succession of births and deaths which seems contrived, almost facile, more a set piece than anything else. Nevertheless at a first glance there is a quick succession of red, blue, and black concentric rings which follow *Beginning's* first orange-red circle, all depending and relying upon the scales established with that first inner circle. Each concentric ring, whether it is raw or stained canvas, echoes and resonates with an intensity and importance equal to the others. The literal qualities of each band, i.e., the way we read the painting -- the thinness and crisp whiteness of the first ring, the scuffled green and rough edges of the third merging and lapping with a thin light blue, the tenth ring of raw canvas sharply contrasting with the coverage and widths of the preceding black and the transparentness of the succeeding blue -- is denied by the metaphoric potential of surface totality.

Every procedure which Noland has followed during the making of *Beginning*, a making which took place over a very short time, has in some way been a deferral, a postponement, a delay, or a suspension of taste. The lack of any definite

procedural mandate has assured this as much as the unequivocal faith placed in the materials, i.e., allowing the materials. With *Beginning* complete, its last whirling black ring hastily applied, this process ends. What followed directly upon the course of drying was an elaborate set of stretching procedures, and finally a painstaking approach to cropping and framing, all involving taste and judgment: a rendering of emotion appropriate by gestalting. We know both these processes required assistance: that Noland's brother, Neil, often helped in the task. And we can assume Noland had some help with *Beginning*. [39]

Stretching involved the most patient and meticulous of methods. The tautness of the framed canvas was not at issue. Rather stretching was to perfect the equivalence of the rings. Imbalances and gross irregularities in the rings were literally stretched out. In *Beginning* the vague impression of a cruciform tightening at the top, bottom and sides is the trace of this as yet perhaps unperfected practice.[40] Yet, for all its clumsiness or forcedness, the effect is one of stunning visual speed in and out and between rings. Undoubtedly a conventional square stretcher was used: the middle section of all four sides of the canvas simply being pulled through for the desired effect. However, forced the stretching is in *Beginning*, it can be assumed that the cruciform effect was an effect which was desired. Perhaps it provided a degree of balance or firmness that could not otherwise be fulfilled or sustained by an otherwise awkward execution of the rings themselves. In the case of a painting like *Split*, (1959) (Figure 13), with its central blue square encased by a square of white, it in turn framed by a thin perimeter of raw canvas, it seems precise ruled measurement was necessitated. Though, even here a judging by sight was more important to achieving the appearance of straightness or [square]ness. Each of the rhombus sides are bowed beyond perceptual belief. It is only their balance and stability in relation to the circular structure, and in turn this relation to the square frame which surrounds

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[39]Interview Keiku Saito, p.2.

[40]The stretching process would undoubtedly reach its zenith with the stripe painitngs of the mid 1960s. Working with his assistant, Keiku Saito, "a very precise and patient labor" of measuring the width of stripes with ruler and by eye was strived for.(Steiner Interview, June, 1995), p.1.

them, that confers upon them their mathematical regularity. Whatever the case, visual balance was less the result of precise measurement than it was the product of gestalting each individual painting's appropriateness.

Cropping and framing was the last procedure carried out. It, like the stretching, involved a long and complicated process of viewing. Large sheets of paper were laid down in between the parameters of the canvas edge and the outermost stained circle. The temporary and moveable nature of this framing apparatus allowed for the slow and methodical judging of the image. If a particular size wasn't "working" then the frame would be slowly moved in or out according to Noland's judgment. In the case of *Beginning* this cropping process left unequal proportions of raw canvas on each side; a relatively large amount on the left, and varying proportions on the other sides. Apparently the weight of the outer black whirl among other aspects warranted this. Given the integrity of the concentric rings in *Beginning*, we can safely assume that no outer rings were entirely cropped out. This was a solution if a "whole" image could not be otherwise isolated. *Sunshine*, (1962) (Figure 4) presents this possibility. Its tightly cropped nature, along with the cryptic progression of its part-arithmetic, part-geometric succession of raw canvas widths, poses a hyperbolic potential. The possibility of such radical cropping exists as well in *Tondo*, 1958-59 (Figure 14), and we know was the case with some of the double circles.[41]

With *Beginning*, Noland's practice of "one shot painting" succeeded without too much afterthought or "tweaking" involved. Still, the awkwardness and hesitancy of *Beginning* must have seemed somehow appropriate to an early, perhaps even first exploration of an unknown process. Its title alone suggests the prominent position it occupied for Noland and in Noland's career. In relation to the "Targets" as a whole, its look clearly belongs at the onset of a sequential series. Its elemental nature provokes, incites, and calls forth. It speaks to a future and

[41]Interview, Keiku Saito, p.2.

demands a series of replies. *Beginning* comes in the form of a promise. It presumes a kind of theatrical apparatus already in place; that it, in itself is but one moment of an ongoing process of repetition; that form in itself, is built out of a compromise.

One hopes that the kind of reading proposed over the last ten or so pages, leaves one wanting. Why bother rehearsing the tedious formal problems of Noland's painting once again? Why simply accept that *Beginning* priorizes a complex of questions relating to color relations and pictorial structure? Why indeed accept that Noland's practice hinges exclusively on process? Given the rich set of associations that Noland's practice apparently animates why assume that the analogical correspondence forged between surface and depth (the functioning of a mind) is entirely secure? Why assume that surface as a metaphor of depth is entirely uncomplicated by the constraints of a surrounding culture? What of Noland's interest in jazz, and all that "supreme hipster(ism)" that the cool sounds of jazz possessed? What of the implications that repetition held in terms of the age of mass consumption; that [square]ness held in terms of middle class conformity; or that boxing as a metaphor of visual impact held in terms of the Cold War, or indeed a domestic moral order founded upon aggression?

The problem with modernist criticism of the formal variety is not that it is a bad reading of Noland's painting. The problem is in fact that it is the very best reading of Noland's painting, because it offers a near perfect mirror of the position that Noland himself was interested in articulating. Near perfect is the key. For a purely formal reading of Noland's painting fails to acknowledge why purely formal issues were historically pressing in the first place. In terms of Noland's perspective the problem can best be summarized by acknowledging the fact that a critical withdrawal into problems of "real handling" and "process" was a debt owed to a set of powerful constructions concerning the personality. That is, Noland's retreat into the problems of painting was in fact complicit in a wider-ranging critique of the

surrounding culture that centered on the personality traits of the anal character. For Noland, the only critical posturing in a culture of conformity was one that recognized and embraced the anal-retentive character of square-ass middle-classedness. Painting, if it was to remain cogent had to court the lowest common denominator in the surrounding culture. If that meant aping the gestures and posturing of the anal retentive, then so be it.

There is of course much to be said in defense of a politics of sitting on the toilet. It is a crucial artistic strategy. As a shibboleth for the critical text however, it leaves much to be desired. Formalist criticism is all so very restrained, so held back, so orderly and so persistent in its pedantry.[42] One is reminded of Freud's first attempts to broach a similar problem in his essay on "Character and Anal Eroticism". He posits an individual stuck in a pre-genital stage of sexual maturation; infants as "a class who refuse to empty their bowels when they are put on the pot because they derive a subsidiary pleasure from defecating; for they tell us that even in later years they enjoyed holding back their stool."[43] This is not to say that the band of formalist critics from the last three decades and more, are legion with "a class who refuse to empty their bowels", but rather that in looking at modernist painting like Noland's paintings, they have both excepted all the premise upon which one problematic notion of the aesthetic state hinged, and that they have inadvertently aligned themselves with Noland's own political reserve, withdrawal, restraint, and hold-backedness.

The [square]ness of Noland's painting, which is central to the difficulties one confronts in any reading of that painting, stems from the characterological traits of a notion of anality that is conceived of as a politics of resistance. Noland's concern is with the question of process, because he genuinely believes content lies therein;

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[42]I would refer all those readers interested in the subject of the "anal character" to Ernest Jones' breath-taking command of the type in his "Anal-Erotic Character Traits". Ernest Jones, *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, (London: Maresfield Reprints, 1948), pp. 413-437.

[43]Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Eroticism", in *Volume IX, Jensen's 'Gradiva'* and Other Works. in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, p. 170.

because he would contend that the aesthetic moment exists only on the far side of discourse; that content is completely unqualifiable in discourse. Sitting on the toilet maybe a far cry from what one might consider a Romantic view of things, but it is not. It is nothing new. A recourse to anality is yet another version of the apocalyptic history of consciousness we have already been discussing. Jonathan Swift had the whole thing worked out in the early 18th century. His muse, remember, was the "gentle Goddess Cloacine ... bounteous Goddess *Cloacine*.[44] As a politics of resistance, anality forces a connection between language and a kind of falleness, completely divorced from the biblical (but perhaps not post-exilic) associations of Louis. To put it simply Noland's painting forces a link between discursivity and feces. The connection is both a powerful and an important one. It goes to the core of the dilemma of representation: the dilemma of any language that is a corruption, and all are. It is no less seductive or deceiving than Nietzsche's negative knowledge of the Dionysian, no less beautiful an illusion than Louis' metaphor of the Fall, no less deluded than Kafka's vision of a post-exilic world.

Anality must be placed at the crux of any reading of Noland's new painting. It is the constraint or limit that governs form; it is what frames the rich set of associations that painting held for him. A critical approach to Noland's work would thus speak to jazz and boxing (both held back in a traditional formal reading) in terms of the social and historical associations that the [square]ness of the anal character held for Noland. A critical approach to Noland's painting would recognize the anal character to be complicit in anyone single aspect or operation of Noland's labored and scrupulous technique, but simultaneously acknowledge the effect of surface as a completely liberatory moment, nothing less than a utopics of pleasure. With Noland's painting from 1958, we are faced with a strange tension indeed: it is a shuttling back and forth between the restrained morality of anality and

[44]Jonathan Swift, "A Panegyrick on the Dean". See Norman O. Brown's excellent commentary on Swift in "The Excremental Vision". *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959), p. 200.

the utter abandon of a sexual revolution. A theory of autobiography is at the heart of unlocking this dialectic.

In his essay on "Autobiography as De-Facement", Paul de Man describes the autobiographical as a tension existing within the self-reflexive text, a text wherein "an author makes himself the subject of his own understanding".[45] De Man proposes we think of autobiography "not as a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts".[46] The figure is a tension between two types of reading: an instantaneous, synchronic, or metaphoric flash into meaning (Greenberg's well known theory of expression), and secondly a metonymic and diachronic process that exists in a complementary relation with the first. The synchronic event exists by virtue of the diachronic movement, because the diachronic movement is effaced or blinded by the structural relation that the former enacts. This blinding or "specular moment" is implicit to any act of self-reading. It is the dyadic structure at the core of the dialectic in Noland's painting. The theory of autobiography thus allows us to unravel or problematize the expressive complex in terms of "two patterns of figuration". In effect, we can map out the fictional or metaphoric potentiality of surface through the metonymic and associative coordinates of the life lived (the autobiographical in its traditional sense). We can in effect turn a patterned, obsessive, and recurrent set of metonymic associations, which is a contingency of the social, into the instantaneous structure of metaphoricity that stands in place of a utopian moment of free love.

Think of the figure of autobiography in terms of what de Man calls "an epitaphic inscription". Think of the figure of autobiography as a kind of nicer way of linking discursivity with death and the great nothing or indeed feces. Think of it, as de Man does, in terms of that archetypal scene in Nicholas Poussin's *The*

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[45]De Man, "Autobiography as De-facement", in The Rhetoric of Romanticism, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.70.

[46]De Man, ibid, p.70.

Arcadian Shepherds, 1650 (Figure 15) where a kneeling Shepherd mouths an inscription to a group assembled around a tomb: "Et in Arcadia Ego".

> ...the epitaph says Wordsworth, "is open to the day; the sun looks down upon the stone, and the rains of heaven beat against it." The sun becomes the eye that *reads* the epitaph. And the essay tells us what this text consists of, by way of a quotation from Milton that deals with Shakespeare: "What need'st thou such weak witness of thy *name* ?" In the case of poets such as Shakespeare, Milton, or Wordsworth himself, the epitaph can consist only of what he calls "the naked name", as it is read by the eye of the sun. At this point, it can be said of "the language of the senseless stone" that it acquires a "voice", the *speaking* stone counterbalancing the *seeing* sun. The system passes from sun to eye to language as name and as voice. We can identify the figure that completes the tropological spectrum that the sun engenders: it is the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech. Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the tropes name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or face *(prosopon)*. Prosopopeia is the trope of autobiography, by which ones name, as in Milton's poem, is made as intelligible and memorable as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration.[47]

Noland's new paintings are conceived of as a kind of "epitaphic" inscription. They are based on a theory of language that presupposes the discreet elements of language to be a "senseless", "deceased", and corrupted form. Yet a language nonetheless that has the "power of speech", or voice, beyond what is "read by the eye of the sun". Expression for Noland is only what is heard by the sun. Rather than a tropological structure, which is a tension between an optical and acoustic metaphor, Noland's painting claims to hinge upon the complete substitution of the optical for the acoustic. We know from the theory of autobiography however, that phonicity always depends on the "speaking stone counterbalancing the seeing sun". Phonicity, remember, is a blinding specular moment that must be problematized in terms of the tropological structure of language. In other words, the pleasure of phonicity, which is the physicality of the medium, is intimately related to the anal-erotic character. "Our topic", as de Man reminds us, "deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration". De Man's words are carefully chosen. They are meant to be read aloud, said slowly, and

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[47]De Man, ibid, pp. 75-76.

savored for their phonic potential. Not to the extent of Noland's painting, of course, but only to the extent of allowing the literal and figural aspects of language to become inextricably entangled in what Gerard Gennette calls a whirligig. De Man's concern like Noland's concern is with the terms of an acoustic success. Our topic deals . . . "with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration, and disfiguration". . . Our topic deals with feces and defecation. Our topic deals with the psychoanalytic knowledge that Noland brought to his understanding of painting and his relation with the moral order of the surrounding culture. Our topic deals with the wide open, revolutionary possibilities of complete genital gratification on the one hand and the unique set of notions Noland entertained about the sexually repressed, debilitated, anal-erotic character type, typical of the middle-class American.

Take what is Norman O. Brown's treatment of the relation between culture and anal-eroticism in his 1959 book *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History.* Though we will need to complexify this assessment later on, it stands as a first useful indication of what Noland is up to. It is not simply coincidental that the connection Brown makes between anality and culture was posited in the same year as Noland would produce the Target series. Noland's critique of anality was not an isolated phenomenon. It had gained some currency among liberal intellectuals whose primary concern was the threat of popular culture. If it was at all resonant in America during the postwar decades of accelerated consumerism, it was no less a concern for psychoanalysis in the prewar decades that saw the rise of fascism.

> According to Freudian theory the human infant passes through a stage -- the anal stage -- as a result of which the libido, the life energy of the body, gets concentrated in the anal zone. This infantile stage of anal-eroticism takes the essential form of attaching symbolic meaning to the anal product. As a result of these symbolic equations the anal product acquires for the child a significance of being his own child or creation, which he may use to obtain narcissistic pleasure in play, or to obtain love from another (feces as gift), or to assert independence from another (feces as property), or to commit aggression against another (feces as weapon). Thus some of the most important categories of social behavior (play, gift, property, weapon) originate in the anal stage of infantile sexuality and -- what is more important -- never lose

their connection with it. When infantile sexuality comes to its catastrophic end, non-bodily cultural objects inherit the symbolism originally attached to the anal product, but only as second-best substitutes for the original (sublimations). Sublimations are thus symbols of symbols. The category of property is not simply transferred from feces to money; on the contrary, money is feces, because the anal-eroticism continues in the unconscious. The anal-eroticism has not been renounced or abandoned but repressed.[48]

The problem might be neatly summarized by the equation often posited between anality and authoritarian culture. For Noland all the categories of social behavior were dictated by the anal stage. In the context of American culture, anal-eroticism had as Brown argues not been renounced at all, but rather had been repressed across the board. No one could escape the pressures, constraints and limits placed upon social life. Anality and the social were inexorably connected, because character structure was a function or contingency of coming into the social. The position Noland stakes out in terms of anality is one of utter pessimism. It is a politics similar to Greenberg's and Louis' own position; a position that claimed culture, all culture was inherently authoritarian because constituted by empiricism, positivism, the teleological imperative of knowledge, the totalizing nature of language.

Noland's peculiar tact is not unrelated to Brown's own position. For Brown, the situation of authoritarian culture was so grim that ultimately it was funny. For Brown, humor is the highest position. Humor is indispensable to negotiating the unegotiable way meaning is made historically. His position is revealing with respect to Noland's specific debt to psychoanalysis. For with neither men we are dealing with an obstinate and entirely academic theory of character structure. Rather than an attempt to normalize the social life of the neurotic, Noland's project is to establish a self-sustaining moral economy altogether divorced from the authoritarian morality of the surrounding culture. If nothing else, Brown recognizes the humor in the sobering state of affairs that gives rise to the "anal-

[48]Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death*, ibid, p. 191.

erotic nature of speech". He quotes the all-too serious researches of Ferenczi, for example.

> That there are certain connections between anal eroticism and speech I had already learnt from Professor Freud, who told me of a stammerer all whose singularities of speech were to be traced to anal phantasies. Jones too has repeatedly indicated in his writings the displacement of libido from anal activities to phonation. Finally I too, in an earlier article ("On Obscene Words") was able to indicate the connection between musical voice-culture and anal eroticism.[49]

There is a kind of orderliness, a kind of obstinacy of an academic variety, a certain "stubborn insistence" on the empiricism of the whole affair that is all too clear in Ferenczi's summation. This is both serious research and high-minded thinking about nothing but shit. Orthodox psychoanalysis firmly believed in the efficacy of its project, because it was an empirical project. All the great problems of life on this planet could be solved, thanks to the totalizing imperative of psychoanalysis. The problem surrounding anality was that it was a social phenomenon. No one, absolutely no one, was immune. The thing was that everyone was just as [square] as the next person. What Noland recognized was that the only way to be truly cool was to be [square]. Amidst a culture awash in self-help books, all variety of therapeutic theory, and psychoanalytic understandings, Noland's answer to Freud, Otto Fenichel, Ferenczi, and Ernest Jones is simple and to the point: Aim for the utopia of the non-repressive civilization and the free love of a sexual revolution, but take the whole thing with a grain of salt, be cheerful, frame the target with a chuckle.

Noland knew therapeutic culture offered insight, and helpful hints as to how to live one's life, and conduct one's relations, but he also knew that the psychoanalytic project was for the most part a sham, just another post-war growth industry, another aspect of the individual colonized by capitalism. Noland knew that therapeutic culture was mostly just garbage. Because he recognized just how

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[49]Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death*, ibid, p. 199.

[square] he really was. That he was no better off than any of the other cats out there. That in the last analysis he was as "crabbed", "half-baked", and anal as any other individual out there in American culture and society in the 1950s. This kind of circumspect engagement with the psychoanalytic project is something we have already noted with respect to Greenberg and Louis. In Noland's case as in these other cases, such pessimism and circumspection was a product of the specific kind of structuralist inspired psychoanalytic understanding he was exposed to and involved in.

We need to think of Noland's engagement with the question of character and personality, and indeed the question of the therapeutic project more generally, in terms of a self-travestying structure built right into the Target paintings. That is, when looking at Noland's painting one needs to recognize and accept the critique of anality that is offered up but also acknowledge the half embarrassed smile with which it is spit back out. The logic is simple: Never spell out the connection between a "voice-culture" and "anal-eroticism", but rather leave it instead for the reader-viewer to embarrassingly mouth out. The connection between culture and anal-eroticism, between feces and figuration, had to be felt or heard, not simply seen. In other words: Don't paint a painting, paint a baroque cartoon of a painting (Figure 10). Make a painting out of a circle and call it *Circle.* Then give it a kind of [square] plumage to make it look as wise as an owl. Make it hoot a mimic hooting. It is the twilight of civilization after all. Make the reader-viewer stumble through the awkward pronunciation of its duo-syllabic title. Make the reader-viewer read "circle", and then before the second infantile syllable-sound of "cle" is pronounced, know and predict that his or her eyes have already returned to the painting and can now identify it as such . . . "Good for you", says Mr. Circle . . . What cheek! A [square] cat with attitude. A bird. A real smart -ass. Mouth out, vocalize the relation between faces, figuration, and defacement, feces and defecation. Then throw

it back up at the culture that is stuffing it down your throat, because that is all you can do.

It was "an event whose strangeness Freud never tired of emphasizing".[50] And on occasion an event whose strangeness he never tired of repressing. Take the case of Sergei Pankeiev, the celebrated analysand in *The History of an Infantile Neurosis*. The Wolf Man would be Freud's great therapeutic triumph. Yet for all the polemics surrounding the case there is, as well, a sense of lingering doubt. The etiology of the neurosis had been fully revealed, yet the neurosis persisted. There is that unfinished footnote; Freud's repeated and incessant updating of yet another "piece of transference which had not (as yet) been overcome".[51] There is the continued dialogue between the author and himself in *The Uncanny* (1919), *Fetishism* (1927), *New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis* (1932), *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937), and *The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense* (1938), where the Wolf Man resurfaces in other guises, not identified as such, but nevertheless returning and haunting Freud's attempts at finally and conclusively mapping the unconscious.[52] The cure was supposed to put an end to repetition. Yet in the case of the Wolf Man it had not. The cure was to "abreact", through a slow process of attrition, an "affect-laden" Oedipal material. The cure was to end the compulsion to repeat, for Freud would ultimately maintain that repetition was contingent on the neuroses. Apparently it was not.

The problem of repetition goes to the core of one of the great paradoxes of psychoanalysis: that psychoanalysis is indeed flawed in terms of "the very principle

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[50]Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 456.

[51]Sigmund Freud, *The History of an Infantile Neurosis*, v. 17, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. J. Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1966, p. 122.

[52] Nicholas Rand, "Translators Introduction: Toward a Cryptonomy of Literature", in N. Abraham's and M. Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. liii.

which grounds the entire analytic experience": the transference phenomenon.[53] Freud, of course, was not unaware of the problems engendered by transference. From early on he considered transference at the very usable limits of the therapeutic process. We know that the revision of psychoanalytic technique that he would begin in the wake of treatment for his patient Emmy Von N. placed a new emphasis on the form over the content of the analysand's response. A basic lack of therapeutic success, i.e., a failure to reliably effect any cure, had warranted this. For the early Freud transference merely operated as a process of displacement, whereby a memory or emotion connected with a previous event was transferred from one unconscious idea to another. With the articulation of the Oedipus complex, however, the transference phenomenon would come to connote that structural relation between the analyst and analysand more generally. The form of the transference figured or repeated an infantile prototype established during the Oedipal complex. In effect, the analyst was inserted into a kind of predetermined relation that was a (re)presenting of the parental figure in the guise of a sign.

The problem as Freud and others began to conceive it, hinged on the question of character structure. Because the sign was not possessed of the insistence, immediacy, and force of the unconscious, a "charge of affect" otherwise bound to the past event and accessed by the "living connection" that the transference supposedly insured, it seemed plausible that a secondary formation was complicating the "worm-like progression" of the therapeutic process. In effect the successful operation of the transference was being blocked or stemmed by character or personality itself. Given the limitations placed on therapy by a character structure transference could only at best be a restaging of an affect driven Oedipal material in the guise of a sign or mask. That which was assumed to be founded on a symbolic or "living connection" was in fact only an allegorical representation.

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[53]Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* , trans. P. Patton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.19.

The reassessment of the therapeutic process following in the wake of the case of Emmy Von N was not insignificant. It was to lay the crucial groundwork and prescribe the two-part nature of the psychoanalytic process itself. For Freud the identification of the negative transference as a function of character structure provided the crucial backdrop against which the phenomenon of transference could be successively played out. Because the affect was considered distinct from remembrance in the abstract, the concept in general, or the representation of "the repressed event in all its particularity", the first stage of a therapy always attempted to unravel or separate off the idea from the affect. The real therapeutic work would begin when attempts were made to harness the drive of "affect" of its potential for repetition. Generally speaking, the repetition and continual return to the "idea", or conception, or sign of neuroses, functioned as a "substitute for the normal abreaction of the affect". Over the course of the cure, over the course of the multiple sequence of transference's, the "idea" or "concept in general" would be repeatedly returned to, for the unique access it provided to the "affect". The cumulative result of releasing, freeing, of channeling the "affect" into lived memory was tantamount to cure, for it decreased the ineluctable resolve and insistence of the unconscious by sapping through attrition the affect based formation of the repressed event.

Freud's new emphases called for an investigation into the resistance's to cure, i.e., the interpreting of the "negative transference", as a precis to the working with the transference. As a complex of factors that were socially mediated rather than a function of the individual neuroses, the negative transference militated against an opening up to cure. In the case of Frau Emmy Von N this reluctance to be cured -- a kind of repetitive defensive posturing set up against the idea of convalescence and the course of therapy -- "justified" in Freud's words, "a pictorial mode of expression". Around a pathogenic core, which the positive transference process would ineluctably return and hinge upon, was a concentric structure of deceit and delay, a concentricity that was constitutive of the character or personality. In Frau

N's case, and in the case of hysteria in general, there is "to begin with", Freud writes...

> ... a nucleus consisting of memories of events or trains of thought in which the traumatic factor has culminated or the pathogenic idea has found its purest manifestation. Round this nucleus we find what is often an incredibly profuse amount of other mnemic material which has to be worked through in the analysis and which is, as we have said, arranged in a three-fold order.
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> In the first place there is an unmistakable linear chronological order which obtains in each separate theme ... It was as though we were examining a dossier that had been kept in good order. The analysis of my patient Emmy Von N. contained similar files of memories... These files form a quite general feature of every analysis and their contents always emerge in a chronological order which is as infallibly trustworthy as the succession of days of the week or names of the month in a mentally normal person. They make the work of analysis more difficult by the peculiarity that, in reproducing the memories, they reverse the order in which these originated. The freshest and newest material in the file appears first, as an outer cover, and last of all comes the experience with which the series in fact began.
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> I have described such groupings of similar memories into collections arranged in linear sequences (like a file of documents, a packet, etc.) as constituting 'themes'. These themes exhibit a second kind of arrangement. Each of them is -- I cannot express it any other way -- stratified concentrically around a pathogenic nucleus. It is not hard to say what produces this stratification, what diminishing or increasing magnitude is the basis of this arrangement. The contents of each particular stratum are characterized by an equal degree of resistance, and that degree increases in proportion as their strata are nearer to the nucleus. Thus there are zones within which there is an equal degree of modification of consciousness, and the different themes extend across these zones. The most peripheral strata contain the memories (or files), which, belonging to different themes, are easily remembered and have always been clearly conscious. The deeper we go the more difficult it becomes for the emerging memories to be recognized, till near the nucleus we come upon memories which the patient disavows even in reproducing them.
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> It is this peculiarity of the concentric stratification of the pathogenic psychical material, which, as we shall hear, lends to the course of these analyses their characteristic features.[54]

In a sense the structural relation upon which the transference was based could at best only enact an allegorical representation of the nucleus. For it was only a representation of "themes" ordered concentrically around the core material. That is, the concentric structure of stratification's were not the nucleus but rather the displaced manifestations of the nucleus. It would not be until the case of Frau Emmy Von N, that Freud would realize that what he at first had thought was the nucleus was in fact only a contingent set of themes organized in a "concentric stratification" around it. Apparently the transference phenomenon precipitated in the normal processes of object-relations it both established and permitted, a

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[54]Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. II (1893-1895), Studies on Hysteria.* trans. James Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press, 1955. pp. 288-89.

compulsive logic of repetition that was underwritten by the negative transference. Freud believed these stratification's to be of a chronological and finite nature. Yet in the case of the Wolf Man the continued compulsion to repeat seemed to suggest otherwise. It seemed in the case of the Wolf Man that just at the moment when a repressed Oedipal material was in the greatest danger of being exposed, the indestructibility of the unconscious wish would be manifest in the form of yet another displaced or deferred sign consistent with preexistent themes and ordered in terms of as a concentric structure.[55] It seemed that the operation of the transference phenomenon presumed the maintenance and production of a repetitious chain of figures or faces that was in fact only ever revealing of an anterior personification, a stratum or defensive armoring that protected that which preceded it.

Despite Freud's best intentions the therapeutic regime potentially hinged on a factor that perpetuated the therapeutic process indefinitely. While the founding moment of the therapeutic process -- the means via which it takes place --, transference as repetition, was inasmuch antithetical to the cure -- the end product of the therapeutic process itself. Yet, if transference was both the founding moment of the therapeutic process as well as its undoing, it was recognized as such only by Wilhelm Reich and not by Sigmund Freud. Reading a book like Reich's *Character Analysis* one imagines a kind of originary scene, wherein a dawning recognition of experience as a theater of repetition should have finally struck Freud in a deadly flash of illumination, but did not.

In a sense, Wilhelm Reich invented character analysis. His interest in the body as a site that could narrate a repressed history better than language, placed him in stark contrast to the orthodox and largely non-partisan Freudian community from which he hailed. For Reich, what was not spoken during the course of a therapeutic session -- i.e., the manner, posturings, or carriage constitutive of

[55]I would refer one to Fred Orton's good discussion in *Figuring Jasper Johns* here.

character or personality -- held the most valuable material for analysis. For Reich, the therapeutic process hinges exclusively on the question of personification. Reich's style of resistance therapy focused entirely on the form of the transference, because it was the purest manifestation of character structure. The therapeutic failures that had forced Freud to revise his theoretical model had in effect led Reich to sublate content analysis to the formal problematics or the conditions of possibility framing the transference itself.

For Reich, the revision of psychoanalytic technique that Freud had begun in the wake of treatment for his patient Frau Emmy von N., did not place enough emphasis on the form as a repetitive and concentric structure of deceit and delay. The concentric structure of deceit, constitutive of character structure posed too large a problem for Freudian protocols to effectively overcome. And indeed, Reich's moves in the 1920s and 1930s to forefront an altogether new emphasis on the resistance's to cure were accepted in large part by the orthodox Freudian community. Parts I and II of his 1933 book *Charakteranalyse* was mandatory reading for any young, up-and-coming analyst. Mind you, if Reich's emphasis on interpreting the problems involved in overcoming the negative transference endeared him to the international psychoanalytic community and its attempts at revision, the radical conclusions he would draw from his foray into character analysis would isolate him altogether. Because the paradox of the transference phenomenon as repetition itself, posed an insurmountable dilemma to psychoanalytic methodology, the vegetative or biologically oriented conclusions Reich would draw were totally rejected. If Parts I and II on "Technique" and "Theory of Character Formation" were required reading for any analyst, Part III of *Charakteranalyse*, "From Psychoanalysis to Orgone Biophysics" was the beginning of the end.[56]

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[56]Reich's book *Charakteranalyse* translated into Enlish as*Character Analysis* represents both the most advanced treatise on the problems surrounding the transference phenomenon in the 1930s and a fundamental critique of the psychoanalytic methodology more generally. The first two parts on technique were written in the winter of 1928-29; both were reprints previously published within the

Nonetheless Reich's insight into the relation between the transference phenomenon and repetition is revealing. Mounting a critique against the orthodox conception of the transference phenomenon, its' independence of the repetition compulsion and its basis in "the attractive force of repressed infantile ideas", Reich's conclusion is dramatic. "This would be correct", he writes,

> ...if the repetition compulsion were a primary, irreducible psychic datum. Clinical experience shows, however, that the great attractive force exercised by the unconscious and infantile ideas derives from the energy of unsatisfied sexual needs, and that it retains its compulsive repetitive character only as long as the possibility of mature sexual gratification is blocked. In short, the neurotic repetition compulsion is contingent on the libido's economic situation. Seen from this perspective as well as from the point of view to be encountered later in the formulations on the neurotic and genital characters, the peace between ego and id which Nunberg is justified in postulating can be secured only on a given sex-economic basis: first, through the supplanting of pre-genital strivings by genital strivings; second, through effective gratification of the genital demands, which, in turn, would solve the problem of the permanent elimination of stasis.[57]

Or to put it more bluntly, Freud's therapy of the Wolf man failed because he never prescribed sex. For Reich, the neurotic build-up of energy and the prospects for its release were both contained in the physical body. "The severity of any kind of psychical disturbance is in direct relation to the severity of the disturbance of genitality ... The prognosis depends directly on the possibility of establishing the capacity for full genital satisfaction".[58] A lack of genital gratification bound or "anchored" unspent obstructed energy in the body, thus sustaining the neurotic or pathologic character trait. The continued mental illness of the Wolf Man was the result of the energies of the primary sexual impulse being channeled into its secondary form as character structure. Because the sex economy was deflected from its aim for somatic gratification, a kind of potential energy was being stored in the body as a personification, a compulsion to repeat.

Internationalen Zetischrift fur Psychoanalyse, no doubt confirming their importance to the more orthodox community. Reich was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association sometime in 1934. This followed the delivery of his paper on the radical direction his research on character analysis had taken at the 13th Congress in Lucerne. Wilhelm, Reich, trans. Vincent Carfagno, *Character Analysis*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1972), see pp. xv-xx.

[57]Reich, *Character Analysis*, ibid, p. 17.

[58]Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 96.

Yet despite all this concern for the relieving of individual neuroses, Reich's real concern focused on the social psychological implications of character formation in the first place. For Reich, character structure, if a destructive, sadistic, and aggressive rechanneling of sexual energies, was the oppressive rule in what he would call "the sex-negating social order" of patriarchal and authoritarian cultures.[59] So if Reich's investigations were loosely premised in a construction of the subject in some ways similar to more "respectable" forms of American characterological research, the absolutely decisive difference came down to the question of sexuality and the role sexuality might play in the therapeutic process and more importantly revolutionary process.

"It is banal and sounds rather hackneyed, but I maintain that every person who has succeeded in preserving a certain amount of naturalness knows this: those who are psychically ill need but one thing -- complete and repeated genital gratification".[60] Thus begins one of the many of Reich's treatises on sex, one of the many dreams for the liberation of humanity founded solely on the economy of the orgasm. The sex-economy which Reich placed his hopes on, redefined the polarities of individual health and sickness in terms of repetition: Repetition would no longer be a function of the neurotic compulsion of an anal stage of sexual development but rather hinge upon the "complete and repeated genital gratification" of mature genital sexuality. If the freeing up of energy that came with the functioning of the orgasm stood as an independent shibboleth for health, progress, and creativity, the "bound-up" and compromised form of that energy in the context of a repressive culture, stood as an absolute limit and constraint. The self-regulating sex-economy was a complete disavowal of the sex-negating moral economy. A model of the personality emerges based solely on the free flowing energies of a sex-economy; an economy in the context of American culture in the 1950s woefully hinging on too

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[59]Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure*, trans, T. Pol, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1974), p.7.

[60]William Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm: Sex Economic Problems of Biologic Energy*, trans. V.R. Carfagno, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 96.

little sex and too little time. And that's hard on a jazz aficionado, and a cool boxer that is a "swinger" like Kenneth Noland.

I think we can safely assume that Reich's appeal for a number of artists, writers, and intellectuals in the 1950s was initially grounded in his peculiar species of oppositional politics. The Reichian method had a very particular perspective on Cold War politics. It was highly critical of it, articulating a fundamentally pacifist, anti-aggressive, anti-nationalist, and anti-nuclear politics. Mind you, Reich's theory of the Orgone was never boring or tedious in the dry Enlightenment inspired tradition of Interpersonal field theory either. We have to give him credit for turning Kafka's bleak and sterile notion of expulsion from paradise into an opportunity for "complete and repeated genital gratification".

This was theory only for the "supremest hipsters", the wildest cats, only the coolest swingers. How else can you treat a revolution in theory that calls in practice for "complete and repeated genital gratification." Artists, neurotics, or indeed any libidinally challenged suburbanite just not getting it, could not help but put a book on this kind of thing down. Think of that memorable scene in the movie version of Reich's traverse of the globe with Charles Bukowski and some other Beat poet whiling away the hours in an Orgone Box to get recharged. They could have been drinking cocktails in their favorite lounge, but instead they chose Reich's elemental particle, the Bion. They chose the patented Orgone Box, a wooden box covered with metal, able to trap and distill the very life force out of solar radiation and bestow it on the occupant[61] Think of Anthony Caro and Jules Olitski spending glorious moments nude on the beaches of Connecticut with their families, discussing the political ramifications of Reich's great magnum opus, *The Sexual Revolution.*[62] They could have been creating austere high modernist masterpieces in steel and

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[61]Because of Reich's claims that the Orgone box could cure anything from cancer to a low sex drive, the FDA siezed Reich's *wunderproduct* and threw him in jail where he would eventually die. The ACCf would try on a number of occasions, with no success, to get him released. See ACCF Papers.

[62]Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution, Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure,* trans. T. Pol, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1945).

paint respectively. Or indeed think of Kenneth Noland and his first wife who religiously chose to go on weekend getaways at the Orgone Institute in Philadelphia. Not everyone would want to spend their weekends in Philadelphia. We know from archival material, in fact, that Einstein declined on a number of occasions, as did Morris Louis and his wife Marcella.[63] The only thing that can attract anyone to Pennsylvania's famous capital is sex. Maybe Einstein and Morris Louis hadn't heard about *The Sexual Revolution.*

So where to begin? In his great essay *Three American Painters: Noland, Olitski, and Stella,* Michael Fried did not know where to begin either. Fried knew all too well that Noland's paintings were about repetition, about multiple beginnings and as many deaths; about beginning and beginning again. It was the nature of their look: one "analogous to that of syntax in a verbal language"[64] In a sense Fried's project is not altogether alien from our own: his interest is in forwarding "an account of what seems to (be) the development of pictorial structure in Noland's work since the late 1950s".[65] The only difference is that his account is an attempt to come to terms with Noland's painting in terms of being [square]. Of the period spanning from 1958 to the Chevrons of 1963 and 1964 (Figure 16), Fried writes...

> It is important to bear in mind that Noland had been concerned from the start to relate his stain-images deductively to the shape, if not the specific dimensions, of the picture-support, by means of exact centering and then of lateral symmetry; and the chevron paintings may be seen as an entirely consistent, but nonetheless daring, exploration of formal problems raised and possibilities suggested by his own previous work. In fact, despite the seemingly radical difference in structure between the first chevrons and the earlier paintings based on concentric-ring and ellipsoid motifs, the relation of image to framing-edge is essentially the same in them all: namely, one of symmetry.[66]

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[63] Shep Steiner interview with Marcella Abner Brenner.

[64] Fried, *Three American Painters,* p. 26.

[65] Fried, *Three American Painters,* p. 26.

[66] Fried, *Three American Painters,* p. 30.

Fair enough. Noland's Targets are indeed about the shape of the support. But the fact is, that in being "symmetrical", that in relating "deductively to the shape ... of the picture support", and that in exploring "formal problems" related to the "framing edge", they are figuratively speaking paintings about not being [square]. For the symmetry, balance, and coolness which Fried argues for, is manifest only by virtue of a kind of concentricity that is so forcibly made to be square that it sizzles with the sound of driving a [square] cat wild. Because Fried's concern are those formal qualities which constitute the painting's aesthetic detachment and objectivity, in the end he misses the humor and lightheartedness of the Targets, but most importantly he misconstrues the precise nature of coolness and detachment that Noland himself was interested in. In effect, he leaves out the subtle operations of a chain of often simple and obscene puns which found Noland's practice as a negation of the surrounding culture and its compulsory sexual morality in terms of a self-regulating genital sexuality. Fried overlooks the fact that [square]ness is manifest only by virtue of not being [square]; that coolness (being a member of the swinging singles set --read a boxing, dating, jazz set) was functioning as a totally critical strategy.

Still, we need to accept Fried's word on the fundamental [square]ness of Noland's painting. It is [square]. But not simply the [square]ness of the formal variety that Fried argues for. [Square]ness held very specific associations, a web of possible associations we can lay bare only by virtue of decrypting the process of formalization or "radical self-criticism" which Fried correctly sees driving Noland's work in the 1950s and 1960s. Take the balance achieved in *Split* (Figure 13), where the essentialized forms of square and circle, if antithetical, exist in a kind of perfect functional unity. Not only does the on-endedness of the inner white square point out the constraints of the framing edge, but circularity as a tension with [square]ness does so as well. Take the balance existing between the crisp inner blue circle and the jagged and botched interface formed by the outer-blue and red banding. Despite this

graphic irregularity the whole seems shot through by some instantaneous pulse of energy that unifies. For if the angularity of the white diamond shape presses outward, the scuffled nature of the outer rings forces and equal and opposite collapse inward. *Split* is constituted through a simultaneous expansion of angularity and contraction of circularity. Or is it the other way around? Certainly thematically it would make more sense if [square]ness was a limit and circularity was a potentiality. At any rate, oneness or wholeness is founded upon opposition, a relation thematized by the all too apparent tension between [square]ness and not being [square].

By means of a similar tension verticality and horizontality has apparently brought the concentric rings of *Tide* (1958) (Figure 17) into existence. The successive structure of rings, seem contingent in some inexplicable way on the linearity of the Louis-like streamings of stain that shape from above. Yet if we assume this ribboning and the bold horizontal is refigured as a function of the eight consecutive rings one can neither discount a reading that priorizes concentiricity. Perhaps like the solar flares at bottom, the verticals and horizontals above, are a contingency of circularity; the evidence of a wider perimeter that has now receded. Perhaps they are the striated traces of a slow and steady surging and subsiding which is nothing less than a tidal bore. The apparently banal tension between [square]ness and circularity exists elsewhere as well. There is the [square] plumage of *Circle* (Figure 10) which matter-of-factly reforms the circle as [square]. Or those lines of penetration and extension in *Fete* (1959) (Figure 18). If at one moment they operate as fully functional arrows, which flag a kind of piercing movement inward, at another they are evidence of an explosive expansion. For that matter there is the mirage like effects that shimmer and contort the side of *Heat* (Figure 12). The more subtle solar flares that spin off *Spread* (1958) (Figure 19). The trajectory of that broken green that skips off the denser atmosphere of blue in *Luster* (Figure 11). Or that near

reconciliation between the outer-most black ring in *Beginning* (Figure 5), and the safe anchorage promised by the right hand side of the support.

The fact is, that the more one studies the compositional structure of these works, the more one realizes that they ultimately depend on the tension between [square]ness and circularity. In *Untitled* (1958-59) (Figure 20) the on-endedness of the canvas' orientation itself seems only to reference what we assume is a more stabile hanging orientation on one side as [square]. Even in *Tondo* (1958-59) (Figure 14) this is the case. The roundness of the painting's support seems so forced and so contrived that [square]ness is accessed through a ruse, through its very absence and negation. Its title only distinguishes the fact of its not being [square] all the more. *Magic Box* (1959) (Figure 21) poses a similar problem. Given the intensity of the inner red circle which glows or hums with energy, it seems to be another example of intentional mis-naming. Perhaps by accentuating the fact of [square]ness, which is in a sense a question of boxing, we can assume that a certain sensuousness and intensity only inheres within the confines of [square]ness? The tension between being [square] and not being [square] is so crucial a factor in a work like *Magic Box* that it seems to be providing the motor for a kind of transformative moment. The title is clear in this respect. It poses the tension between [square]ness and not being [square] as a question of magic, the black magic of the inner square which is simultaneously a hollowed out circle.

In Noland's painting being [square] and not being [square] are utterly inseparable processes. They are constitutive of a tension that maps out process itself. In *Magic Box* as much as *Split* the tension between [square]ness and circularity is a self-reflexive relation. Circularity comes of [square]ness as much as [square]ness comes of circularity. Which is to say that being [square] and not being [square] are the poles of a dialectical double beat. Or to put it another way: how cool one of Noland's paintings sounds is always a function of how stale the painting looks. Take the isolated case of the crisp inner red circle and black and yellow squares in

Magic Box. Square and circle exist in some mysterious pairing that is not unrelated to the way the mottled, square, outer, white and blue banding seem to court roundness themselves. It sounds ludicrous but in relation to the inner configuration, the [square] blue and white banding seems to want to become circular. The expansive force emanating from the central red, black, and yellow is so pronounced that it looks like the squared-off blue and white perimeter is about to burst a gasket. Internal pressure is so high that surface tension on the blue and white outer membranes is maxed, so as to appear stretched like a taut bladder. Yet, if filled to the point of bursting it holds its [square]ness even so.

The kind of tension we are dealing with here is fundamental to Noland's Target paintings. All of the Targets encapsulate some indefinable moment of dynamic complementarity. Compositional balance depends on it. It is a half-biological and half-mechanical movement contained within a single pulse of energy. Noland's new definition of painting might be neatly summed up as the art of the throb. The art throb, painting as dialectical art beat. Yet if it has anything to do with the affairs of the heart -- a physiological action, a muscular function, a loving relationship -- it does so only insofar as the perfect thumping, repetitive and harmonic pumping condenses Reich's theory of the orgasm ("Tension--Charge--Discharge--Relaxation") into a synchronic event.[67] Tension in Noland's painting is a complementary movement within the flash of an instant that resonates as deeply with the structural tensions of jazz music as with the isometric forces of the old one-two-punch. It is simultaneously a movement of pleasure and anxiety, a spreading and recoiling. Not one or the other, for peripheral excitation is always equivalent to an intensity or activity at the core. Every one of Noland's Targets are simultaneously a bursting and a relaxation, an exploding and an imploding, an expansion and a contraction, a climaxing and a relaxing: An orgasm. For Noland this kind of tension, the indescribable tension which shuttles between pleasure and

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[67]Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 272.

pain possessed only at the moment of the orgasm was constitutive of the metaphoric possibility of surface.

What a concept, a materialist practice founded upon the physical act of love making. Surface as a metaphor of the fantastic expansion and contraction of the physical and psychical apparatus during sex. Not simply sex in a box (though for a Reichian the Orgone box is certainly beneficial to sex), nor sex on the box, boxed sex, or sex on the brain (a type of sex, a representation of sex, and a perverse, sadistic, lascivious obsession with sex that is precisely the problem with any patriarchal culture that insures compulsory sexual morality), but the cool riffs of sexy music, that sound like jazz being played on a phonograph which is actually a surface that is a metaphor of orgiastic pleasure. A painting that is'nt really about being [square] or boxing, which is kind of like making things or people fit in [square]. A painting that is a phonygraph: not really writing, not really about jazz or boxing, or even painting, but about whispering sweet nothings, sexual peeps, swooning bleeps, excited bleats, swoops or moans, any and all species of repeated sighs, accelerated breaths, and sensual sounds. A device that is a painting for producing all the hushed tones of making music but really is not a phonograph at all. A painting that is for all intents and purposes a pornographic record, but is not really pornography because the orgasm it fakes, is real. You can feel it. Just listen.

It is a new definition of painting for the swinging set. A definition that priorizes surface as a metaphor of the sexual revolution; a metaphor of orgiastic pleasure. It is a definition of painting finely attuned to a theory of the human organism as, finally and ultimately, simply just, a machine for repeated genital gratification. It is painting reduced down to the coarser mechanical and economic aspects of sexuality. Painting as sex-machine. Painting as throbbing, erection-making, vaginal-stimulating, genital circulation pump.

Simply put -- and being simple was part of his strategy -- a painting like *Magic Box* shuttles between high modernist painting's serious project of distilling

expression and a kind of obscene, naive staging of the tension between an always-already constituted structure of being [square] in a culture of conformity and the possibility of driving a [square] cat wild. If the expressive quality of Noland's painting hinges on what Fried calls "transformations of pictorial structure based on an act of perpetual radical criticism", making surface a metaphor of expression through a process of abstraction and formalization was as much a kind of cheeky autobiographical restaging of a succession of moments in time spent sitting in an Orgone Energy Accumulator at the Orgone Institute in Philadelphia. A life's work shuttling between a high-minded, "bland, large, Apollonian art" and those magic moments of sexual potency gained in the charged atmosphere of the Orgone Energy Accumulator. The Orgone Box, a magic box that enabled magic moments to come. Maybe boxing was not so bad after all. In Noland's world all the real swingers ussually are boxers, if that is, they can catch and throw a punch-line.

Needless to say, a reading that recognizes not being [square] as a blind moment in a process of becoming [square] is the other side, the far other Dionysian side of a formalist reading of Noland's practice that might argue for it, as say a reformulation of the essential abstractness of Pollock's painting. Certainly working from the center out, working around the canvas, and employing a pictorial structure of concentric rings, provided a practical resolution for dissolving or dispersing the pictorial density of cubism and later abstract expressionism. Finding the center of the canvas and working outward toward the shape of the support was Noland's own way of insuring "equivalency" or "homogeneity" of the surface. It militated against the privileging of any one part or any one aspect of the canvas. It was another way, Noland's way of entirely subjugating surface to metaphoricity. Yet, if a procedure which priorized a fictional utopics of pleasure, we know from the theory of autobiography, that it must also exist as a tension with a life lived. A metaphoric use of surface is always founded and built upon a constellation of metonymic

associations that can circumscribe even a timeless theory of expression founded on sexuality to a very dated set of notions about what it takes to be cool.

If Noland's introduction to the problems of expression were made up of an intricate network of connections and associations that early on included jazz and the sweet science of boxing, by 1958 the expressive complex was priorizing a project for sexual revolution. The theory of the orgasm did not simply replace the previous associations. Instead, the metaphor of the orgasm reworked, complemented, and deepened those other ways that Noland was thinking and dreaming about surface. It is significant in this respect that the tension between [square]ness and not being [square] remained the controlling metaphor before and after Noland's shift in 1958. That is, if [square]ness as the crucial tension against which coolness was defined in the hip dialect of the 1950s jazz aficionado offered up a kind of critical though naive posturing with regard to middle class conformity, Reich's understanding of character structure as a static, [square], and fabricated armor that blocked pleasure on a mass scale, provided the basis of a dialectical critique.

The radical sexual conclusions that Reich would draw from the structure of concentric stratification which was Freud's wager for the best pictorial expression of character structure served Noland in a two-fold manner. Because it mapped out the subject in terms of a polarity that fully accommodated the lingo of the jazznick, the notion of character as a structure of concentric stratification (which was really about being [square]) distilled out the paradox of representation in terms of a tension between form and content. Functioning simultaneously in terms of what Fred Orton calls "surface matter" and "subject matter", the structure of "concentric stratification" permitted the content of the former to be staged or dramatized in terms of the form of the latter.[68] That is the [square]ness of form as a structure of "concentric stratification" simultaneously functioned in terms of all-overness that was charged with content. The allegorical nature of a character structure -- a socially

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[68]Fred Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns*, p. 9

contingent personification of the subject, a social figure, a public face -- actually enabled through its very negation as surface-matter, an encapsulation of symbolic process.

Driving a [square] cat wild and not simply representing a wild cat through a recourse to the gesture or sign was the logical outcome of Noland's movement away from abstract expressionism. It was implicit to a complexification of his own understanding of expression; part of a concern for the phonic aspect of painting, a concern for the material or physical aspect of painting. The important point to acknowledge in all this however, is that the figure of Reich represented more than simply a topical or timely issue. Rather, Reich's theory of sexuality functioned as the crucial building block to the whole of Noland's mature work. For Noland's "breakthrough" to creativity at the time of his shift in 1958 was intimately connected to a new conception of self; a deeper, more self-reflexive awareness of self offered up by Reich's sex oriented version of character analysis. Which is to say, that if the shift in Noland's practice operated within certain established art historical boundaries, it was as much a function of insight gained into the allegorical nature of ones character or personality, that fundamental disunity within the self which Reich located at the core of the "suppression of genital sexuality".[69]

Take the example of Noland's 1959 painting *Wilhelm Reich* (1959) (Figure 22). The title is significant. It is the only Target painting with a specific reference. The dedication to Reich, in the winter of 1958/59, was presumably on the occasion of his death in prison. Reich had been jailed for not discontinuing the sale of his patented Orgone Box which he claimed could cure everything from sexual impotency to cancer. That Noland would title one painting of a much larger series

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[69] "The person afflicted with the emotional plague limps characterologically. The emotional plague is a chronic biopathy of the organism. It made an inroad into human society with the first mass suppression of genital sexuality ... It is an endemic illness ... An essential and basic characteristic of the emotional plague reaction is that action and the motive of the action never coincide. The real motive is concealed and a sham motive is given as the reason for the action. In the reaction of the natural and healthy individual, motive, action, and goal form an organic unity." Reich, *Character Analysis*, pp. 504-507.

of paintings, *Wilhelm Reich,* is more than simply coincidence. It was earlier that same year that Noland had finally begun Reichian therapy, after a long period of acquaintance.[70] While James Agee notes that Noland began Reichian therapy in 1950 for a period of nine years,[71] on the occasion of my interview with Noland he assured me that though he had been aware and interested in Reich this early on, he only began Reichian therapy in 1958.[72] At any rate Noland had first learned of the work of Reich through his friend Robin Bond who had taught at the A. S. Niel School, an alternative education school at Summerhill. Noland met Bond, the director of art studies at the Institute of Contemporary Art, while student teaching there in 1949.

Looking at the painting with the fifteen or so other Targets from the same years in mind, *Wilhelm Reich* strikes one as an anomaly. In comparison to the typical layout of the Targets, not only is the concentric or successive structure of rings absent, but the insistence on circularity itself is downplayed. Nevertheless, what is interesting is that the moment captured seems to be a moment of becoming. The frame and indeed the squared off configuration or figure within the frame is turning into a circle. For if the shape of the outer perimeter of the block seems as yet unaffected by the centrifugal force of the central circle, the inside of the block is already in the process of swirling or screwing into a circular form. Moreover, if the squared perimeter seems captured at a moment before being centrifuged out, its tilt does not bode well for the static forces of [square]ness. *Wilhelm Reich* is a painting in the process of becoming; it is a painting that marks a transformation from being [square] to becoming not [square]; a painting in the process of becoming a Target or a Circle painting. It seems to stage a kind of fictional beginning or originary moment. For it is as if *Wilhelm Reich* was intentionally painted to represent the first of the

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[70]Steiner Interview, June, 1995, p. 2(b); for Agee see *The Circle Paintings,* p. 18; on Noland meeting Bond see Kenworth Moffet, *Kenneth Noland,*p. 95.

[71]Agee, p. 18.

[72]This later date would roughly concur with the recollections of Marcella Louis Brenner, who has referred in interview with me to Noland's weekend visits to a Reichian clinic in Philadelphia some time in the later 1950s. Steiner interview with Marcella Louis Brenner, May, 1993.

series, a kind of missing link between an early painting like *Globe* (1956) (Figure 9) and what I have argued is one of the first Target paintings, *Beginning* (1959) (Figure 5).

It is an important painting because the polarity between [square]ness and not being [square], that we have isolated as the key compositional device, is here clearly and vividly mapped onto determinations of stasis and dynamic movement. That is, stasis as a function of [square]ness is in opposition to the circulating movement of not being [square]. Combating stasis through becoming was at the core of the idea of sexual revolution. It was as Reich formulated it "a capacity to surrender to the flow of biological energy, free of any inhibitions; a capacity to discharge completely the dammed up sexual excitation through involuntary, pleasurable convulsions of the body."[73] As a negation of the conformity and compulsory sexual morality of the surrounding culture, Reich's conception of orgiastic potency and the self-regulating sex-economy, was the only way of stemming the neurotic character forming pressures of the surrounding culture. Because character structure was formed of a "pattern of successive resistance's", that was in itself contingent on the structural tensions enacted in the interpersonal relation, character was an inalterable limit and precondition of social life. Contrary to the Freudian project, character structure could not simply be dispensed with during the course of an analysis. Repression was incurable. It was however manageable if the "successive pattern of resistance's" repetition mobilized as character, were combated by providing repetition with the primary outlet in sexual somatic gratification it sought in the first place.

Repetition was not boring, tedious, stale, mundane, boring, mechanical, lifeless, middle class, prosaic, or conservative, it was on the contrary, quite a provocative, exciting, and even revolutionary notion. Repetition was the only way to access a symbolic realm of wholeness or oneness otherwise lost to those living "under the condition of neurotic sexual repression".[74] "Under the condition of

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[73]Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, p. 102.
[74]Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*, p. 5.

neurotic sexual repression" "complete and repeated genital gratification" was the only way of preventing [square]ness, stasis, sickness, neuroses, or perversion. For Noland, repetition was not simply about sexual obsession, sexual compulsion, an obsessive compulsiveness about sex, a repetition compulsion founded in sexual repression, anal retentiveness, or even a neurotic obsession with anality. Rather it was an indices of sexual potency, mature genitality, and the "self-regulating" possibilities of the sex-economy. For Noland, the circle painter, the revolutionary sexual thinker, boxing's king of the ring, the non [square] jazz listening Orgone Box sitting swinger, this meant a whole lot of fucking around.

Figure 1 Kenneth Noland. *This,* 1958-59. Acrylic on canvas. 84 x 84 inches. William C. Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-1963.* Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, 1993, p. 69.

Figure 2 Kenneth Noland. *That,* 1958-59. Acrylic on canvas. 84 x 84 inches. William C. Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-1963.* Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, 1993, p. 70.

Figure 3 Kenneth Noland. *Virginia Site.* 1959. Acrylic on canvas, Kenworth Moffett, *Kenneth Noland.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977, frontispeice.

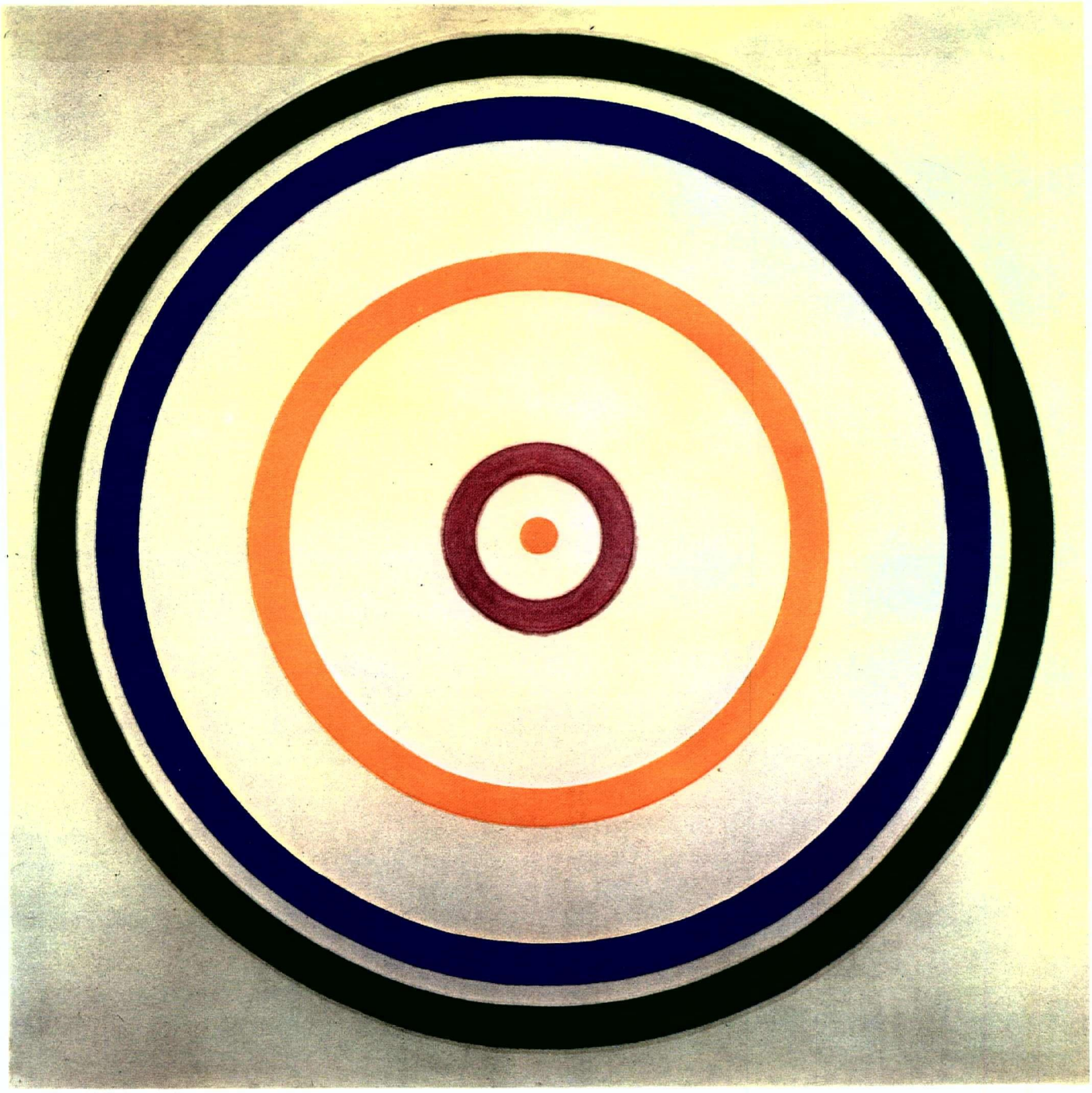

Figure 4 Kenneth Noland. *Sunshine*. 1961. Oil on canvas, 84 x 84 inches. Kenworth Moffett, *Kenneth Noland*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977, p. 53.

Figure 5 Kenneth Noland. *Beginning*. 1958. Magna on canvas, 90 x 95 7/8 inches. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution.

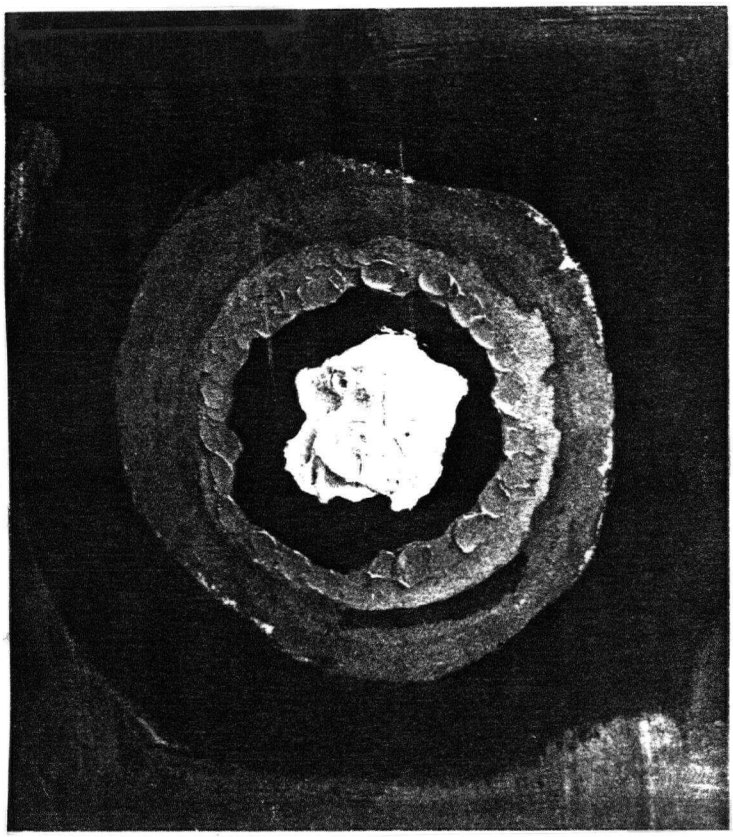

Figure 6 Kenneth Noland. *Untitled.* c.1956. Oil on canvas, 18 x 18 inches. Kenworth Moffett, *Kenneth Noland.*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977, p. 26.

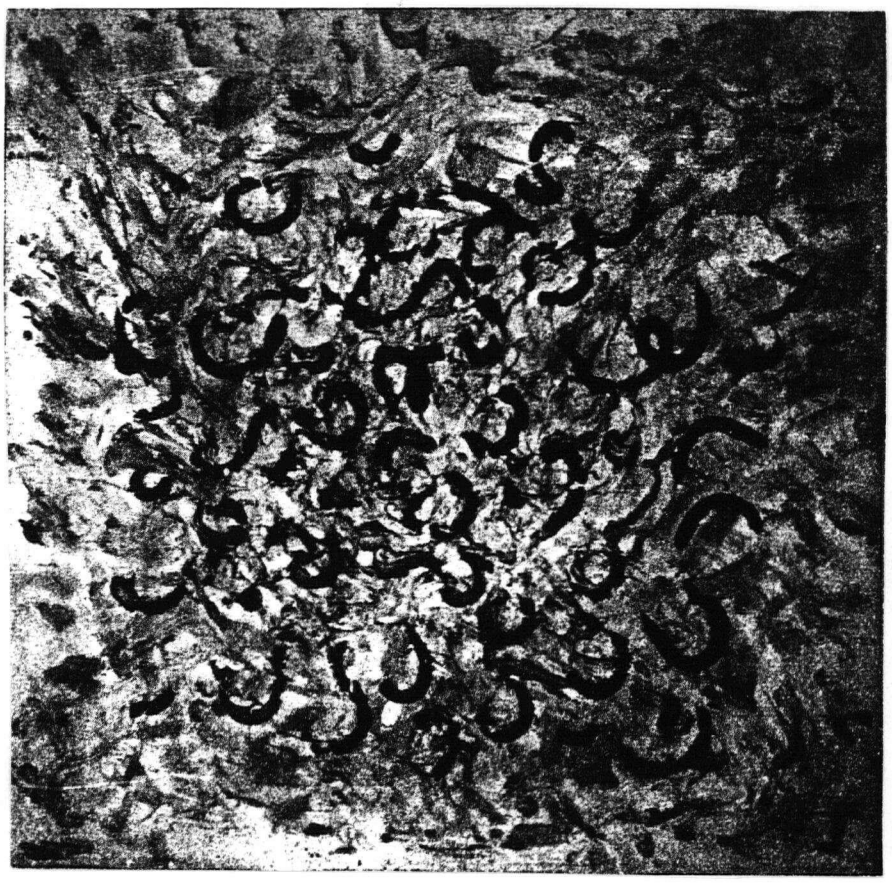

Figure 7 Kenneth Noland. *Untitled.* c.1957. Oil on canvas, 16 x 14" inches. Kenworth Moffett, *Kenneth Noland.*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977, p. 26.

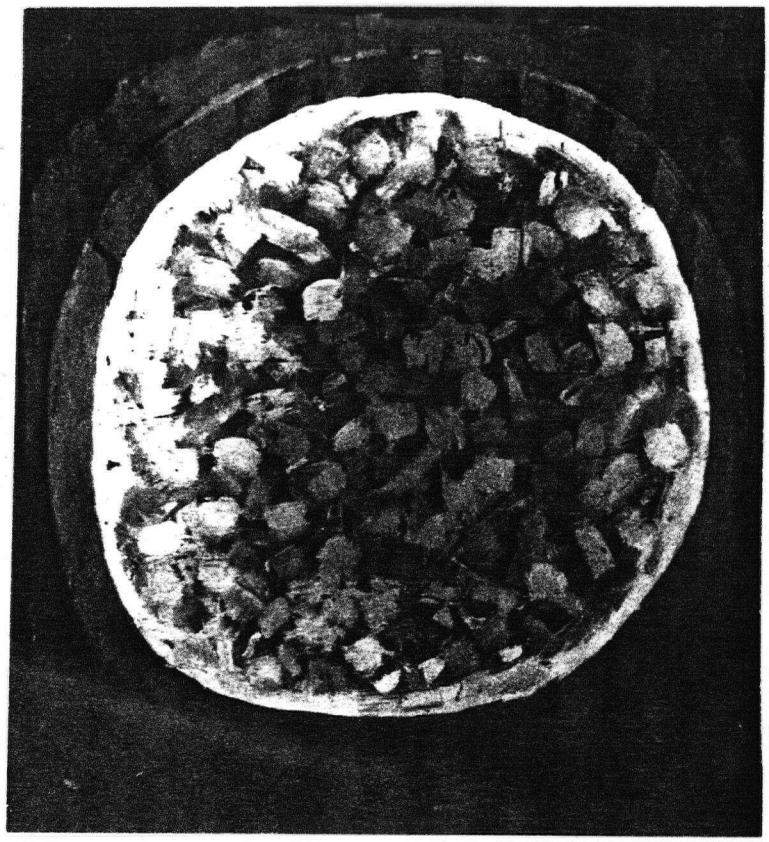

Figure 8 Kenneth Noland. *Untitled.* 1957. Oil on canvas, 60 x 54 inches. Kenworth Moffett, *Kenneth Noland.* New York: Harry N. Abrans, Inc., 1977, p. 26.

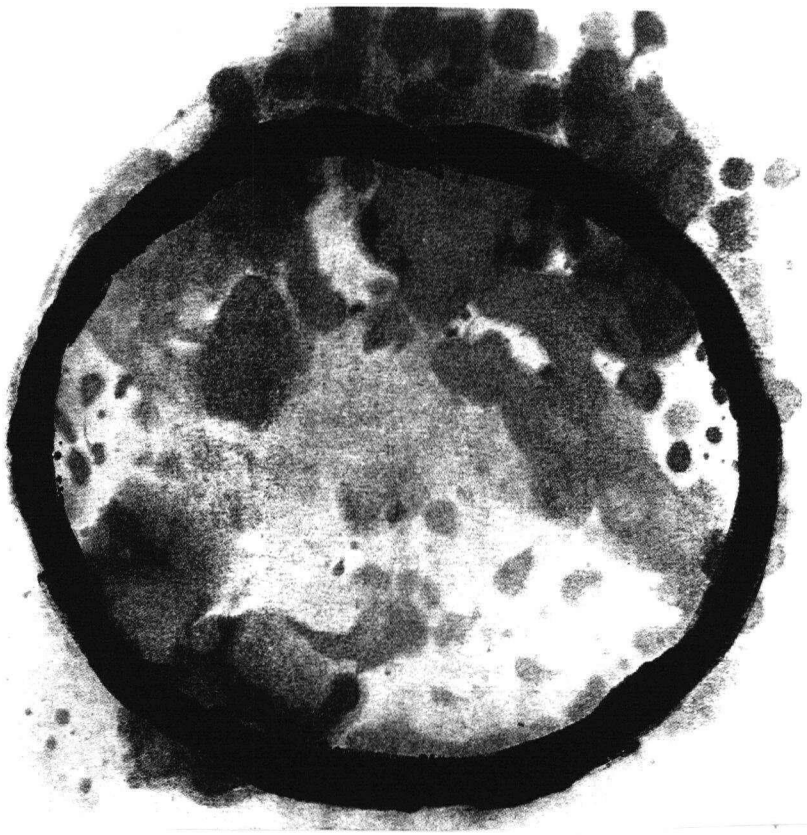

Figure 9 Kenneth Noland. *Globe.* 1956. Oil on Canvas. 60 x 60 inches. Kenworth Moffett, *Kenneth Noland.*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977. p. 48.

Figure 10 Kenneth Noland. *Circle.* 1958-59. William C.Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings,* 1956-1963. Acrylic on canvas, 96 x 96 inches. The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, 1993, p. 65.

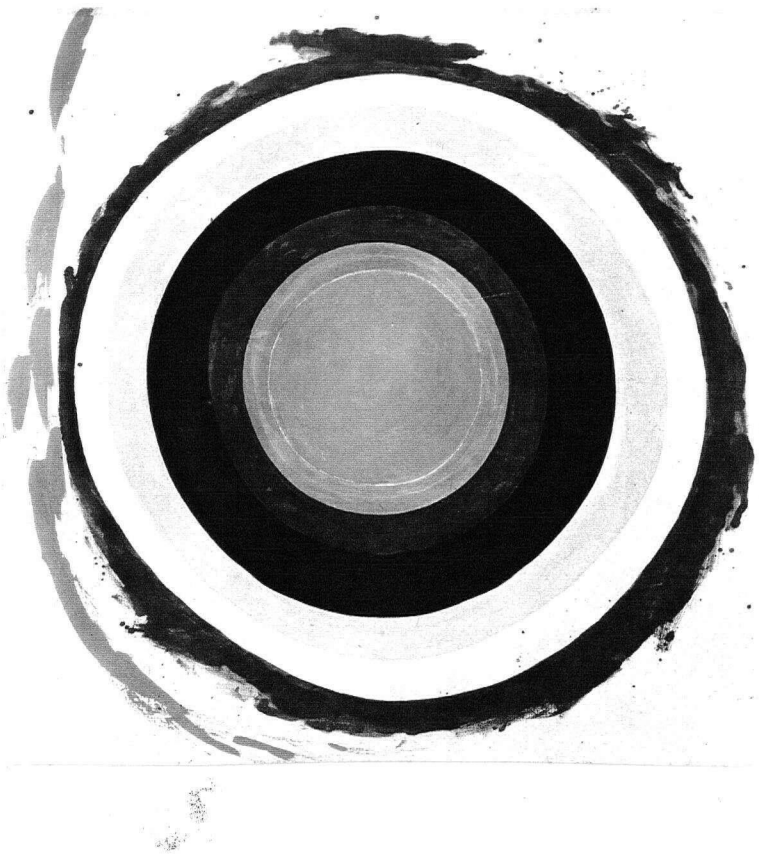

Figure 11 Kenneth Noland. *Luster.* 1958. Acrylic on canvas, 59 x 59 inches. Karen Wilkin, *Kenneth Noland.* New York: Rizzoli, 1990, pl. 1.

Figure 12 Kenneth Noland. *Heat.* 1958. Acrylic on canvas, 63 x 65 inches. Collection Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles.

Figure 13 Kenneth Noland. *Split.* 1959. Acrylic on canvas, 94 x 95 1/4 inches. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

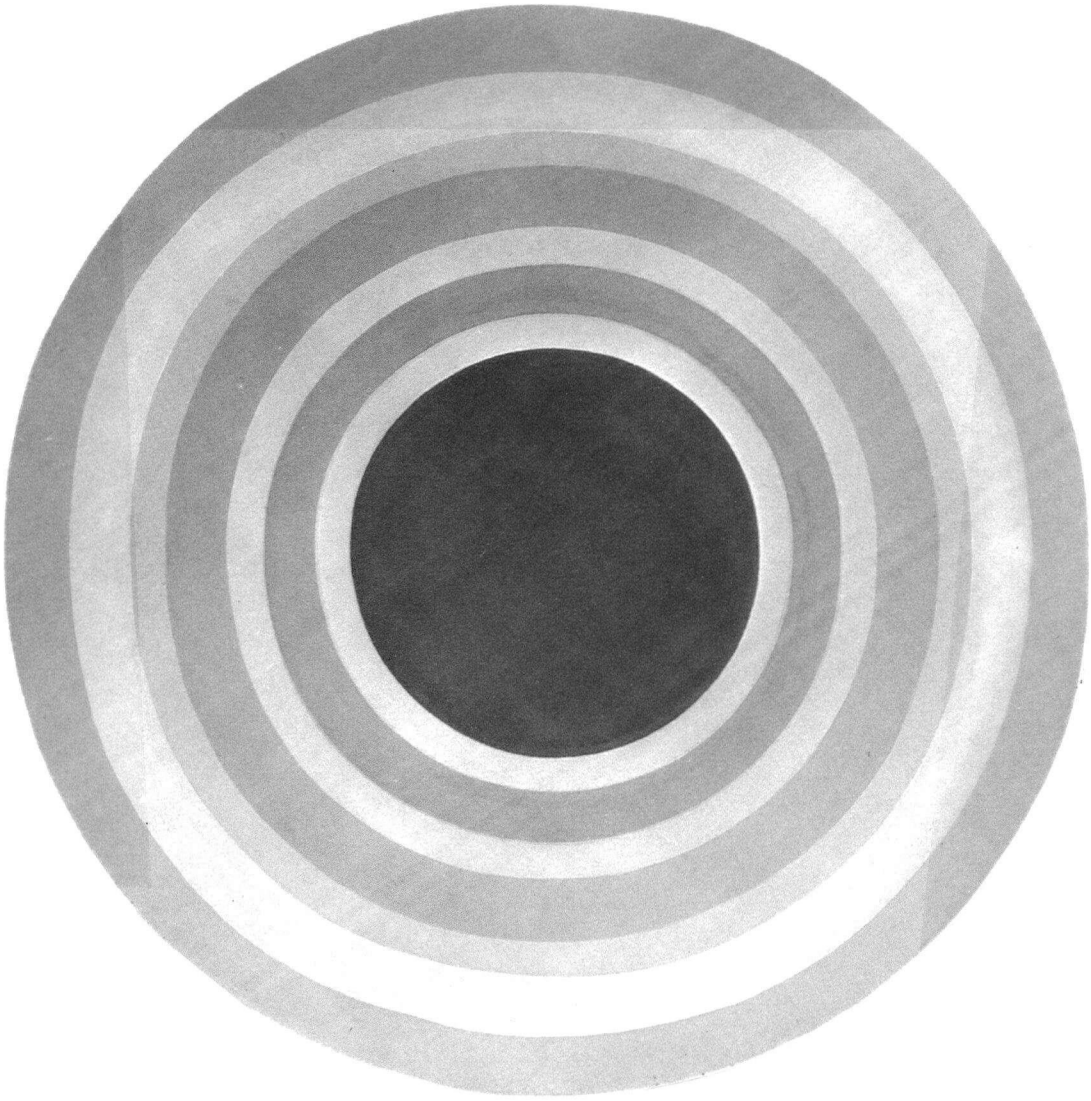

Figure 14 Kenneth Noland *Tondo.* 1958-59. Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 inches. Kenworth Moffett, *Kenneth Noland*.. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977, p.55.

Figure 15 Nicolas Poussin. *The Arcadian Shepherds.* 1650. Louvre, Paris.

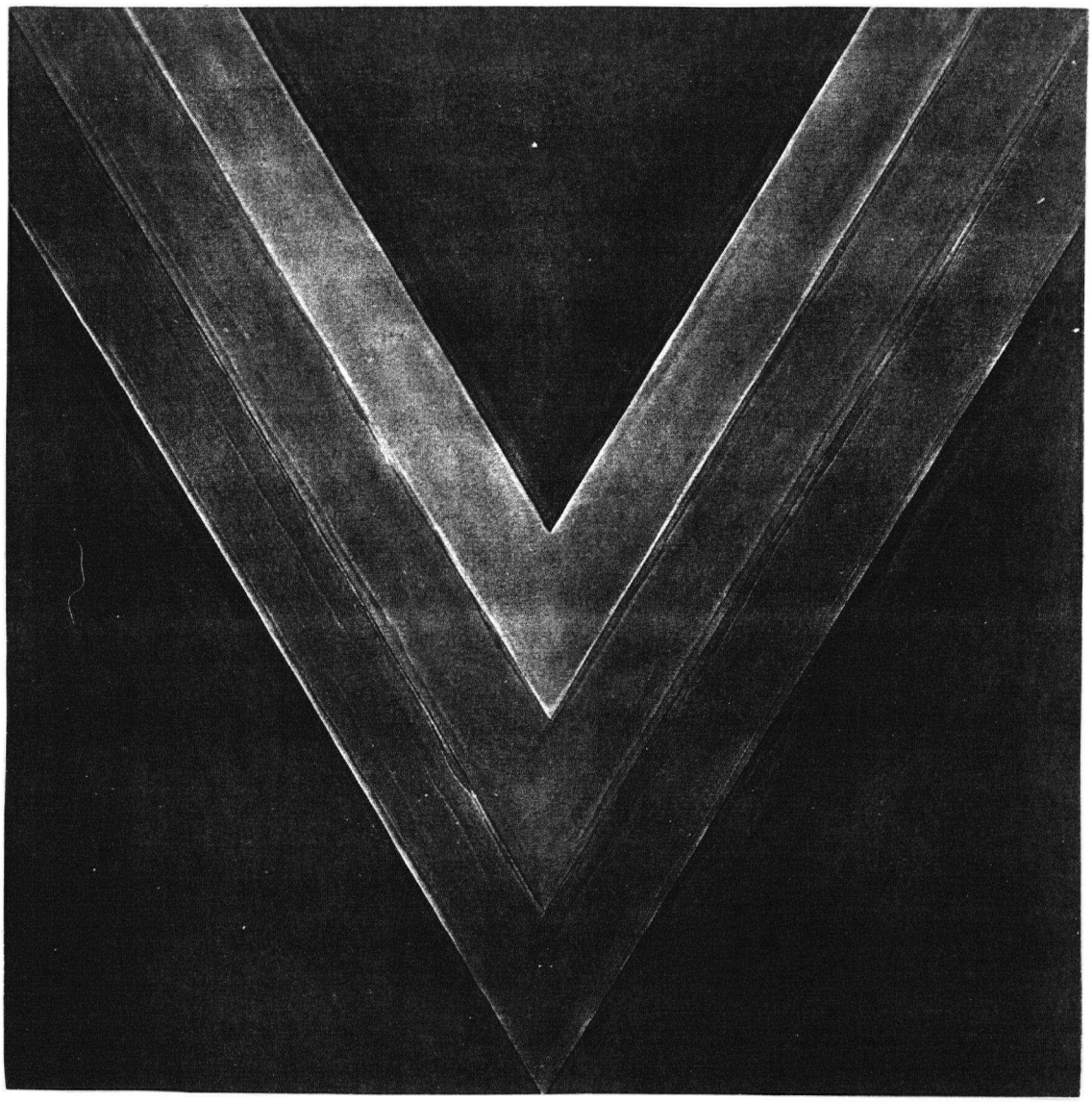

Figure 16 Kenneth Noland. *Blue Veil*, 1963, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x72 inches. Kenworth Moffet, *Kenneth Noland,* New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977, p. 130.

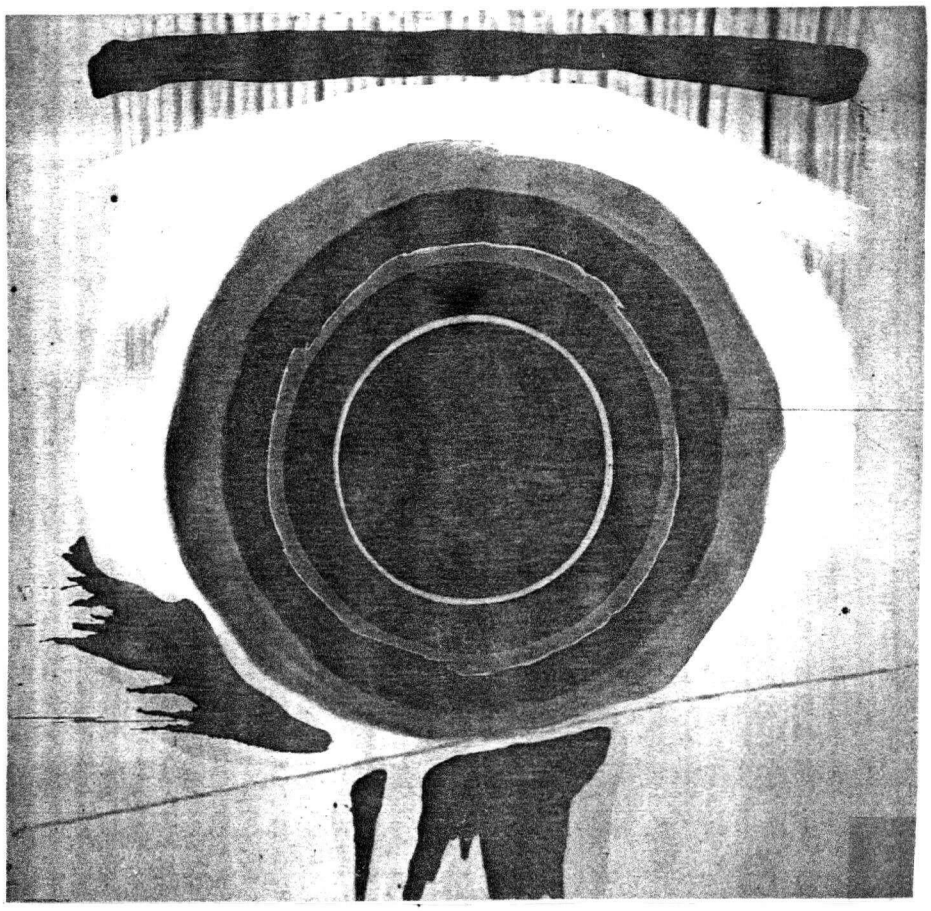

Figure 17 Kenneth Noland. *Tide*, 1958. Acrylic on canvas, 67 x 63 inches. William C. Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-1963.* Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993, p. 59.

Figure 18 Kenneth Noland. *Fete,* 1959. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72 inches. William C. Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-1963.* Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993, p. 74.

Figure 19 Kenneth Noland. *Spread,* 1958. Oil on canvas, 117 x 117 inches. William C. Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-l963.* Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993, p. 63.

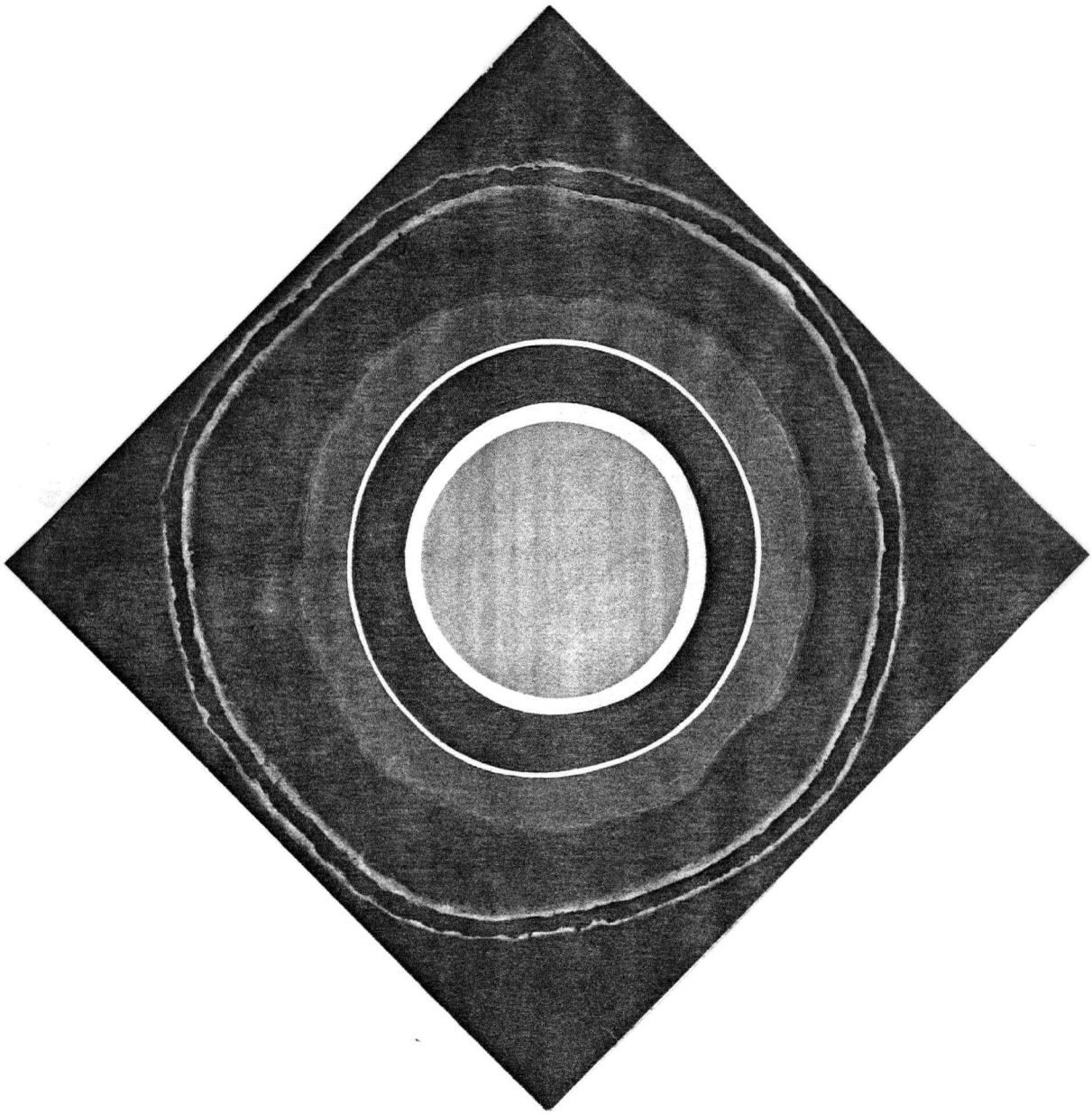

Figure 20 Kenneth Noland, *Untitled*, 1958-59. Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 84 inches. William C. Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-l963.* Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993, p. 73.

Figure 21 Kenneth Noland. *Magic Box*, 1959. Acrylic on canvas, 96 x 96 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York.

Figure 22 Kenneth Noland. *Wilhelm Reich*, 1959. Acrylic on canvas, 69.5 x 70 inches. William C. Agee, *Kenneth Noland: The Circle Paintings 1956-l963.* Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1993, p. 32.

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