

Elective Affinities

Testing Word and Image Relationships

Edited by
Catriona MacLeod, Véronique Plesch
and Charlotte Schoell-Glass



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Introduction

Catriona MacLeod

Bald werden sie [Naturwesen] sich als Freunde und alte Bekannte begegnen, die schnell zusammentreten, sich vereinigen, ohne an einander etwas zu verändern, wie sich Wein mit Wasser vermischt. Dagegen werden andre fremd neben einander verharren und selbst durch mechanisches Mischen und Reiben sich keineswegs verbinden; wie Öl und Wasser zusammengerüttelt sich den Augenblick wieder aus einander sondert. (Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke*, I, 8: 302)

Sometimes they [natural substances] will meet as friends and old acquaintances and come together quickly and be united without either altering the other at all, as wine for example mixes with water. But others will remain strangers side by side and will never unite even if mechanically ground and mixed. Thus oil and water shaken together will immediately separate again. (Goethe, *Elective Affinities* 31)

In the autumn of 2005 more than 120 scholars from across the world and representing a range of academic disciplines gathered in Philadelphia for a week of discussions on topics relating to word and image studies. The essays collected in this volume are based on papers presented at that meeting, the seventh triennial conference of the International Association of Word and Image Studies, whose overall theme was *Elective Affinities*. Our conference title was borrowed from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1809 novel *Die Wahl verwandtschaften* (*Elective Affinities*), which in turn took its title from Swedish scientist Torbern Bergman's chemical treatise *A Dissertation on Elective Affinities* (*Disquisitio de attractionibus electivis*, 1775). Like the alkalis and acids whose behavior captivates the novel's protagonists, words and images, though apparently opposed, may also display a remarkable affinity. At the same time, as one of Goethe's characters objects, affinities themselves are problematic, and "werden erst interessant, wenn sie Scheidungen bewirken" (I, 8: 303; "are only really interesting when they bring about separations": 32).

From the so called "linguistic turn" to what W. J. T. Mitchell has dubbed the "pictorial turn" (Mitchell 9 34), much of twentieth century culture was preoccupied with hierarchical and polar relationships between words and images; but the twentieth century was also defined by the invention of film, a medium combining the visual, the verbal, and the phonic. The IAWIS conference

“Orientations” that took place in Hamburg in 2002 emphasized what has come to be known as “the spatial turn,” with the concomitant implications for words and images. As we move onward into the twenty first century, new art, literature, and technologies that present us with mutating relations and layerings of words and pictures make us revisit the old yet still pressing debate about the respective abilities of words and images to represent. They also challenge us to reconsider the nature of reading and spectatorship. Are images supplements or “illustrations” to words, or is text now subordinate in our hyper visual culture? What lies between word and image? Is a third kind of meaning generated by new forms of interplay between word and image, and if so, what is it, what are its claims, and how does it insert itself into our consciousness? Do words and images enjoy a harmonious kinship, yield to adulterous passion, engage in border skirmishes, or seek to annihilate one another? Such questions have been at the heart of word and images studies since the foundation of IAWIS in 1987. These are not merely formal matters, but rather constitute an ideologically charged terrain, as indeed much of the recent work in this field has demonstrated and as spatial metaphors such as “borders,” “crossings,” or “orientation” also suggest. A term open to multiple meanings and to experimental testing, “elective affinities” allows us even obliges us to conduct a discussion that traverses and sometimes falls between disciplines and that takes a historical perspective in order to approach current innovations.

To look back at Goethe’s 1809 novel is simultaneously to look forward this is a move performed by Goethe’s book itself, as we shall see. The novel opens at a secluded country estate, where the happily married couple Charlotte and Eduard, sitting in what is described as a small, even cramped summerhouse, casually suggest that the space, just large enough for them, might also accommodate a third, and even a fourth person. The married happiness of Charlotte and Eduard is soon interrupted and reconfigured by the arrival of two new characters, Eduard’s unmarried friend the Captain, and Charlotte’s foster daughter Otilie. Goethe’s adultery novel, a textual space filled with hybrid forms ranging from travel albums, to the picturesque gardens tended so obsessively by Charlotte and Eduard, to the tableau vivant performances enthusiastically mounted by Luciane, Charlotte’s daughter from her first marriage, and the Architect, both anticipates a burgeoning mixed media culture and mounts a (possibly parodic) critique of such combinations. Only a decade before the publication of *Elective Affinities*, Goethe, in full throated classical disapproval of the combining of art forms, had argued in his programmatic introduction to the *Propyläen* journal (1798) that any mingling of arts is a sure indication of artistic degeneration, or even moral perversion. Yet, the reader

will also note that Goethe here takes for granted the “affinities” between arts, natural attractions which the “true artist” is charged with repelling:

Eines der vorzüglichsten Kennzeichen des Verfalles der Kunst ist die Vermischung der verschiedenen Arten derselben. Die Künste selbst, so wie ihre Arten, sind unterein-
ander verwandt, sie haben eine gewisse Neigung, sich zu vereinigen, ja sich ineinander
zu verlieren; aber eben darin besteht die Pflicht, das Verdienst, die Würde des echten
Künstlers, daß er das Kunstfach, in welchem er arbeitet, von anderen abzusondern,
jede Kunst und Kunstart auf sich selbst zu stellen und sie aufs möglichste zu isolieren
wisse. (I, 18: 468–69)

One of the most striking signs of decline in art is the intermingling of the various forms of art. To be sure, the arts themselves and the various art forms are intimately related and have a certain tendency to unite, if not merge completely. However, the duty, task, and worth of the true artist lie precisely in keeping one particular art form separate from the others. He should give autonomy to each branch and form of the arts and isolate them as far as possible.¹

Contemporary readers of Goethe’s novel were scandalized by the adulterous passions of its protagonists (Tantillo 1–26). Romantic author Ludwig Tieck reportedly called it the “Qualverwandtschaften” (“Torture Affinities”; qtd. in Tantillo, *Goethe’s “Elective Affinities”* 7). At first, to be sure, the novel appears to signal that a consideration of elective affinities is a harmless intellectual parlor game: “Diese Gleichnisreden sind artig und unterhaltend, und wer spielt nicht gern mit Ähnlichkeiten?” (I, 8: 305; “These comparisons are very entertaining, everyone likes playing with analogies”: 33). Nevertheless, the scientific banter has consequences that will be of twofold importance for the novel as well as for the present collection of essays. Firstly, of course, as even Charlotte realizes when she makes the apparent misstep of likening elective affinities in nature to the social structures and divisions of her age (I, 8: 302; 31), there will be far reaching ideological implications for class (and, one should add, gender). Secondly, the discourse of adultery/adulteration shifts readily from the realms of marriage and chemistry to that of “improper” art. Indebted to classical indictments of hybridity such as those by Goethe and Lessing, art historian Karl August Böttiger would go on to characterize Luciane’s sculptural poses or “attitudes” as “Ungebühnisse” (qtd. in Jooss, 295; “improprieties”) in a skeptical review of the novel. Writers of fiction did not like it any better. Christoph Martin Wieland scorned the popular tone of the novel, indicting it as “ein farrago, ein Mischmasch von Dialogen und Vorlesungen über Gartenkunst, Baukunst, Decorationskunst, Mahlerei, Bildnerei, Musik, Mimische Kunst, u. Gott weiß über wie vielerlei Künste” (“a farrago, a mishmash of dialogues and lectures on landscaping, architecture, decorating, painting, portraiture, music, mimic art, and God knows on how many arts”; qtd. in Tantillo, *Goethe’s “Elective Affinities”* 10). When Luciane’s spectators urge

her to break her pose in a performance after Gerard ter Borch's painting *The Paternal Admonition*, uttering in unison the words "tournez s'il vous plaît" (I, 8: 429; 148), they are actually speaking like readers, demanding that she behave more like a book (her proper place being that of a character in a novel) than a painting. Nevertheless, Goethe was of course himself responsible for generically mixed literary masterpieces, and was passionately involved in the visual arts at every stage of his long career. Whether or not the *tableau vivant* was an affront to genuine art, because of its mingling of performance, body, painting, and text, and its merger with popular culture, we know that Goethe did embrace its theatrical potential. In a birthday celebration at the Weimar court in 1813 for Maria Pawlowna von Sachsen Weimar Eisenach, Goethe directed a series of *tableaux vivants* and appeared on stage himself as a Roman soldier in the *Belisarius* scene, thus re-enacting one of the performances for which his novel had become famous or, indeed, notorious (Jooss 314–17).

This Janus-like aspect of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*—does he want to police the boundaries, or surrender to the irresistible pleasures and possibilities of hybrid unions?—proved useful in reflecting on the wide diversity of topics, historical periods, and disciplinary approaches present in this collection, with their tendency to fall into patterns of attraction and repulsion. Furthermore, the complexity of the term "affinity" needs to be emphasized, highlighting as it does natural law and necessity, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, human beings' belief that they can manipulate these affinities according to their volition. (The grotesque embodiment of the latter principle will be Goethe's spectacularly unsuccessful marriage broker, Mittler.) To take one last glance at the novel, it is striking that during the initial discussion of scientific affinities three of the protagonists who will be caught up in the experimental reactions project their own human subjectivity and desires onto the chemical pairings (I, 8: 300–07; 29–35). Charlotte is interested in the marital bond, Eduard in divorces ("Scheidungen"), and the Captain focuses on the free movement of the elements (cf. Tantillo, "Polarity and Productivity" 317). As Tony Tanner aptly puts it, "the characters themselves are effectively creating the experiment in which they will be the materials" (209). The fourth human component in the test, Ottilie, most drastically, is converted at the end of the novel into an art object, a mixed media spectacle: a latter-day *Sleeping Beauty* in a glass-covered coffin (I, 8: 523; 235–36).²

Following the experimental modalities opened up by Goethe, the present volume is divided into three sections, which explore, respectively, how words and images can merge in harmony, engage in conflicts and contestations, and, finally, interact in an experimental way that self-consciously tests the boundaries and relations among verbal and visual arts.

The first cluster of essays considers the theme of union from several perspectives. A number of contributors discuss writers or visual artists who traverse the boundaries of their respective media to synthesize images and words. Adriana Dragomir explores the narrative construction of a persona by Frida Kahlo, which, she argues, unfolds in a parallel movement through a series of self portraits and in the artist's diary. An essay by Michael Taylor on Duchamp's challenging final work, *Étant donné*, also encourages readers and viewers to consider the significance of an apparently peripheral written document in deciphering a visual work, in this case the illustrated binder of instructions created for the piece's installation. Laurence Wuidar extends the notion of synthesis between word and image to include the phonic dimension in her analysis of multi media works by the seventeenth century Roman composer Francesco Valentini. Collaborations between artists and writers provide illuminating examples of creative affinities across media, whether synchronous or across time: Irish artist Louis le Brocquy's evocations of Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett in portraits Karen Brown terms "inscapes"; the quintessentially romantic collaboration of Wilhelm von Schadow's novel *The Modern Vasari* and its illustrator, characterized by Cordula Grewe as a self referential interplay. That the union of written and visual vocabulary may, however, be performing problematic ideological work is illustrated by Robert Grant's article on nineteenth century British images of native peoples, which reveals the seamless translation of contemporary race theory and policies into the visual language of the picturesque.

The second section of the volume reflects open conflicts and antagonism, in surprising places and with a pronounced tendency to question the utility, motivation, or truth value of the image. Where, as Miriam Harris showed in the case of Lynda Barry at the end of our first section on "Union," the comic strip by its very nature vibrantly joins words and images, Steen Christiansen explores the radically different agenda of the *Transmetropolitan* series, and its seemingly paradoxical use of images to launch an assault on contemporary visual culture. Indeed, to take a work that instantiates such a visual turn in the first half of the twentieth century, the French photomagazine *Vu*, according to Danielle Leenaerts, systematically and explicitly subordinates text in its generation of meaning. This suppression of the word, however, is an exception in the works under analysis here. By contrast, Hubert Locher discusses the eclipse of visual art by literary ekphrasis: in his comparison of descriptions of picture collections by Wilhelm Heinse and Friedrich Schlegel from the late eighteenth century, he reveals the deeply literary and aesthetic agenda of the writers, both of whom dispense with illustrations of the paintings described. Lauren Weingarden's discussion of Baudelaire and Baudelairean artists astutely considers moments of dissonance and conflict in their

responses to modernity, while also exposing significant contradictions in the “elective affinity” between Baudelaire and his twentieth century champion, Walter Benjamin. By the beginning of the twenty first century, as Valentin Nussbaum argues in his essay on images of the artist as a malefactor, we can find numerous examples of art that manipulates and distorts the evidentiary claims of images. Jonathan Marshall’s essay on Charcot and his critics, the last article on conflict, reveals deep seated suspicions on the part of Charcot’s contemporary Munthe precisely based in his performative mingling of words and images with scientific discourse, a move that Munthe indeed considered iatrogenic.

In a final grouping, readers will find essays addressing literature, photography, film, script, and body art that consciously undertake experiments on and with words and images. Susana Oliveira opens this section with an account of the dichotomous impact of artificial light on the arts: received negatively in much nineteenth century literature, it was, however, embraced experimentally by visual artists because of the unprecedented new optical effects it ushered in. The collaboration between Henry James and the illustrator George du Maurier, in Jennifer Greenhill’s reading of “The Real Thing,” emerges as a meditation on literary and visual blindness and sight. In the case of both Alexei Remizov’s texts and drawings, discussed by Julia Friedman, and of the visual translators of Baudelaire’s “L’Invitation au voyage” analyzed by Eric Haskell, we find conscious efforts to push or surpass what is seen as the limits of the verbal. Focusing, like Friedman, on discourses of the ornament, but with an emphasis on its historically mutating meanings, Spyros Papapetros traces Aby Warburg’s copious notes and illustrations on *Semper* and ornament as allegories of Western modernity. Christina Cuevas Wolf and María DeGuzmán track the ideological deployment of word image experiments: Cuevas Wolf, in the tragicomic Weimar photomontages of John Heartfield, and DeGuzmán, in the imaginary photographs strategically appearing in contemporary Latina/o fiction as a critique of colonial imaging of Latinas/os. Susan Nurmi Schomers parses German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s intermedial experiments importing painterly verticality and stasis into his adaptation of Fontane’s novel *Effi Briest*. Finally, opening up the theme of strategic experimentation to a global context, Birgit Mersmann’s article on contemporary body and performance art in China considers the encounter between Western and Eastern notions of writing, inscription, and the corporeal.

We invite readers to explore the affinities that have emerged here in a rich counterpoint of viewpoints, disciplines, media, and historical periods.

NOTES

- 1 Author's translation. I would like to express my thanks to Neil Garrioch, Cordula Grewe, Véronique Plesch, and Charlotte Schoell Glass for their thoughtful comments.
- 2 On the freezing of the living body of Otilie, presided over by patriarchal authority, see Tanner (esp. 225–32); for a related discussion of tableaux vivants and morbidity in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795), see MacLeod 119–23.

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SUMMARIES

KAREN E. BROWN

The “Inscapes” of Louis le Brocquy

This essay investigates le Brocquy’s head images of W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. The author argues that these images must be understood in the light of recent inquiries in Irish studies, literary studies, and art history. Firstly, analysing the artist’s images and words exposes constructs of nationalism and Celticism in his response to Yeats. Secondly a comparative analysis of memory, identity, and modernism between his work and that of Joyce highlights his appropriation of the Joycean “epiphany.” And finally, a synthesis of Beckett’s themes of space, time, and human isolation are traced in le Brocquy’s paintings.

STEEN CHRISTIANSEN

The Truth of the Word, the Falsity of the Image: *Transmetropolitan’s* Critique of the Society of the Spectacle

In this essay, Warren Ellis and Darick Roberts’s science fiction comic book *Transmetropolitan* is shown to be a critique of the society of the spectacle, a warning against visual culture’s media saturation. Being at the same time both rebellious and nostalgic, the comic book reacts strongly against what it sees as the hyperreality of images, a condition which destroys meaning and empties the subject until humans are mere commodities. Using a cultural semiotics approach, the author shows how the comic book uses words to control the image, and to present strategies for opposition to dominant culture.

CRISTINA CUEVAS WOLF

John Heartfield’s Insects and the “Idea” of Natural History

This essay argues that Heartfield’s montage *Deutsche Naturgeschichte* (*German Natural History*) published in 1934 in the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (*The Worker Illustrated Newspaper*) is Walter Benjamin’s theory of natural history applied to the actuality of every day life and the political and historical developments that shaped it in 1934. Heartfield transforms photography, the metaphor of history, into an allegory of death in order to signify metaphorically and literally the paradox of progress as tragicomedy and as farce in Nazi propaganda. Concomitantly, this essay examines the visual interrelationship between Heartfield’s critique of rationalization in the twenties and his critique of evolutionary progress in the thirties to delineate the historical and thematic continuity between these two decades of German history that witnessed the political disintegration of the Weimar Republic.

MARÍA DEGUZMÁN

The Photographic Thought of Latina/o Literature and Cultural Critique

This essay examines Latina/o fictional texts that involve a textually conjured photograph but that are not accompanied by any actual photographs. The author examines how this device of the photograph in the text turns the absence of an actual photo

into a complex meta fictional maneuver, a comment on the terms of power structuring representation itself and the relation of Latinas/os to systems of dominance and subordination. Interest in the photographic image in this fiction may be read in terms of attempts to appropriate “self image” within the context of a history of colonialism and the contemporary experience of new kinds of colonialism.

ADRIANA DRAGOMIR

Living and Dying in the Limelight: Performing the Self in Frida Kahlo’s Diary and Paintings

This essay questions the view that considers Frida Kahlo’s diary an intimate document. It argues that the artist constructs a persona in the diary in the same way she does it in her numerous painted self portraits. The construction of the autobiographical self takes the form of a narrative that unfolds uninterrupted from the first self portraits to the last diary entries. This process becomes visible through an analysis of the word/image dynamics in both mediums of expression.

JULIA FRIEDMAN

The Writing Drawing Continuum of Alexei Remizov

The graphic experimentation undertaken by Alexei Remizov (1877–1957) resulted in hundreds of handwritten illustrated albums that mix India ink and watercolor drawings with collages and texts. What began with the ink outlines of his calligraphic text, and developed in the colorist bravura of the 1930s albums, came to a conclusion in the meaningful linearity of Remizov’s late images from the 1940s. Using previously unpublished albums as examples, this essay shows how the shift from the textual to the visual in Remizov’s illustrated albums reflects his broader artistic progression from ornamental prose to virtually hieroglyphic drawing.

ROBERT GRANT

American Scenery/Canadian Scenery: Conflicting Views of Indigenes in Mid Nineteenth Century British Portrayals of the American Continent

Willis and Bartlett’s mid nineteenth century representations of Native American and First Nation peoples provide insights into a contemporary systematization of racial difference. Trans global developments made the Atlantic dialogue particularly important, but it would be reductive to see the American and British experiences as identical. The erasure of Native Americans in *American Scenery* had a certain logic: the work of racial domination must be seen to be done. *Canadian Scenery*, by contrast, historicized First Nation peoples in a way that reinforced the emerging rhetorics of race as a means of managing difference: for the British, racial domination was always a work in hand.

JENNIFER A. GREENHILL

Illustrating the Shadow of Doubt: Henry James, Blindness, and “The Real Thing”

This essay departs from familiar readings of Henry James’s 1892 short story “The Real Thing” to focus on the theme of blindness. Drawing on, firstly, James’s reading of Kipling’s 1890 novel *The Light that Failed*, secondly, on James’s friendship with the illustrator George du Maurier, and, thirdly, on Jacques Derrida’s conception of blindness, the author considers what being blind means for literature and the art of illustration in the 1890s. As James saw it, the challenge facing the late nineteenth century artist was to learn to see in the dark. Who could perform this feat better—the artist who put his pen to the literary image or the one who created the visual image—this is what James’s story seeks to flesh out.

CORDULA GREWE

The *Künstlerroman* as Romantic Arabesque: Parody, Collaboration, and the Making of *The Modern Vasari* (1854)

This article explores the way in which the illustrations to Wilhelm von Schadow’s 1854 novel *The Modern Vasari: Reminiscences of an Artistic Life. A Novella* shape the nature of the text and the reader’s understanding of it. Focusing on the book’s parodic vignettes by Julius Hübner, the article argues that Hübner’s illustrations are not merely ornamental embellishment, but function as aesthetic interventions that construct a metadiscourse on Schadow’s aesthetic positions. Most importantly, they assert the book’s romantic character as an arabesque, that is, an open ended, non linear form of writing, by adding an element of self referential complexity.

MIRIAM HARRIS

Cartoonists as Matchmakers: The Vibrant Relationship of Text and Image in the Work of Lynda Barry

This essay explores the powerful ways in which Lynda Barry intertwines and juxtaposes text and image, creating rich layers of association. There are startling narrative twists, stretches of hilarity, and an overlaying of poignancy and poetry. Her multi sensory coupling of image and text often leads us to see both social and political issues in an entirely new way, and offers a profound challenge to the status quo. This exploration of Barry’s work draws upon the work of theorists who have investigated text/image relationships and comics, such as Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* and David Carrier’s *The Aesthetics of Comics*.

ERIC T. HASKELL

Picturing Paradise: Baudelaire’s “L’Invitation au voyage”

The *Flowers of Evil* have inspired a vast array of graphic interpretations striking in the quality and depth of insight they bring to Baudelaire’s poetic universe. This essay’s focus is an analysis of images created specifically for “L’Invitation au voyage.” The

dynamics of IMAGINING ideas, the intersection of verbal and visual planes, and the move from representation to abstraction are germane to this investigation. Thus, how twentieth century artists have pictured this iconic nineteenth century text is central to this interart inquiry which at once reframes and refigures the intrinsic value of illustration as interpretation.

DANIELLE LEENAERTS

Le magazine français *Vu* (1928–40): Naissance de l'information visuelle et utopie de la substitution de l'image photographique au texte écrit

Publié à Paris entre 1928 et 1940, le magazine *Vu* se donne pour objectif d'informer le public sur l'actualité politique et culturelle de son temps. Il entend se fonder principalement sur l'image photographique, en faisant appel à des agences, des photoreporters et des artistes photographes. Sa volonté est de donner à l'image la prépondérance sur le texte, d'inverser le rapport de subordination qui inféodait jusque là l'image au texte écrit. Cette préférence accordée à l'image s'exprime aussi bien en termes quantitatifs qu'en termes de surface d'impression consacrée aux contenus visuels, présentés sous forme de rubriques, de photomontages, d'images isolées ou de séquences.

HUBERT LOCHER

From Ekphrasis to History: Verbal Transformations of the Display of Picture Galleries – Wilhelm Heinse and Friedrich Schlegel

This essay presents a comparative analysis of two descriptions of picture collections by Wilhelm Heinse and Friedrich Schlegel. In his description of the princely picture gallery in Düsseldorf (*Über einige Gemälde der Düsseldorfer Galerie*, 1776/77), Heinse aims at composing a self contained literary text for a reader without any visual knowledge of the paintings described. Each description can be read as a more or less traditional ekphrasis intended to incite the imagination of the reader. In contrast, Friedrich Schlegel's account of the paintings displayed in the Louvre (*Nachricht von den Gemälden in Paris*, 1803) is comparatively sober. Instead of describing single paintings, he tries to put forward a specific argument by composing "characterizations" of the works on display. Schlegel's account is also to be read without illustrations. Its purpose is to develop his own theory of art aiming at the promotion of a renaissance of a specifically German tradition of painting inspired by the visual experience of a particular display of the paintings in the Louvre.

JONATHAN MARSHALL

Hypnotic Performance and the Falsity of Appearances: The Aesthetics of Medical Spectatorship and Axel Munthe's Critique of Jean Martin Charcot

The semi fictionalized biography of Dr. Axel Munthe *The Story of San Michele* (1929) features a critique of French neurologist Professor Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93). Munthe identifies the theatrical aspects of Charcot's discourse as a contaminant within the neuropathologist's practice which Munthe would have preferred

expunged from the neurologist's otherwise insightful observations. Charcot practiced a theatrical form of medical visualization in which word and image were hierarchized and deployed so as to successfully describe those illnesses of movement which were the subject of the new discipline of neurology. Munthe however saw this dramatic mixture of word and image as being iatrogenic, contributing to disease rather than describing it.

BIRGIT MERSMANN

(Ideo)Logical Alliances between Image and Script: Calligraphic Reconfigurations in Contemporary Chinese Art

In East Asian culture, image and script form a very strong alliance. Because (artistic) forms of visual representation grew out of a script/literate culture, a specific mode of *scriptural iconicity* developed. When Western body and performance art found its way into Chinese contemporary visual arts in the nineties, this traditional scriptovisual paradigm was challenged and infiltrated. The author argues that in response to the challenge of Western models of body representation and embodiment, calligraphy as scriptural body projection, as well as traditional print and stamp practices, were revived and reconfigured by contemporary Chinese body and performance artists, be it to redefine cultural, personal, and bodily identity, or to undermine critically the socialist cultural paradigm of writing as pre scription and in scription into the body.

SUSAN NURMI SCHOMERS

Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein, Fassbinder: *Découpage* Aesthetics on the Divide

Taking Roland Barthes's essay "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" as its point of departure and frame of reference, this article offers a critical look at the rationale behind the "composition" of this "group portrait," adding to it a fourth figure: the German film maker Rainer Werner Fassbinder. This heuristic move towards establishing common denominators and identifying crucial differences between theorists and practitioners of *découpage* aesthetics is ultimately directed towards an exploration of Fassbinder's adaptation of Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1974) as a self conscious study in the aesthetics of the filmic tableau vivant and what one might call an Eisensteinian campaign against "horizontal passivity" and the cine narrativity with which it is associated. Strategies aimed at "verticalizing" the shot and foregrounding the frame as the cell unit of the filmic medium are investigated from an Eisensteinian "anti narrative" perspective. Moreover, this inquiry raises questions about the interplay of film, theater, the plastic arts, and the word on the page in Fassbinder's filmic idiom, probing into the aesthetic implications and potential of such intermedial encounters.

VALENTIN NUSSBAUM

Serial Künstler: Portrait of the Artist as a Malefactor

Some comics and biographical novels, as for example Enki Bilal's *32 décembre* (2003), and Patricia Cornwell's *Jack the Ripper: Portrait of a Killer. Case closed* (2002), depict the artist as a malefactor. This paradoxical association has to do as much with fiction as

with reality. We have to concede that artists, since the end of the nineteenth century, regularly promoted transgressive images of themselves. But through the appropriation of the semantic field of criminal behavior they also questioned the dramatic issues of visibility. Playing with the codes of the imagery of crime, they created works that remain uncomfortable and demonstrate that images are not evidence in themselves.

SUSANA OLIVEIRA

New Lights and Old Shadows: Industrial Illumination and its *Imaginaire*

The questions behind this essay were prompted by Gaston Bachelard's idea, expressed in *The Flame of a Candle* (1961), that candlelight was an extraordinary producer of images. Dramatic nineteenth century developments in artificial light changed the ways the world was perceived and represented. Under the premise that new illumination technologies influenced the production of cultural forms, this essay aims at showing that it also created an imaginary of its own, both in scientific and popular forms as well as in literature and visual arts.

SPYROS PAPAPETROS

Aby Warburg as Reader of Gottfried Semper: Reflections on the Cosmic Character of Ornament

From abstract patterns to concrete artifacts and from cosmic symbols to allegories of a declining world order, ornaments and the discourses that envelop them follow a winding yet symmetrical trajectory in turn of the century histories of art and architecture. Based on Aby Warburg's unpublished reading notes from Gottfried Semper's 1856 lecture on objects of bodily adornment ("Schmuck") and following the multiple citation of these notes in Warburg's early work on Renaissance accessories in motion and later in his on site research on the decorated artifacts of the North American Pueblos, this essay describes the conversion of ornamental forms from "dynamograms" of natural science (as originally envisioned by Semper) to oscillating ideograms of social and cultural transition (as reconfigured by Warburg). The oscillations produced during the global circulation of ornament and the meandering historiographic legacies that trail behind it in fact presage the radical questioning of ornament in early twentieth century culture and its phenomenal eclipse from artistic practice.

MICHAEL R. TAYLOR

Consulting the Manual: Word and Image in Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés*

Marcel Duchamp's enigmatic final masterpiece, *Étant donnés* (1946-66), has been described by Jasper Johns as "the strangest work of art in any museum." This essay explores the history and reception of this elaborate installation, for which the artist supplied no notes, speculations, or other written documentation, beyond an illustrated binder of instructions for its assembly. The author argues that this often overlooked photographic *Manual of Instructions* supplies numerous clues as to Duchamp's disruptive and subversive intentions in presenting this brightly lit diorama to the public after his death.

LAUREN S. WEINGARDEN

Modernizing History and Historicizing Modernity: Baudelaire and Baudelairean Representations of Contemporaneity

Charles Baudelaire's mandate for representing nineteenth century contemporaneity suggests a genealogy for recovering modernism's own historicism and a model for assessing our postmodern conditions of contemporaneity. This essay examines how Baudelaire and Baudelairean artists recorded their own historical moment as paradoxical encounters with fragmentation, dissonance, and change during the Haussmannization of Paris. Baudelaire's art criticism (in particular his 1846 essay "The Hero of Modern Life" and 1859 essay "The Painter of Modern Life") provides the basis for identifying these historicist topoi. The author considers two strains in the interpretation of Baudelaire's writings: a negative response to the new urbanism by way of Walter Benjamin's anti capitalist critique and a celebratory one through Christopher Prendergast's postmodern recovery of Baudelaire's ironic intent.

LAURENCE WUIDAR

Imbrication de l'image, du texte et de la musique dans un corpus de prières énigmatiques à la Vierge

Analyser les rapports entre image, texte et musique en prenant comme exemple les œuvres musicales de Pier Francesco Valentini, compositeur romain des années 1650, ouvre des pistes pour la compréhension des interactions à l'œuvre dans la multimé diatisation d'un certain type de message religieux et sert tant l'historien d'art que l'historien du catholicisme et le musicologue.

UNION

Consulting the Manual: Word and Image in Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés*

Michael R. Taylor

Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*The Large Glass*), of 1915–23, has been described by the British pop artist Richard Hamilton as “an art form without parallel, a unique marriage of visual and linguistic concepts.” A work of art to be looked both through and at, neither a painting nor a sculpture, *The Large Glass* defies easy categorization and Duchamp steadfastly resisted all efforts to decode its hermetic meaning until the publication in 1934 of ninety-four handwritten notes related to its genesis and construction. The notes published in *The Green Box* thus provided an indispensable guide to the work, which could now be at least partially understood as an allegory of frustrated desire involving the bride above, and the circle of nine uniformed bachelors below. For Duchamp, the meticulous notes and studies that prepared the way for *The Large Glass* and the *Glass* itself were inextricably linked, since as Hamilton has pointed out “without the notes the painting loses some of its significance and without the monumental presence of the glass the notes have an air of random irrelevance.”

This statement has enormous ramifications for the study of *Étant donnés*: 1. *la chute d'eau*, 2. *le gaz d'éclairage*..., of 1946–66 (fig. 1), for which the artist supplied no notes, speculations, or other written documentation, beyond an illustrated binder of instructions for its assembly. I will argue that this often overlooked photographic *Manual of Instructions* supplies numerous clues as to Duchamp's subversive intentions in presenting this brightly lit diorama to the public after his death. Like an illustrated “user's guide,” the *Manual* can be used not only to assemble the work, but also to dismantle and unpack its contents and meaning, which have for too long been understood in terms of sexual violence and mutilation.

No photograph can ever communicate the intensity of the unique visual experience of seeing Duchamp's enigmatic assemblage, which has been described by Jasper Johns as “the strangest work of art in any museum” (qtd. in Tomkins, 451). Permanently installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1969, this three-dimensional tableau offers an unforgettable and

untranslatable experience to those who peep through the two small holes in the old wooden door (fig. 2). The unsuspecting viewer encounters a spectacular sight: a realistically constructed simulacrum of a naked woman lying spread eagled on a bed of dead twigs and fallen leaves. In her left hand, this life size mannequin holds aloft an old fashioned illuminated gas lamp of the Bec Auer type, while behind her, in the far distance, a lush wooded landscape rises toward the horizon. This brightly illuminated backdrop consists of a retouched photograph of a hilly landscape with a dense cluster of trees outlined against a hazy turquoise sky, replete with fluffy cotton clouds. The only movement in the otherwise eerily still grotto is a sparkling waterfall, powered by an unseen motor, which pours into a mist laden lake on the right.

The astonishing news that Duchamp had been working on an elaborate assemblage in total secrecy for a period of twenty years was revealed by Cleve Gray in an obituary for the artist that was published in *Art in America* in July 1969 (Gray). Unfortunately, Gray's article used the racy language and sensational tactics of tabloid journalism to present Duchamp's final work as an "erotic crèche" that was "as explicitly sexual as any work ever made" (Gray 20 and 23). Written shortly before *Étant donnés* went on public display, Gray's uninformed essay was filled with factual inaccuracies, as when he claimed that the work would be unveiled at the Museum "to adults only," or when he described the nude as being covered with "pigskin," whereas in fact Duchamp had used vellum, or calfskin, to cover the mannequin's torso (Gray 27).¹ That Duchamp used pigskin for his nude is a myth that still persists to this day, but the use of vellum is far more in keeping with the personal nature of the materials used in *Étant donnés*, since his former lover Mary Reynolds was a bookbinder and often used vellum in her work. Although the earliest studies for *Étant donnés* feature the voluptuous body of Maria Martins, the surrealist sculptor and wife of the Brazilian ambassador to the United States with whom an infatuated Duchamp was having a torrid affair during the 1940s, these works often take the form of books or book covers. In one instance the plaster nude is partially enveloped within folds of vellum in what can be seen as a deliberate reference to his earlier relationship with Reynolds. The use of vellum to cover the mannequin in *Étant donnés* was thus not accidental, but a deliberate allusion to Reynolds, who died in 1950, shortly before Duchamp completed an earlier and slightly smaller version of the nude, which no longer survives.

When *Étant donnés* was publicly unveiled at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on 7 July 1969, it provoked a storm of controversy. Taking his cue from the cheap sensationalism of Cleve Gray's prose, the art critic John Canaday, writing in *The New York Times*, thought that the sexual exhibitionism on display would not have been out of place in a production of *Oh! Calcutta!*, a



Fig. 1. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), *Étant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*), interior view, 1946–66. Mixed media assemblage: wooden door, bricks, velvet, wood, leather stretched over an armature of metal, twigs, aluminum, iron, glass, Plexiglas, linoleum, cotton, electric lights, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), motor, etc. 7 feet 11½ inches x 70 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969. © Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2008, ADAGP, Paris.

reference to Kenneth Tynan's theatrical revue that had shocked off Broadway audiences in the summer of 1969 with its ground breaking introduction of full frontal nudity to the American stage (Canaday). However, Canaday went on to bemoan what he called the "sterile slickness of this final Duchamp work," which he unfavorably compared to Edward Kienholz's pornotropic tableaux constructions of cast off objects and urban detritus. "For the first time, this cleverest of twentieth century masters looks a bit retardataire," he argued, since Kienholz's grossly deformed and mutilated doll prostitutes had gone so far beyond this stereoscopic tableau vivant as to make "Duchamp look like Bouguereau" (Canaday).

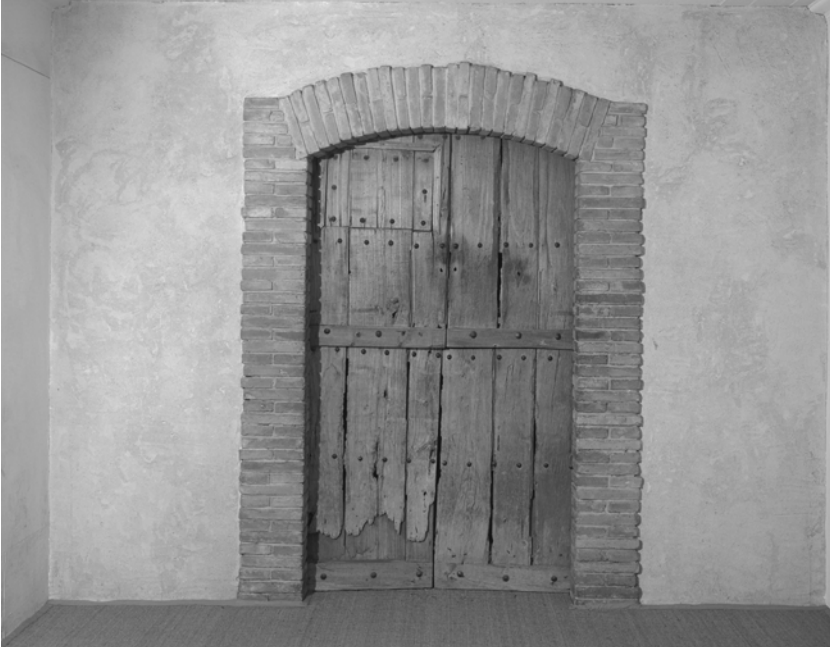


Fig. 2. Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*), exterior view, 1946–66. 7 feet 11½ inches x 70 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969. © Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2008, ADAGP, Paris.

Canaday was not alone in comparing *Étant donnés* with the work of Ed Kienholz and other American artists of the post abstract expressionist generation, such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, George Segal, and Bruce Conner. Indeed, as *The Philadelphia Inquirer* gleefully reported at the time, Duchamp's little secret was that he was not only aware of "American artists of the Pop persuasion, kinetic artists concerned with motion, and designers of 'happenings' and 'total environments,'" but that he was working—as recently as 1966—"in closer harmony with it than anyone had reason to believe" (Donohoe).² Such statements were supported by the Philadelphia Museum of Art's publication of a *Bulletin* containing a masterful essay, co written by Walter Hopps and Anne d'Harnoncourt, to accompany the newly revealed installation. Drawing upon his extensive knowledge of recent developments in contemporary art, especially on the West Coast, Hopps made a powerful case for the impact of the work of younger artists such as Kienholz and Segal on Duchamp's final piece (d'Harnoncourt and Hopps 46).

With or without Hopps's words to guide them, the pioneering voyeurs who pressed their faces against the weather beaten door and peered inside saw, or at least thought they saw, a shocking image of sadistic violence and sexual mutilation. Newspaper interviews at the time reveal that viewers found the work "disgusting," "distasteful," "shocking," and "pornographic" (qtd. in Haas). Philipp Frings, a German visitor to the Museum, "felt the nude looked like a cadaver on which they would perform autopsies in a medical school," while Philadelphia resident Arthur Zbinden told a local newspaper that he "was expecting an assemblage of weird things, but not such a graphic depiction of a woman" (qtd. in Haas). It fell to Chestnut Hill art history student Marion Stroud, better known today as "Kippy" Stroud, the founder of the Fabric Workshop and Museum, to defend the work, which she believed to be "totally nonsexual" and "not at all shocking" (qtd. in Haas). What impressed her was "the feeling of voyeurism involved in pressing your nose up against the door and peeking in. She also thought there was an extra dimension to the viewing experience in 'knowing there was someone behind you watching you'" (qtd. in Haas). But Stroud's musings on voyeurism and the carnality of vision embodied in the work placed her firmly in the minority, since the American press reveled in salacious accounts of a "pigskin" nude lying on real bushes in an environmental sculpture that was widely understood to represent a scene of death and defilement. The resulting scandal ensured that the museum tripled its attendance, attracting nearly 13,000 visitors in the first week alone (Anonymous), but the tabloid stories of rape and dismemberment have, in my opinion, irreparably hindered our understanding of the work.

So what is going on here? What can account for the uniformity of these responses to a highly complex work that was created in great secrecy over two decades? Looking back from the vantage point of the early twenty first century, I think it is clear that the first visitors to spy through the peepholes of *Étant donnés* looked at Duchamp's brightly lit diorama and thought they were seeing a Kienholz. Indeed, there is a stunning visual similarity between Duchamp's primal scene and Kienholz's disquieting multipart environments, such as *Back Seat Dodge '38*, of 1965, or *The State Hospital*, of 1966, as well as other works by post war American artists, such as Robert Whitman's rarely seen 16 millimeter film *Window*, of 1963, which Walter Hopps always thought bore an uncanny resemblance to *Étant donnés*.³ What Hopps forgot is that his own encyclopedic knowledge of dada and surrealism, from Kurt Schwitters's *Merz* environment to Hans Bellmer's depersonalized dolls, must have had a huge impact on the work of his friends. Although Hopps was careful to present Kienholz as a largely self taught artist, immune to the history of modern art, I think that even the most impartial of viewers would detect an undercurrent of surrealism in works such as *Back Seat Dodge '38*, with its

voyeuristic depiction of two adolescents (the male formed by chicken wire and the female rendered in cast plaster), making out in the back of a truncated old Dodge that owes a strong debt to Salvador Dalí's slimy, snail infested *Rainy Taxi*, of 1938.

Without the aid of the voluminous notes that had accompanied *The Large Glass*, viewers were forced to find their own frames of reference by which to navigate and decipher Duchamp's final work. Helped by Hopps and d'Harnoncourt's essay, these visitors found many rich, yet surely serendipitous, correspondences between *Étant donnés* and the challenging contemporary art practices of their day, such as assemblage and installation art. Perhaps unsurprisingly, European critics and art historians, such as Robert Lebel and Colette Roberts, discerned a rather different artistic lineage for Duchamp's posthumously revealed work, which they traced back to surrealist mannequins and dadaist images of death and dismemberment, such as Hans Bellmer's perverse *Poupées* and Max Ernst's astonishing 1921 photo collage *The Anatomy as Bride*, in which segments of a woman's dissected body are combined with mechanical elements and placed in a tin tub (Lebel). But once again it is the violence of such imagery that seems to me to be so remote from the scopophilic pleasure of Duchamp's last work, which is almost elegiac by comparison.

Although Duchamp was clearly conscious of referencing the surrealist vogue for dolls, mannequins, and automatons in his final work, I think the reception of *Étant donnés*, with its emphasis on the female nude as victim of a frenzied rape or sex murder, has pre-programmed us to accept unthinkingly that we are the spectators of a sadistic crime. More often than not the lurid details attributed to Duchamp's work do not match the actual scene we witness, which seems to me to be completely devoid of trauma. The splayed nude is often described as a corpse or carcass that "holds up the lamp as if locked in rigor mortis," while the diorama setting has been called "the site of an atrocity" (Bond 63), despite the complete absence of any blood or obvious wounds to the body. It is not that I find such readings necessarily wrong, especially since Duchamp believed that it was the spectator who completed the work of art "by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications" (Duchamp, "Creative Act" 29), but what concerns me here is the narrow range of references, meanings, and interpretations that the piece has elicited since its public exhibition in 1969. The artist presented us with a unique opportunity to decipher his work and ideas without a safety net. Any theory, no matter how improbable, is as valid as the next one, and yet in the face of an endless range of possibilities we have singularly failed to move beyond an initial knee jerk reaction to the work's perceived misogyny and association with violence and death.



Fig 3 Marcel Duchamp, *Manual of instructions for the assembly of Étant donnés*, 1966 Black vinyl binder with gelatin silver photographs, drawings, and manuscript notes in graphite and colored inks on paper in clear vinyl sheet protectors Binder 11⁵/₈ x 9¹⁵/₁₆ x 1³/₄ inches Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969 © Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2008, ADAGP, Paris

It is at this point that I would like to bring in Duchamp's *Manual of Instructions* (fig. 3) for the disassembly and reassembly of *Étant donnés*, which provides a visual and verbal language that is diametrically opposed to the critical vocabulary that has been used to describe the work. Liberally illustrated with 116 black and white Polaroid photographs taken by Duchamp and occasionally his second wife Alexina "Teeny" Duchamp, this practical manual consists of thirty five hand written pages of notes, plans, sketches, and diagrams, which together provide a step by step guide for assembling the work in fifteen precise "operations."⁴ In my opinion, the binder, with its transgressive conjunctions of word and image, through carefully constructed folds of text and startling photo collages, transcends its perfunctory practical purpose, and in doing so provides us with a wealth of detail concerning the laborious construction of the assemblage, as well as its complex evolution and meaning.

The notebook bears the title "Approximation démontable" ("dismountable approximation"), to which Duchamp added, "par approximation j'entends une marge d'ad libitum dans le démontage et remontage" (Duchamp, *Manual*; "by approximation I mean an *ad libitum* margin in the dismantling and reassembling"). Despite this promise of flexibility, the *Manual* actually contains extremely detailed and specific instructions, right down to the wattage of the light bulbs, which allow for very little margin of error in the construction of this ocular illusion. In fact, the only place where Duchamp allowed the slightest modicum of freedom was in the position of the cotton clouds in the sky, which are "changeables à volonté" (Duchamp *Manual*; "can be altered at will") or the brilliance of the cascading waterfall, which is also adjustable.

The first thing you notice when you open the ring binder is the unexpected use of photo collage to complete the diorama *in situ* (fig. 4). Duchamp began constructing the mannequin and its environment in the early 1950s, first in his studio on the top floor of a building at 210 West Fourteenth Street in New York, before moving in late 1965 to a small, anonymous room (Room 403) on the fourth floor of a commercial building at 80 East Eleventh Street. It was at this time that Duchamp began taking Polaroids for the manual, which he completed in 1966, although the cramped quarters of the new studio, which measured just eighteen by twenty feet, made it extremely difficult for him to photograph the work to his satisfaction, leading him to forbid any photograph of the interior of *Étant donnés* being published for a period of at least fifteen years after its posthumous unveiling.

These photo collages allow us to see what we cannot see when we look through the peepholes on the exterior, namely the intricate workings "backstage," which reveal Duchamp's skill as a *bricoleur*, as well as the economy of means by which he assembled his final work. We are suddenly aware of

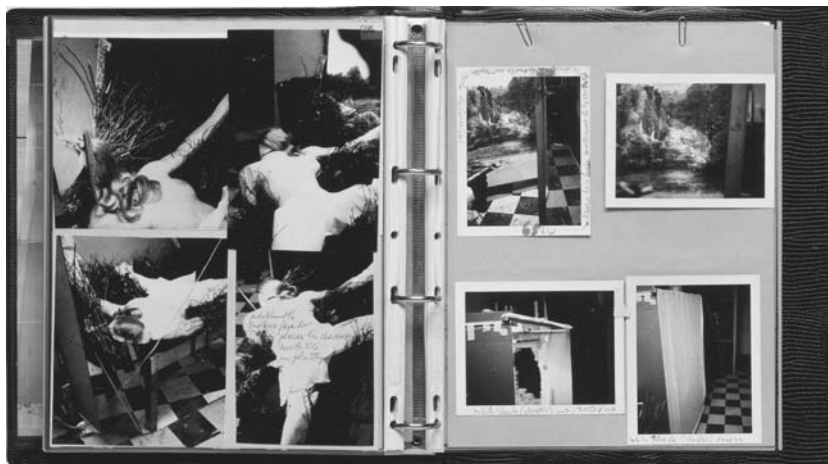


Fig. 4. Marcel Duchamp, *Manual of instructions for the assembly of Étant donnés*, 1966. Binder: 11⁵/₈ x 9¹³/₁₆ x 1³/₄ inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969. © Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2008, ADAGP, Paris.

Duchamp's elaborate, and rather eccentric, system of fluorescent lighting, which requires a dense tangle of roughly connected electrical wires and around thirty extension cords to obtain the supra naturalistically diaphanous quality that pervades the work. The behind the scenes workings have a ramshackle quality that is dramatically different from the technical perfection of the illusionistic diorama that we view through the peepholes, which permanently cuts off from view many crucial details, such as the checkered black and white linoleum floor. The pattern allowed the artist carefully plot the exact position of every element of the work, while also referencing Duchamp's lifelong passion for chess.

The instruction manual is written almost entirely in French, with occasional lapses into English, as when the artist uses the words "pinkish" or "cool white" to describe the fluorescent lighting inside the hermetically sealed environment (Duchamp, *Manual*). The language that Duchamp uses can tell us a great deal about how he conceived and understood the piece. In the sections devoted to the placement of the mannequin, for example, Duchamp always describes her as "le nu" ("the nude"), while in his earlier letters to Maria Martins he called her "my woman with open pussy" ("ma femme au chat ouvert": Tomkins, 366) or the deliberately blasphemous "N. D. [Notre Dame] des désirs" (qtd. in Tomkins 366; "Our Lady of Desires").⁵ Despite the overt eroticism and blasphemy of these terms of endearment, they seem far removed from

the inflammatory prose of critics and art historians, who prefer to see the naked female as a rape victim or, worse still, a headless corpse. Although the mannequin's face is invisible from the peepholes, the photographs in the binder reveal her head to be made up of two concave pieces of plastic, an upper and lower shell, that are held together by a clothespin, which is hidden when viewed from the peepholes, partly by her locks of dirty blonde hair (one of Teeny's wigs) and partly by the bricks that form the inner wall.

Duchamp strongly emphasizes the need to have two people to move her fragile torso, which must be handled with the utmost caution, especially when placing her in the exact position, which required her body to "sink" gently into her bed of twigs and branches (fig. 5). This emphasis on handling the body of the nude delicately and "sans trop forcer" (Duchamp, *Manual*; "without too much force") again underlines the need to challenge the general critical consensus that the mannequin represents a violated and mutilated woman, as Juan Antonio Ramirez has recently claimed (Ramirez 234). Furthermore, she is not wholly passive, but instead holds up the phallic gas light in a posture that suggests the "blossoming," post coital Bride of *The Large Glass* who "has reached the goal of her desire," as suggested by one of the notes found in *The Green Box* (Hamilton n.p.).

As the artist's notes and photographs in the *Manual of Instructions* make clear, *Étant donnés* needs to be placed decidedly outside the framework of neo dada, pop art, and Californian junk art that has heretofore defined its reception and sealed its fate. The problem with situating Duchamp's work within the context of American art of the 1960s is that his preliminary studies for *Étant donnés* predate Kienholz's assemblages and Segal's plaster figures by almost twenty years. A photograph, made around 1948, of an early plaster version of the female torso reveals how Duchamp made very few changes to the work over the next two decades. This fact alone should disqualify many of the more absurd and comical interpretations that have been made about the work, since not only were Duchamp's ideas fully formed by the 1960s, but many of the studies and erotic objects relating to *Étant donnés*, such as the *Wedge of Chastity* (*Coin de chasteté*), of 1951–52, were well known to artists such as Johns, Rauschenberg, Segal, and Kienholz by this time, who began to construct their own works using found objects or cast body parts in wax or plaster to represent the fragmentary human form.⁶

Although unveiled in Philadelphia at the height of the Civil Rights era, amidst Vietnam War protests and race riots, the three dimensional tableau was actually begun some twenty years earlier, at a time when Duchamp was actively involved in surrealist exhibition design, and closely aligned with the aims and ideals of the exiled group in New York. Indeed, a close examination of the history of the work reveals that Duchamp was responding instead

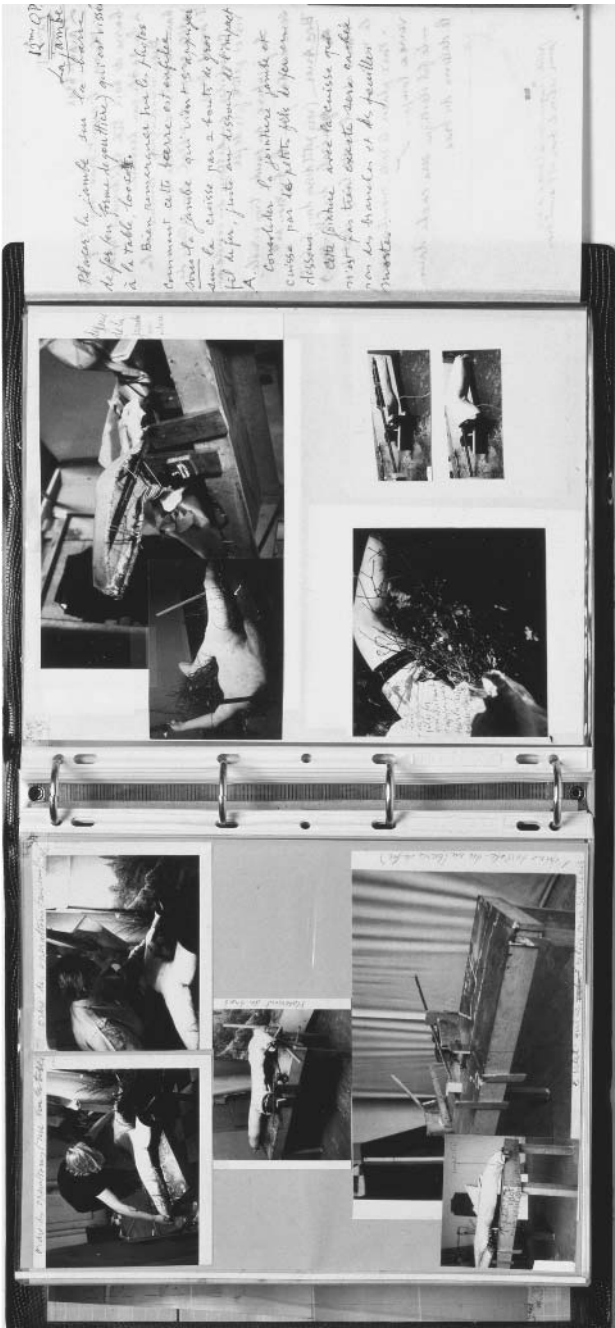


Fig 5 Marcel Duchamp, *Manual of instructions for the assembly of Étant donnés*, 1966 Binder 11⁵/₈ x 9¹³/₁₆ x 1³/₄ inches Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of the Cassandra Foundation, 1969 © Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2008, ADAGP, Paris



Fig. 6. Marcel Duchamp, *Female Fig Leaf*, 1961. bronze of 1950 plaster cast, $3\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{3}{4} \times 5$ inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mme Marcel Duchamp, 1976. © Succession Marcel Duchamp, 2008, ADAGP, Paris.

to the changing conditions of surrealism both during and after the Second World War, when group members embraced tarot cards, black magic, pagan rituals, arcane imagery, and, above all, a new conception of Eros, as Alyce Mahon has so persuasively argued in her recent book on the surrealist movement between 1938 and 1968.

More Eros than Thanatos, *Étant donnés* thus emerges as a grand summation of the artist's life, loves, and obsessions, as opposed to Donald Kuspit's recent claim that the work was an "explicitly, consummately pro death work" featuring a "violated, dead woman" (Kuspit 11). The frequent references to mutilation and violation appear to stem from the nude's glabrous vagina, whose anatomical distortions have often been related to a gash like castration wound. As Amelia Jones has pointed out, "there are no 'labia majora,' 'labia minora' in view; there is no vaginal vestibule or clitoris, but neither is the figure Barbie doll smooth and without genitals" (Jones 201). Although no less staged and artificial, this gaping orifice is quite distinct from the flattened

pubic mound of Duchamp's Rose Sélavy mannequin at the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition, whose mass produced beauty contrasts starkly with the physical imperfections of the *Étant donnés* figure. Indeed, her exposed genitals appear to be part anus, part vagina; a hairless puckered hole that, as Jean François Lyotard has argued, provides the vanishing point in the artist's carefully orchestrated system of perspective that meets our gaze from our viewing point through the peepholes (Lyotard 137–38).

Now there can be no doubt that Duchamp intended his final work to foreground the role of voyeurism in artistic experience, and to update this pictorial convention through an eroticization of perspectival vision, which was no longer seen as innocent, let alone scientific, but rather was marked by sexual difference. However, I think the emphasis on the mannequin's external genitals as somehow deformed or mutilated rather misses the point and fails to take into account Duchamp's playful investigations of the "inframince" (which the artist defined as barely perceptible changes in a body or object, or forms of separation from one state or dimension to another). These explorations took place through positive and negative molds and body castings, in which inside becomes outside, front becomes back, concave becomes convex, female becomes male, and vice versa. Duchamp's series of erotic objects related to the fabrication of *Étant donnés* often represent the fragmentary human form as part objects, as in *Female Fig Leaf* (fig. 6), a negative cast of the rough vaginal slit of the mannequin, or the phallic *Objet Dard* (literally meaning "object sting"), a plaster cast excised from a mold of the space underneath or around the same figure's breast which resembles a veined and detumescent penis. We know that Duchamp melted lead ingots to create armatures for his body castings in poured plaster, and then made casts of the broken molds to heighten the ambiguous nature of these erotic objects. This casting process may well account for the anatomical inaccuracies of the mannequin's vagina, as well as its lack of pubic hair. All we can say for now is that in the nude, as with the illustrated *Manual of Instructions*, backstage is now front and center.

NOTES

- 1 During a guided tour of the galleries, Anne d'Harnoncourt told a local journalist, Otto Dekom, that the nude was "made of stuffed vellum, not as has been reported, of pigskin." See Dekom.
- 2 Abraham A. Davidson also argued that *Étant donnés* could "not have been conceived without the salubrious artistic milieu of Assemblage, Pop Art, and multi media environment" (Davidson 45).

- 3 Walter Hopps, interview with the author, 6 October 1998.
- 4 In order to preserve the manual of instructions, which is contained in a looseleaf binder, the Philadelphia Museum of Art issued a facsimile edition in 1987. See Marcel Duchamp, *Manual of Instructions for Étant donnés*.
- 5 Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, 366.
- 6 Helen Molesworth's recent exhibition "Part Object Part Sculpture" at the Wexner Center for the Arts convincingly traced a direct lineage between Duchamp's erotic objects of the 1950s and the subsequent work of twenty European and American artists, including Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Eva Hesse, Robert Gober, and Gabriel Orozco.

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Living and Dying in the Limelight: Performing the Self in Frida Kahlo's Diary and Paintings

Adriana Dragomir

The subtitle *An Intimate Self Portrait* added to Frida Kahlo's diary, published for the first time in 1995 by Harry N. Abrams and La Vaca Independiente, set a framework for understanding it that has remained unchallenged for the past twelve years. In an essay that accompanies the text, Sarah M. Lowe argues that, because of its intimate nature, reading the diary is "an act of transgression, an undertaking inevitably charged with an element of voyeurism" (Lowe 25). The portrait painted here by the artist with words, colors, and lines renders "an image of the artist unmasked" (Lowe 26). This view resonates throughout the subsequent scholarship on Kahlo's journal, which is regarded as a repository of the artist's most intimate thoughts and feelings.¹ The "spontaneous and unplanned" diaristic drawings (Lowe 27) are opposed to the highly elaborated self portraits that constitute the core of her pictorial oeuvre and are seen to construct a visual autobiography that unfolds almost cinematically,² revealing "a holistic and uninterrupted formation of the self" (Yang 324).

The diary does not reveal, however, anything that her self portraits or the folklore surrounding the artist's persona have not already revealed: the street car accident that disabled her for life; the numerous surgical interventions and the physical pain; the love for her husband Diego Rivera; the famous Mexican muralist; and their troubled relationship, Kahlo's identity issues;³ or her Marxist views. If the self is central to the *journal intime* (Lowe 25), then Kahlo's self portraits, as they explore her own birth and miscarriages, her multifaceted identity as daughter, lover, wife, artist, and political militant, her relations to her Hungarian and Mexican ancestors, as they show her both healthy and sick, her body and mind cut open, reveal a dimension of intimacy specific to the diaristic genre. Similarly, the intimate nature of Kahlo's diary and its presumed truth value are called into question when, shortly before her death, she indicates 1910 the year of the Mexican revolution as the year of her birth, instead of 1907 (Kahlo 151). In her diary, as in her self portraits, she constructs a persona. In this essay, I argue that Kahlo's autobiographical

identity comes to life only when these distinct media of self expression are read in conjunction with each other, as complementary parts of a narrative that unfolds chronologically from the first self portraits painted by the artist to the last entries in her diary, and can be reconstructed in spite of semiotic heterogeneity and temporal disruptions through a word and image analysis. The visual and textual interaction reveals the inextricable connection between the artist's painting and diary. The word is exterior or enters the image, it explains or undermines it, and filters the viewer's perception and the reader's interpretation. Presented as both space of intimacy and self portrait (inescapably audience oriented due to its association with Kahlo's pictorial work), the diary is placed into the same field of revelatory concealing that is specific to her *œuvre*, where the intimate experience becomes the subject for pictorial works, and the constant public exposure leads the artist to construct autobiographical works with the viewer in mind. Throughout the self portraits and diary, Kahlo's play with words and images constructs a performance of parallel deconstruction and reinvention through which she depicts her own death and overcomes it, in the dual vein commemorative and celebratory, simultaneously personal and collective of her beloved Mexico's Day of the Dead.

In her article "I Write for Myself and Strangers": Private Diaries as Public Documents," Lynn Z. Bloom argues, following William H. Gass's line of thought,⁴ that "for a professional writer there are no private writings" (Bloom 24) and, consequently, any text, no matter how private, will be shaped so as to accommodate the concerns of an audience. Although the performance might not be as "polished" as, for example, a book manuscript conceived for publication, "once a writer, like an actor (or a painter, we might add), is audience oriented, such considerations as telling a good story, ... supplying sufficient detail for another's understanding, can never be excluded" (Bloom 24-25). Bloom points out that techniques such as flashbacks and foreshadowing, the repetition of philosophical themes, the permanent return to certain issues, the use of symbols, character depiction, and the emphasis on topics rather than chronology, among other features, indicate that the text is oriented towards an external audience (Bloom 29). By contrast, "truly private diaries are those bare bones works written primarily to keep records of receipts and expenditures, the weather, visits to and from neighbors, or public occurrences of both the institutional and the sensational sort" (Ulrich 8; qtd. in Bloom, 25).

Kahlo dismisses the daily and, through repetitions of metaphors, the return to certain topics, the inclusion of letters, and numerous corrections operated on the text, changes the focus from the chronology traditionally involved in private diaries to the themes that pervade her pictorial work: the

mutilated body, the love for Diego, Mexico, politics, mythology, genealogy, the mysteries of the universe, and the dynamics of life and death. Having bared her body and displayed her insides for public viewing, the artist is unable to conceive a space of pure intimacy. Sarah Lowe examines page five of the diary and observes an "incongruity" between the content of the words juxtaposing hypnotically "the mundane with the sacred, the natural with the technological, the literal with the ideal, the beautiful with the ugly, the intimate with the public" (Lowe 203) and the careful handwriting. She advances the idea that the text might have been transcribed from another document. At page eleven of the diary, Kahlo transcribes a letter that she had written to painter Jacqueline Lamba, André Breton's wife, in 1939.⁵ This is only one of the numerous letters included in the diary, most of them addressed to Diego Rivera, declaring her love, devotion, and ultimately the desire to identify with her husband: "I am the embryo, the germ, the first cell which potentially engendered him I am *him* from the most primitive ... and the most ancient cells, that with time became *him*" (Kahlo 58; original emphasis).

The letters open up the diary and transform it into a space of dialogue. However, as Kahlo's interlocutors are not given voices, the dialogue is imbalanced; she preserves her position of authority in relation to the others, who exist only insofar as they serve well defined roles in a carefully elaborated scenario. Diego is depicted and transformed, through idealization, into a mythical figure: "My Diego: ... You are all the combinations of numbers. life" (Kahlo 20); "Everything was surrounded by the green miracle of the landscape of your body. Upon your form, the lashes of the flowers responded to my touch, the murmur of streams" (Kahlo 21); "You are here, intangible and you are all the universe which I shape into the space of my room" (Kahlo 22).

The references to the Minotaur and Janus, Heaven and Earth embodied as maternal figures, and Kahlo's own identification with Nefertiti (fictionalized as Neferisis)⁶ indicate that the diary continues the performative construction of the autobiographical identity begun by the self portraits, where she is successively contemporary with the Mexican revolution (*Pancho Villa and Adelita*, before 1927), a stillborn, thus becoming her own mother (*My Birth*, 1932,⁸ also recalls the miscarriage that she suffered the same year, represented in *Henry Ford Hospital*, 1932⁹), or a Christic figure (*Self Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940¹⁰).

With few exceptions, there are no dates to mark the entries, although it's estimated that Kahlo began writing the diary in the mid 1940s (Lowe 26). At page eight (fig. 1), the artist writes: "Today Diego kissed me," but then she crosses out the line that sounds too much like daily trivia, and continues: "Every moment he is my child. my newborn babe, every little while, every day, of my own self," affirming herself as Diego's mother, a theme that will

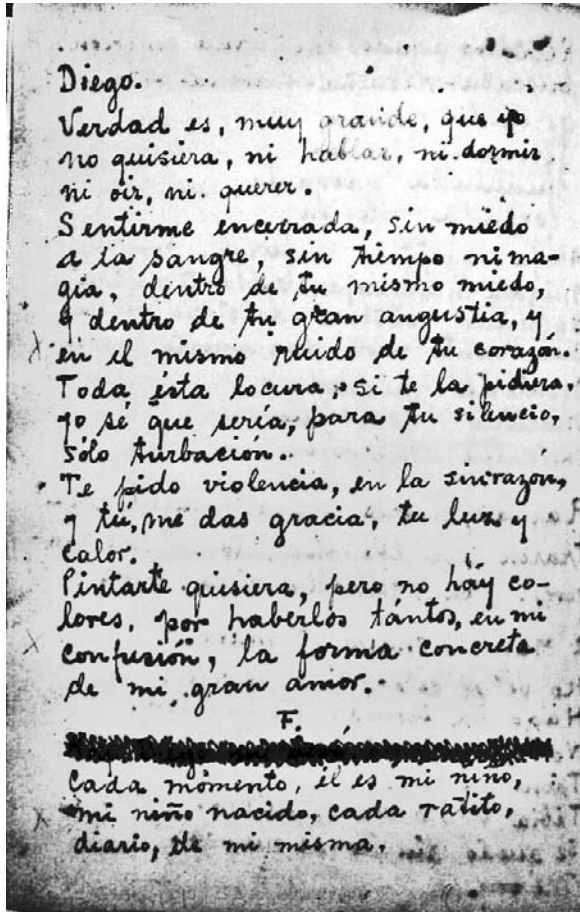


Fig. 1. Frida Kahlo (1907–54), *Diary*, 8, no date. Ink on paper. The Frida Kahlo Museum, Coyoacán, Mexico. © Frida Kahlo, c/o Beeldrecht Amsterdam 2007/2008.

be concretized visually as a drawing in the diary and further elaborated in the 1949 painting *The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Me, Diego and Mr. Xólotl*.¹¹

The reference to the quotidian is eliminated again a few pages later, where she crosses out, but does not completely cover “The death of the old man pained us so much that we talked and spent that day together” (Kahlo 12); the partially removed lines indicate that Kahlo lets the audience decide whether or

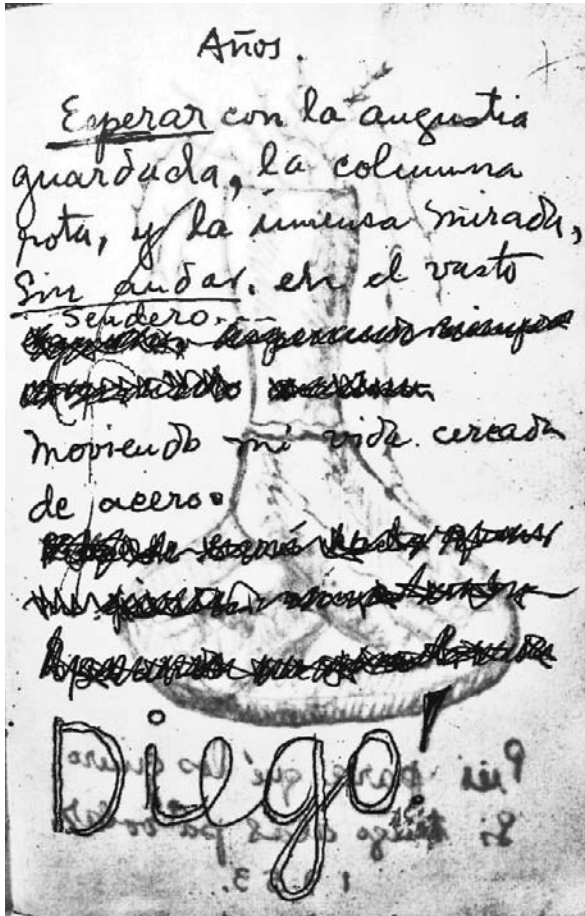


Fig. 2. Frida Kahlo, *Diary*, 133, no date. Colored pencil on paper. The Frida Kahlo Museum, Coyoacán, Mexico. © Frida Kahlo, c/o Beeldrecht Amsterdam 2007/2008.

not to include them in the final reading of the text. The game is, however, a perfidious one: if read, the lines will anchor the fragments into the quotidian, and will shift the focus from the poetic discourse — one of the many keys to understanding the project in its entirety.

Throughout the diary, numerous lines are made illegible, in an attempt to perfect the text, or perhaps hide information that is too personal from the eye of a potential reader. When — although in very rare instances — the artist

mentions the date, she counterbalances it with a highly symbolic text: "Today Wednesday 22 of January 1947 / You rain on me I sky you / You're the fineness, childhood, / life my love little boy old man / mother and center blue tender / ness I hand you my / universe and you live me / It is *you* whom I love today" (Kahlo 55). The spontaneity of the diaristic drawings is often counterbalanced by an excessive care exhibited towards the text, which has to render perfectly her experiences, feelings, and thoughts, much in the same way the pictorial self portraits are controlled to the smallest detail.

Sarah M. Lowe does not exclude the possibility that Kahlo shared with Rivera some of the diaristic letters addressed to him (Lowe 205). Often oversized or bearing an exclamation mark, many textual entries function as spaces of visual performance, for instance when loud speech is suggested by capitalized letters. Such entries are dramatic expressions of the artist's emotions or political beliefs, which she makes known in writing just as she had done it through painting and political action. The performance takes place on multiple levels. The diarist calls out: "DIEGO / I'm alone" (Kahlo 79), "DIEGO" (102), "DIEGO!" (133, fig. 2), constructs dialogue between fictional figures: "DON'T COME CRYING TO ME!" (100), "YES, I COME CRYING TO YOU" (101), or demands an audience: "LONG LIVE STALIN / LONG LIVE DIEGO" (111), "ENGELS / MARX / LENIN / STALIN / MAO" (114).

The progressive disintegration of the pictorial body defines the chronology of the narrative; the diarist accomplishes what the painter has begun. As the artist has trouble recognizing herself, in the second part of the diary, where she paints a defaced feminine figure wearing a traditional Mexican dress and asks herself "Me?" (Kahlo 115), or indicates her inability to escape the symbolic fire that is burning her body because she has "BROKEN WINGS" (Kahlo 124), the voice of the social and political activist grows stronger, marking a change of focus towards another dimension of her persona the Communist: "I feel uneasy about my painting. Above all I want to transform it into something *useful* for the Communist revolutionary movement, since up to now I have only painted the earnest portrayal of myself, but I'm very far from work that could serve the Party. I have to fight with all my strength to contribute the few positive things my health allows me to the revolution. The only true reason to live for" (Kahlo 96–97; original emphasis).

This shift is mirrored by Kahlo's pictorial work. From 1950 onwards (when the pages mentioned above were written), her figure is much less elaborated in the few self portraits that she did create. Two of these, dated around 1954, depict Stalin and Marx, Marxism being endowed—as one title indicates—with healing powers.¹² One year before her death, Kahlo uses her diary to explain her relation to Trotsky, justifying possible political mistakes and ascribing her inability to take "real action" to her health problems. She

also discusses her identity in political terms: she identifies with the Chinese, Czechs, and Poles who share her political beliefs and calls them “united in blood to me” (Kahlo 106).

Shortly before her death, Kahlo performs a retrospective narration of her life, setting 1910 as her birth date (Kahlo 151). She reaffirms this fictional identity by stating that she was four during the events of 1914, when the Zapatists took Mexico City: “I saw with my own eyes the clash between Zapata’s peasants and the forces of Carranza” (Kahlo 153). In the last textual entry, Kahlo thanks the doctors and hospital employees who helped her survive and carry on throughout a life of suffering. Aware that the end is fast approaching, she brings the life story to a closure; she declares she hopes never to return, and signs “Frida” (Kahlo 160), just as she would sign a final letter to a beloved friend and dialogue partner—perhaps the audience that she always kept in the back of her mind during each creative endeavor. On the last page of the diary, the features that functioned as distinctive marks throughout her pictorial work—the united eyebrows, the sculptural coiffure, and the asymmetrical body—are unrecognizable, as she has become an androgynous angel.

At the beginning of this essay, I pointed out that Kahlo’s self portraits are traditionally regarded as spaces of dialogue with others, rendering a continuous process of self formation, while the diary is considered a highly private document, where the artist can communicate with herself. I believe I have identified a number of features in the diary that in my view suggest that the diarist could not escape the artist’s relation to her audience. In what follows, I will show how her relationship to Rivera, unfolding continuously, and the word/image dynamics throughout the self portraits and diary further bridge the interpretive gap between the two media of expression.

Paul John Eakin argues that all identity is relational, and that the process of identity formation takes place as a narrative, with the writing of an autobiography as “culminating phase” (Eakin 73). The relational perspective is determinant for Kahlo’s exploration of her multifaceted identity. The autobiographical self emerges from a narrative shaped by the numerous visual relations established by the artist with herself and with the Other in its various representations: imaginary friend, mother, father, husband, unborn children, friends, Communist Party, Mexican and foreign cultures.

The artist’s visual and verbal relationship with Diego Rivera, evolving continuously from their 1929 marriage to her death, in 1954, remains central to the autobiographical narrative and defines its chronology. Their pictorial relation begins as oppositional: in the 1931 painting entitled *Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera*, she holds Diego’s hand, but her skirt only slightly touches his leg, while the title emphasizes the fact that, though united in love and marriage, they

remain two separate individuals. The viewer's attention is drawn to Kahlo's name, which is written first, although Diego's massive body dominates the composition.

In the 1943 *Self Portrait as a Tehuana*,¹³ the artist depicts herself wearing a traditional Mexican outfit, the figure of Diego drawn in the centre of her forehead. While her obsession with her husband is indicated visually, the artist is still the subject of the painting, as the title indicates. In 1944, however, they become halves of the same body; in the 1949 *Love Embrace of the Universe*,¹⁴ Kahlo becomes Diego's mother; and finally, in the same year, in *Diego and I*, although the composition reproduces faithfully the idea of the *Self Portrait as a Tehuana*,¹⁵ Rivera becomes the focal point, if not the subject.

As the paintings record the disintegration of Kahlo's body, the titles in form Diego's gradual displacement towards the centre of the autobiography. The process continues in the diary, where Kahlo emphasizes in entries so numerous that they become dominant in the diaristic discourse their gradual merger and eventual identification: "Your eyes green swords inside my flesh. ... You were called AUXOCHROME the one who captures color. I CHROMOPHORE the one who gives color. ... You fulfill and I receive" (Kahlo 20), and further "The ultimate union. ... Me as yourself" (Kahlo 53). Throughout her self portraits and diary, Kahlo's need for a visual exorcism of her physical pain through self exposure is, therefore, counterbalanced by a symbolic re-creation of wholeness through an intimate merger with Diego.

The titles of Kahlo's self portraits determine, as I have briefly discussed above, the reading of the images. The definite article in the title of her 1929 painting *The Bus*,¹⁶ suggests that Kahlo depicts the moment from before the accident. The viewer is misled once again: the young woman at the end of the row does not bear Frida's identification marks – the thick, united eyebrows. By taking herself out of the picture, the artist annuls the memory of the accident. At the same time, the image might reproduce the artist's view from the opposite side of the bus.¹⁷ Either way, the painting is perhaps the sole known representation of the image Kahlo had before her eyes at the moment when her life was broken to pieces.

The word embedded into the pictorial space has a similarly mediating role: in *Self Portrait with Loose Hair*,¹⁸ the insertion reads: "I am 37, and this is the month of July, 1947," reaffirming her date of birth as 1910. In *Frieda Kahlo and Diego Rivera*, a dove carries a ribbon on which are inscribed the date and the circumstances of the portrait.¹⁹ This similarity to the eighteenth and nineteenth century Mexican *ex votos* mark, as Emma Dexter observes, Kahlo coming closer to achieving a sense of an identity, as it expresses her association with Mexico's history and tradition, that she would come to affirm strongly in later works (Dexter 118). The word enters again the image

in the 1932 *Self Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*,²⁰ where the insertion reads "Carmen Rivera," emphasizing the artist's multiple identities—she is Frida Kahlo as well as Carmen Rivera—a tension reflected by the opposition between the new, industrial America and the old, spiritually rich Mexico. It also mirrors the conflict between Kahlo's condition as artist and as Rivera's wife, between a bold painter and a submissive wife, two roles that Frida could never fully harmonize. In the 1940 *Self Portrait with Cropped Hair*,²¹ the artist inserts into the painting the lyrics and musical score of a popular song: "Look, if I loved you, it was for your hair. Now that you're bald, I don't love you anymore," suggesting that by cutting her hair she had given to Diego, who loved her long hair, a reason to cheat on her. In fact, Frida cut her hair *after* she heard the news of Diego's relationship with her sister Cristina. The words of the song do not reflect the facts, for she uses the haircut as a self-mutilating procedure, performed in order to punish Diego and to indicate the significance and irreversibility of the transformation she has undergone. At the same time, her experience is de-individualized, as the popular song relates her to any woman betrayed by a man. The relationship between word and image helps to create a narrative—that of the love triangle Frida-Diego-Cristina—and connect it with other similar narratives from which the very song has emerged.

There are only a few textual references, in the diary, to bodily pain, and they appear only to summarily document the evolution of her illness, or to express hope: "I've been sick for a year now. Seven operations on my spinal column. Doctor Farill saved me. He brought me back the joy of life" (Kahlo 95). Even after the amputation of her leg, she continues to regard her situation with detachment; on the same page where she draws two disembodied feet, she writes: "Feet what do I need them for / If I have wings to fly" (Kahlo 134). I will give one last example that, in my view, is highly relevant for understanding both Kahlo's view of the role of illness in her self-representation and her intricate play with words and pictures. On page forty-one of the diary (fig. 3), under a painting that shows a head—identified as Kahlo's because of the united eyebrows—falling on the ground, she writes "I am DISINTEGRATION...." The textual explanation, however, is not in accord with the image, where a new head and arm replace the body parts that she has just lost. The artist depicts herself on a pedestal, suggesting that her public persona emerges from this continuous performance of dismemberment and reconstruction.

Marsha Meskimmon points out that the dilemma that arises in linking women's self-portraits and autobiography emerges, on one hand, from "a need to show the 'self'; to rejoice in being able to come to representation in your own terms rather than as an object in another dominant schema which forces you into the margins," and, on the other hand, from "a recognition



Fig. 3. Frida Kahlo, *Diary*, 41, no date. The Frida Kahlo Museum, Coyoacán, Mexico © Frida Kahlo, c/o Beeldrecht Amsterdam 2007/2008.

that the models used most commonly cannot simply be appropriated without critical adaptation.” Inevitably, the final products reflect the “the multiplicity of identity” and the “concepts of negotiating multiple positions and voices” involved in the construction of a visual autobiography (Meskimmon 95). The difficulty in reading Frida’s autobiographical narrative from a single perspective and in strictly categorizing it comes from the differences between the two media of self expression that compose it. To decipher the patterns of the word/image interplay and acquire a full understanding of the autobiographical project, the viewer has to learn how to read the texts that accompany the paintings and the diary. Similarly, the diary entries can only be read in conjunc

tion with the visual discourse that begins with the self portraits and continues uninterrupted throughout the diary. In the same way that the word guides the reading of the self portraits, the diaristic images or visual interventions in the text break the discourse and undermine a traditional understanding of the diary.

Kahlo's obsession with detail in her paintings is mirrored by the care with which she polishes the diaristic textual entries, which are wonderfully poetic. The rows of unassociated words that open the diary and the fragmentary entries are replaced, towards the end, with focused discussions of her health and lucid references to the inevitable end. By contrast, the image disintegrates along with the pictorial body; the more fragmented and eventually unrecognizable the body, the more coherent the textual entries. The autobiographical self emerges from this double dynamics of the image that *records* the disintegration and crumbles with the body, and the word through which the artist, playing creator, *affirms* her love and beliefs, retrospectively reconstructs his story, and fundamentally reinvents herself. Kahlo thus reasserts the importance of the relational dimension for her autobiographical project, and denies closure to the autobiographical narrative by transmuting it into the field of discourse, where she would continue to live through Diego's and others' memories and stories that transgress time and dissolution: "I'm full of you," she writes in the diary, "waiting for your words which will make me grow and will enrich me" (Kahlo 79). The construction of identity takes place as a continuous performance throughout painted self portraits and diary. The pictorial and diaristic subject interacts constantly with the viewer/reader, who is provoked to piece together the fragments in order to obtain full access to the multiple levels of the autobiographical project. These strategies translate the artist's refusal to accept one single ideal model of self, and reveal the relationship between word and image itself as a catalyst in the continual process of re definition of the autobiographical genre.

NOTES

- 1 Mimi Y. Yang cites Sarah M. Lowe and argues that "If Kahlo's self portraits are intended for 'public consumption' [Lowe 25] and to communicate with others, the diary provides her a private and inner sphere to establish a communication with herself in a most spontaneous way" (Yang 326). Along the same line of thought, Clara Orban states that "perhaps the most personal words and images Frida ever depicted are in her diary" (Orban 168).
- 2 Mimi Y. Yang sees Kahlo's self portraits as a "serial autobiography in images" that unfolds chronologically (324).

- 3 In her diary, the artist declares that she was born in Coyoacán, Mexico, to a father of Hungarian descent and a mother half Mexican Indian, half Spanish (Kahlo 151–52). In the scholarship on Kahlo, two different systems of page numbering are used: that of the 1995 edition of the diary and that of the facsimile that is reproduced in black and white in the second part of that volume. In this essay, all references to Kahlo's diary refer to the pages of the facsimile. Kahlo's Jewish roots are discussed by Ankori, who also refers to Zamora. A dimension of androgyny is also present in her pictorial persona, as she represents herself with thick, united eyebrows, and a visible moustache, or wearing men's clothes.
- 4 Gass "makes explicit that the writer's mind is invariably alert to the concerns of an audience and shapes the text, even letters and diaries, to accommodate these" (Bloom 24).
- 5 Lowe 208, referring to Herrera 253.
- 6 Lowe points out that the accompanying text demonstrates clearly that Kahlo saw herself as Neferisis/Nefertiti, and Diego as Akhenaten, Nefertiti's consort (220).
- 7 Oil on canvas 65 x 45 cm, Government of the State of Tlaxcala, Instituto Tlaxcalteca de Cultura, Museo de Arte de Tlaxcala. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 84.
- 8 Oil on metal, 30.5 x 35 cm, Madonna's Collection. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 100.
- 9 Oil on metal, 30.5 x 38 cm, Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño, Mexico City. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 99.
- 10 Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 49.5 cm, Murray Collection, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 131. Barson 71 observes that this painting refers to *Imitatio Christi* rituals practiced by Mexican nuns.
- 11 Oil on canvas, 70 x 60.5 cm, The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of Modern and Contemporary Mexican Art, The Vergel Foundation, Fundación Cultural Parque Morelos, Cuernavaca, Costco/Commercial Mexicana. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 181.
- 12 *Self Portrait with Stalin*, oil on masonite, 59 x 39 cm, and *Marxism Will Give Health to the Sick*, oil on masonite 76 x 61 cm. Both works belong to the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico, and are reproduced in Prignitz Poda et al. 176.
- 13 Oil on hardboard, 76 x 61 cm, The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection of Modern and Contemporary Mexican Art, The Vergel Foundation, Fundación Cultural Parque Morelos, Cuernavaca, Costco/Commercial Mexicana. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 141.
- 14 See above, note 11.
- 15 See above, note 13.

- 16 Oil on canvas 26 x 55.5 cm, Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño, Mexico City. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 87.
- 17 This was suggested to me by Véronique Plesch during the presentation of my paper at the Seventh International Conference on Word and Image Studies, Philadelphia, 27 September 2005.
- 18 Oil on hardboard, 61 x 45 cm, private collection. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 147.
- 19 The inscription written on the ribbon reads: "Here you see us, Me Frieda Kahlo, with my beloved Diego Rivera. I painted these portraits in the beautiful city of San Francisco California for our friend Mr. Albert Bender, and it was in the month of April in the year 1931." Translated in Herrera 124.
- 20 Oil on metal, 31 x 35 cm, Manuel and Maria Reyero collection, New York. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 95.
- 21 Oil on canvas, 40 x 28 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Reproduced in Dexter and Barson 118.

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Imbrication de l'image, du texte et de la musique dans un corpus de prières énigmatiques à la Vierge

Laurence Wuidar

Je voudrais ici interroger une série de partitions qui mettent en jeu le verbe, l'image et la musique, la richesse de ces œuvres provenant de leur triple nature. Les sources mêlant ces trois composantes multimédiatisent un message qu'il nous est offert de lire sur plusieurs niveaux. Voir comment ces composantes s'interpénètrent et quels rôles elles tiennent respectivement nous ouvre une fenêtre sur les rapports entre le lu, le vu et l'entendu. Comme corpus emblématique de ce genre musical associant une partition à un texte et une image gravée ou dessinée, nous parcourrons quelques œuvres d'un compositeur romain, Pier Francesco Valentini (c. 1570-1654), poète, musicien et astrologue d'origine noble, actif dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle. Les exemples que nous examinerons proviennent d'un manuscrit extrêmement peu étudié conservé à la Bibliothèque Apostolique du Vatican et datant des années 1650 (Valentini, ms. Barb. Lat. 4428, *Canon musicali*).¹ Ces œuvres illustrent de façon paradigmatique les rapports étroits et complexes pouvant exister entre les éléments de ces images musicales. Ce manuscrit, aux confluent de l'étude des pratiques dévotionnelles privées au XVII^e siècle et de la place de la musique dans ces formes de dévotions éloignées de la liturgie, sert d'exemple tant à l'historien du catholicisme qu'à l'historien de la musique.² L'analyse des relations entre texte, musique et image, nous amènera à décoder certaines techniques de cryptographie musicale.³ De nouvelles formes de cryptographie voient le jour au XVII^e siècle et nous tenons ici un exemple extrêmement riche pour comprendre comment fonctionnait la cryptographie musicale, combinée à la présence d'une image, au sein de partitions sacrées. L'historien du catholicisme se réjouira de rencontrer une forme d'expression de glorification d'un personnage sacré, en l'occurrence, le personnage marial. Ce manuscrit, comme objet singulier, par son caractère spectaculaire, par sa triple composition de texte, image et musique, par le caractère spéculatif de la combinatoire des pièces musicales et par le caractère compulsif de ces prières enchaînées, en dehors des sources que l'historien du catholicisme a l'habitude de fréquenter – registres paroissiaux, manuels de dévotion, littérature de spiritualité – lui montre une autre réalité religieuse.

Le manuscrit en question, sur *foglio reale* (48,5 x 37,5 cm), se compose de cinquante cinq énigmes musicales toutes accompagnées de figures gravées, est constitué d'une série d'énigmes musicales, chacune étant accompagnée d'une image gravée et suivie d'un texte concernant la résolution de l'énigme. La partition manuscrite vient se loger dans la gravure, au dessus, au dessous ou autour, comme cela se présente le mieux semble t il pour former l'unité la plus parfaite entre image et musique. La grande majorité des thèmes abordés dans le manuscrit sont des thèmes religieux: des prières aux différents saints, au Christ, à la Trinité et à la Vierge, cette dernière étant l'agent principal du corpus et celle qui nous retiendra ici. Quelques partitions égrènent d'autres thèmes: la mort, les quatre vertus cardinales, les astres solaire et lunaire (qui constituent les armoiries du compositeur) ou même, cas unique, une image profane d'un banquet. Riche d'enseignement, ce recueil nous servira à dégager deux axes principaux: d'une part, le rapport entre texte, musique et image, et, d'autre part, la réutilisation et l'adaptation de l'image et du texte au sein d'une seule réalité musicale.

En prélude à cette étude, il nous faut définir ce qu'est une énigme musicale et détailler brièvement un procédé musical qui reviendra comme véritable *leitmotiv* de ces exemples. L'énigme musicale est une partition notée de telle façon que le lecteur doit appliquer les règles d'écriture musicale du contrepoint savant pour la résoudre. Autrement dit, le compositeur ne note pas l'ensemble de la composition mais laisse une partie de décodage au lecteur. Dans la majeure partie des cas, les énigmes prennent la forme du canon énigme. Le canon est un genre musical: une même phrase musicale est répétée à toutes les voix de la polyphonie à différents moments. Le compositeur note la mélodie, le lecteur doit chercher quand et comment les autres voix viennent se superposer sur cette mélodie en la reprenant telle quelle. Différentes techniques cryptographiques et musicales peuvent venir se greffer sur ce principe de base. Par ailleurs, les compositeurs laissent généralement au lecteur des clés de résolution sous la forme d'indications techniques ou sous la forme de devises littéraires, allégoriques ou bibliques. Ces *motti*, souvent énigmatiques, aident de manière obscure à mettre l'énigme en lumière. Le texte dans le cas de ces canons énigmes a deux fonctions: le texte de la partition musicale forme une unité avec la phrase musicale tandis que le texte technique ou littéraire donne les éléments de résolution de l'énigme.

Le procédé musical que nous rencontrerons est dit du *soggetto cavato* ou encore *sopra le vocali*, ("Sujet extrait des voyelles du texte"). Ce sont en effet les théoriciens italiens qui vont le définir. Il sera utilisé dans les messes par les compositeurs Franco flamands venus en Italie à la Renaissance et dans les canons énigmes par les Italiens de la première moitié du XVII^e siècle. Ce procédé consiste à extraire le thème musical des voyelles d'un texte qui



Fig. 1. Pier Francesco Valentini (c. 1570-1654), *Canone a cinque voci all'unisono sopra le vocali Regina Caeli Laetare*, c. 1650. 48,5 x 37,5 cm. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 4428, f. 11.

sont transformées en notes musicales par un procédé de simple analogie (“u” devient “ut”, “e” “re”, “i” “mi”, etc.). Il s’agit d’une technique musico-cryptographique permettant au compositeur une fusion totale entre texte et musique, le texte devenant l’unique substance génératrice de la mélodie, ce qui peut être vu comme dépendance de la musique au verbe ou au contraire comme signe d’égalité la plus totale.⁴

Le premier exemple choisi est celui de la Vierge accompagnée de ses attributs, à l’image des représentations iconographiques traditionnelles des titres de la Vierge de l’Immaculée Conception issus des litanies de la Vierge de Lorette.⁵ L’attachement de Valentini à la Vierge est à lire en rapport non seulement avec l’importance du culte marial dans la Rome de la Réforme

catholique mais également en regard de l'intérêt manifeste que semble porter l'auteur à la congrégation de Philippe Néri (1515-95, canonisé en 1622), particulièrement portée sur la Vierge et dont l'importance pour la vie musicale romaine n'est pas à redire.⁶ Premier exemple donc d'une éclatante Reine des Cieux: la Vierge, assimilée à la Femme de l'Apocalypse, triomphante, piétine la lune (Apoc. 12. 1),⁷ symbole de l'inconstance du monde, et est accompagnée des astres lumineux, en référence aux attributs de la Vierge issus du Cantique des Cantiques (Ct. 6. 9-10). Sous le titre *Canone a cinque voci all'unisono sopra le vocali* suivi, comme souvent, du monogramme de Valentini, l'image découpée par l'auteur d'une Vierge triomphante est entourée d'une composition musicale à cinq voix à l'unisson *sopra le vocali* (fig. 1) notée de façon énigmatique: une seule voix est écrite, les signes ".s." indiquent l'entrée des autres voix de la polyphonie. En dessous, le compositeur inscrit la résolution de l'énigme, à savoir en une partition à cinq voix, elle-même suivie d'un texte explicatif purement descriptif des procédés musicaux utilisés. Nous serons face à cette structure dans toutes les énigmes envisagées. Le texte de la partition, "Regina Caeli Laetare Alleluia", donne directement naissance au texte musical par le procédé cryptographique sus décrit. Verbe et musique participent intrinsèquement à l'image: ils suivent, visuellement, les nuages entourant la Vierge, tel un chœur des anges concrètement mis en musique. Le chœur des anges n'est plus l'inaudible musique céleste mais cette partition ci face à laquelle se trouve le lecteur. Il n'est pas impossible que le nombre de voix de la partition renvoie lui aussi directement à l'image. En effet, au dessus de la Vierge, à un premier niveau, on voit le Père tenant le Fils sur la croix ainsi que le Saint Esprit opérant le lien entre le Fils et la Vierge; à un second niveau, les éléments, la lune, le soleil et les étoiles, symboles mariaux à la fois firmament et couronne virginale. Ainsi les cinq éléments, la Trinité, le monde céleste et la Vierge répondent aux cinq voix à l'unisson du canon dans une quintessence exprimée par l'union du verbe, de la musique et de l'image.

Dans un deuxième exemple, la partition prend un aspect iconique par sa brièveté et sa simplicité (fig. 2). Nous sommes en présence de deux œuvres disposées l'une en face de l'autre, qui toutes deux suivent la même structure que celle rencontrée dans le premier exemple. La partition de la première énigme, sur le texte "Mater Christi", est formée de quelques notes: une partition nue, dépouillée. L'œuvre dit l'essence du message par une partition musicale de l'extrême abstraction: quelques notes posées sur une portée dans l'attente d'être résolues, auxquelles répond une image claire et directement lisible. L'image, de taille modeste, précède cette ligne mélodique réduite à sa plus simple expression et sa résolution polyphonique en deux partitions à quatre voix ("Resoluzione Prima" et "Resoluzione seconda"). D'une seule donnée naissent plusieurs résolutions possibles, plusieurs partitions polyphoniques différentes.

CANONE SOPRA LE VOCALI

a quattro voci con due Resoluzioni
 quante si possono canone in diversi modi, che
 non hanno a canonicare.

CANONE A CINQUE VOCALI CON SOPRA LE VOCALI

Primo canone Sopra le vocali
 Resoluzione Sopra le vocali

Fig. 2. Pier Francesco Valentini, *Canone sopra le vocali Mater Christi et Radij Solis, et Luna*, c. 1650. 48,5 x 37,5 cm (détail). Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 4428, f. 25.

Une dimension supplémentaire dans l'union fécondatrice du verbe et de la musique nous est fournie par ces partitions polymorphes. Souvent, le lecteur est invité à poursuivre l'invention et ainsi à trouver un grand nombre d'autres solutions que celles présentées par le compositeur. À droite de la page, les armoiries du compositeur et son monogramme sont suivis d'une partition, de sa résolution et d'un texte technique relatif à cette dernière.

C'est ici la page la plus personnelle de l'auteur, la plus intime et la plus intimement liée à sa personne. En effet, la Vierge fait face aux armoiries du compositeur. La gravure de la Vierge à l'Enfant, d'une grande sobriété, fait écho à la simplicité des armes de Valentini composées d'un croissant de lune et de trois flammes solaires. La Mère porte néanmoins son habit du triomphe, discrètement orné de deux étoiles, dans lequel le Fils rédempteur se fond (que l'on observe le jeu de manche). La nudité de l'environnement concentre le regard sur les deux protagonistes de l'image, ce que vient parfaitement redoubler le texte "Mater Christi" réduit à l'essence du message. Les deux uniques paroles de la partition sont la traduction par le verbe de l'image, unies par leur commune nudité. La musique se fonde sur le texte, l'ensemble formant un triple écho musical, visuel et textuel. En effet, le procédé cryptographique d'invention musicale à l'œuvre, la mélodie *sopra le vocali*, augmente encore la parenté entre musique et texte. Des voyelles de "Mater Christi" naît la mélodie : *la ré mi mi*. Quatre notes forment la quintessence d'un message réduit à l'essentiel. L'œuvre musicale dans son ensemble déploie cette mélodie de quatre notes dans un canon à quatre voix tandis que la nature duelle du texte et de l'image se traduit dans la composition polyphonique par les deux résolutions qu'elle offre. La dualité s'exprime par ces deux résolutions notées comme un miroir des composantes du texte (Mater/Christi) et de l'image (Vierge/Enfant). Les deux éléments des armoiries peuvent être vus comme écho métaphorique de la Vierge (Lune) et du Christ (Soleil). Le texte de la seconde partition "Radij Solis, et Luna insignia sunt Domus Valentini Romani" ("les rayons du soleil et la lune sont, à Rome, les armes de la maison des Valenti") décrit quant à lui les armoiries et s'achève sur le nom du compositeur. À nouveau, il s'agit d'un canon *sopra le vocali*. Les mêmes procédés musicaux fonctionnant également comme trait d'union entre le compositeur et les personnages bibliques. L'image et les armoiries, hiératisme et héraldique, se répondent tant musicalement que symboliquement.

Les œuvres auxquelles je voudrais maintenant m'arrêter brièvement devaient connaître une diffusion immense, le jésuite Athanasius Kircher les reprenant dès 1650 dans son célèbre *Musurgia Universalis* paru à Rome. La technique cryptographique ici développée est celle dite du "canone linearis" (canon linéaire) par Kircher, nommée "canon sopra una riga sola" (canon sur une seule ligne) par Valentini.⁸ On assiste à une véritable débauche de procédés : cette technique cryptographique, dont Valentini réclame la paternité, se combine ici à un polymorphisme hypertrophié. La première énigme de ce type est construite sur une image de la Vierge penchée sur son Fils, une rose à la main (fig. 3). Les paroles mises en musique sont limpides : "Beata viscera Maria" ("Heureuses les entrailles de Marie"). La mélodie n'emploie que trois notes musicales différentes, comme l'exige le procédé d'écriture

CANONE SOPRA LE VOCI I IN VNA
RIGA SOLA A DUE A TRE ET A QUATTRO VOCI

nel quale il soggetto viene principiato et finito sopra
tutte le note. Dove è da notare che l'inventione di questa
canoni sopra una riga sola è cosa nova et usata. Puta
ritrovata et inventata da me Pier Francesco Valentini

Beata viscera marie

Fig. 3. Pier Francesco Valentini, *Canone sopra le vocali in una riga sola a due tre et quattro voci*. *Beata viscera Marie*, c. 1650. 48,5 x 37,5 cm (détail). Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 4428, f. 36.

cryptographique choisi qui vient se doubler du procédé *sopra le vocali*. L'auteur prend ensuite la peine de noter dix sept résolutions différentes, à deux, trois et quatre voix, obtenues à partir de ces quelques notes. Au polymorphisme et à la notation linéaire, l'énigme suivante ajoute un procédé supplémentaire: la ligne musicale devant être chantée de droite à gauche et de gauche à droite, jouant là avec le rétrograde du texte musical. L'ensemble est dominé par la figure



Fig. 4. Pier Francesco Valentini, *Canone Consolatrix afflictorum*, c. 1650. 48,5 x 37,5 cm (dé tail). Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 4428, f. 41.

d'une Vierge en prière, penchée sur la composition musicale. Cette combinaison de techniques se retrouve dans l'énigme illustrant l'image de Christ Enfant triomphant de la mort et du serpent (f. 40), elle aussi reproduite dans le *Musurgia* (p. 585, sans l'image). Polymorphisme, *sopra le vocali*, notation linéaire, rétrograde... autant d'éléments que devra vaincre le lecteur. La dernière énigme mariale à utiliser le procédé *sopra una riga sola* mélange exubérance et intimité, sobriété iconique abstraite et déferlement fluvial de notes musicales multipliées à l'infini (fig. 4). Les huit notes de la mélodie de départ engendrent une infinité de combinaisons polyphoniques: un minimalisme générateur de l'exubérance baroque. L'image, minuscule médaillon qui représente la Vierge affligée baissant la tête vers les notes musicales, est en quelque sorte perdue sur la page des résolutions musicales, et illustre parfaitement le texte de la partition "Consolatrix afflictorum" (consolatrice des afflictions) dont la musique est extraite *sopra le vocali*. À nouveau, l'union du texte, de la musique et de l'image est totale.

La présentation de deux énigmes d'une grande simplicité visuelle placées face à face sur une seule page se retrouve dans l'exemple suivant (fig. 5): à gauche de la page une Vierge à l'Enfant, à droite une Vierge lisant. Sous cha

ONE SOPRA LE VOCALI A DICIOITO VOCI CANONE SOPRA LE VOCALI A VINTIQUATTRO VOCI

Virgo singularis

Ad te clamo.

Fig. 5. Pier Francesco Valentini, *Canone sopra le vocali a diciotto voci. Virgo singularis et Canone sopra le vocali a vintiquattro voci. Ad te clamo*, c. 1650. 48,5 x 37,5 cm. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 4428, f. 52.

cune d'elles un texte qui, en substance, renvoie aux éditions des canons les plus célèbres de l'auteur et qui concerne les procédés de composition (Valentini, *Canone sopra la parole della Salve Regina* et *Canone nel nodo di Salomone*). Le texte se fait ici explication et invitation: le lecteur ne doit pas s'arrêter aux résolutions données par le compositeur, il en existe d'autres. Le lecteur doit continuer l'œuvre créatrice, génératrice devrait on dire. Cette invitation expresse montre encore une fois la place active accordée au lecteur dans l'exercice spirituel qui lui est présenté pour une expérience chrétienne quotidienne par la résolution concrète de l'image musicale. Le canon de la Vierge et l'Enfant, présentés

dans une gravure de petite taille, forme une œuvre à dix huit voix *sopra le vocali* sur le texte “Virgo singularis” (“Vierge sans pareille”), celui de la Vierge lisant, forme un canon à vingt quatre voix *sopra le vocali* du texte “Ad te clamo” (“je crie vers toi”). Les deux œuvres se répondent, se font face et utilisent les mêmes procédés contrapuntiques. En dessous de la résolution des énigmes, le compositeur prend la peine de noter que, non seulement ces canons peuvent être chantés à un nombre supérieur de voix que celles indiquées, mais également à un nombre de voix innombrables et infinies par les procédés contrapuntiques d’augmentation et de diminution: l’aspect pratique de ces prières destinées à être chantées devient purement spéculatif lorsque l’infinitude des voix entre en scène. Il en va de même pour le canon de la Vierge lisant qui se chante en combinant ces techniques à celle du rétrograde: des vingt quatre voix, douze chantent en lisant la partition de droite à gauche tandis que simultanément les douze autres chantent en lisant de droite à gauche. À l’extrême simplicité de la présentation, de l’image, du texte et de la mélodie, répond la complexité des procédés musicaux: augmentation, diminution, rétrograde, voix innombrables et infinies.

Un autre axe de réflexion sur le rapport entre le texte, l’image et la musique nous est donné par les énigmes dont la musique reste identique alors qu’image et texte changent. Un exemple de cette circulation d’une même œuvre musicale s’illustre parfaitement dans le canon “Vinum et Musica Laetificant cor hominis” (Le bon vin et la musique réjouissent le cœur de l’homme: Eccl. 40. 20). L’image présente une femme jouant du théorbe, un galant à son cou, un autre galant devant elle, à la viole de gambe. Tous trois sont assis autour de la table parmi vin et autres couples. Un canon illustre musicalement cette gravure d’un banquet galant accompagné de musique. Or Valentini indique lui-même que la partition musicale est identique à celle composée sur les paroles “Hic finis est libri Deo gratia”. Cette dernière se trouve dans un manuscrit dédié à Ferdinand III, en fin d’ouvrage, en signe de remerciement final à Dieu (Valentini, *Duplitionio*, dernier folio). Scène galante et remerciement di vin, gloire à Dieu et vice des hommes peuvent être musicalement chantés d’un même et unique chant... Un autre exemple de ce type montre la récupération d’une même partition musicale tantôt dans un contexte sacré, tantôt sur un texte profane: la musique composée pour illustrer une gravure de l’adoration aux bergers (f. 19) est reprise sans changement sur un autre texte et dans un autre contexte, à savoir pour le canon publié dans le *Musurgia Universalis* de Kircher avec le texte “Ecce consoni et Dissoni praecepta”. Valentini en donne une troisième version (f. 70) sur l’*Ave Maria*. Ceci nous offre deux exemples de récupération d’œuvre musicale dans différents contextes nous indiquant une certaine polyvalence du message musical adaptable à diverses réalités religieuses et profanes ainsi qu’à différentes images. Qu’une même partition

puisse servir tant l'image sacrée que profane montre une polysémie musicale active au delà de ces frontières. Frontières floues entre sacré et profane dans la société du XVII^e siècle, frontière que souvent la réalité musicale permet d'enjamber, tel le cas du genre musical des parodies (où une même partition se voit adaptée sur des paroles sacrées ou profanes), tels les exemples d'antennes mariales reprises au sacré dans une instrumentalisation politique ou encore les chants utilisés par les missionnaires récupérant à leurs fins des mélodies populaires bien ancrées dans les mentalités.⁹ Dans nos exemples, l'interchangeabilité du message véhiculé par la musique opère tant par rapport à l'image qu'au verbe, à l'image et au verbe sacré que profane. Il n'est récupéré à aucune autre fin que la sienne propre; pas question d'utiliser les apports de l'un pour servir l'autre. Il n'y a ni passage du religieux au politique dans lequel le second se chargerait des vertus du premier, ni récupération de la culture populaire à des fins religieuses, mais un message musical qui est, et non devient, tantôt religieux, tantôt profane. Ni l'image ni le texte ne pourraient atteindre ce degré de polyvalence, comme si le langage musical seul permettait cette polysémie absolue.

La complémentarité parfaite entre image gravée et musique se donne à voir de façon archétypale dans ce manuscrit qui constitue un exemple paradigmatique d'association entre les aspects visuels et musico spéculatifs. Pas n'importe quelle musique: une musique qui intègre le lecteur de façon beaucoup plus directe et intense que la lecture d'une partition, il participe à l'exercice dévotionnel en résolvant la partition énigmatique, et à l'accomplissement de l'œuvre par le décodage. Raison et dévotion s'unissent dans la résolution de l'énigme musicale qui dépasse sa valeur purement musicale dans un au delà spéculatif. Dans ce recueil d'images et de phrases pieuses mises en musique s'expose une forme d'exercice spirituel musical où le lecteur est invité à méditer sur l'image, le texte et la musique. Les énigmes ne sont pas simples. Souvent l'auteur emploie des procédés à ce point singuliers qu'il faut au lecteur une méditation soutenue sur la partition avant de pouvoir chanter les louanges qui s'y donnent en musique. Quant au polymorphisme, il signifie au lecteur qu'il n'y a pas une seule et unique façon de regarder la réalité, de l'image, du message sacré, de la partition musicale: vous pouvez la chanter comme ceci et/ou comme cela. La prière et la relation de la musique à l'image et au verbe se déclament non seulement de façon polyphonique mais polymorphe, polysémique et plurivoque: à plusieurs voix, par plusieurs voies.

La recherche, notamment dans les artifices compositionnels et dans leur formalisation, qui se situe du côté du compositeur et du côté de son lecteur, est bien l'élément central de la spiritualité religieuse de l'auteur. Le but de l'énigme est de conduire à la prière par un *exercice* de composition, de recherche, de recomposition. Le rôle actif du lecteur apparaît comme une donnée

fondamentale à double niveau: la résolution, la recomposition, de l'énigme d'une part et son exécution d'autre part. Le souci pratique de la prière et de l'énigme se lit clairement dans les indications d'exécution sans évincer cependant la dimension spéculative de ces œuvres. Le ou les lecteurs chanteront la gloire de la Vierge après une recherche sur l'énigme. L'organisation spatiale en trois temps participe aussi à la mise en lumière dans un second temps du côté obscur de la partition: c'est d'abord une partition close accompagnée d'une image qui est offerte au lecteur, puis, ensuite, la résolution de cette partition qui se donne à lire. Partition fermée d'abord, résolution déployée ensuite, dépliée dit souvent l'auteur jouant sur le double sens italien de "spiegare". Rares sont les énigmes qui se lisent facilement. L'ésotérisme parfois extrême des compositions par les procédés utilisés et leur formalisation est néanmoins toujours un ésotérisme au service de la prière.

Par ailleurs, s'opposent dans leur union l'image ouverte et la partition fermée. Image, texte et musique forment une unité dans laquelle se trouve, en son sein, une opposition: celle d'une image et d'un texte clairs d'une part, d'une partition close codée d'autre part. Les imbrications entre texte, musique et image ne peuvent être réduites à un seul niveau. L'image se fait parfois miniature, parfois au contraire elle occupe l'entièreté de la page, sautant aux yeux du lecteur ou l'obligeant à la scruter, s'imposant à l'attention du lecteur ou l'obligeant à se poser attentivement devant elle. Elle sert de support méditatif et spéculatif éminemment concret. La musique vient accentuer cette dimension, impliquant directement le lecteur à une fin pratique. Il regarde certes, décrypte, mais pour aller plus loin. Il observe pour résoudre. Pour pouvoir prier. Le chapelet s'égène au fil des notes musicales.

C'est également à un processus d'appropriation de l'image auquel nous assistons. L'auteur les coupe et les découpe de manière telle qu'il se les approprie entièrement, leur enlevant les indications de leur provenance originelle, les utilisant comme support à l'invention musicale, comme nouvel élément d'un tout unique, original, inédit. Au départ d'une image préexistante, l'auteur compose sa partition et, souvent, un texte de son invention. L'image est intégrée dans une composition dont elle devient partie intégrante pour former une unité nouvelle parlant à la vue, à l'intellect et à l'ouïe. Ce sont les trois composantes qui forment l'unité dans un rapport d'interdépendance au sein duquel aucun des médiums n'est autoportant: ils s'assistent l'un l'autre.

Image, texte et musique sont autant de supports à la prière. Néanmoins la fonction du texte et de l'image et celle de la musique est à la fois identique et différente. Identique en ce que les trois composantes servent à prier. Différente en ce que l'image par sa nature apparaît directement à la vue et à l'entendement du spectateur alors que l'énigme musicale ne s'entend qu'après sa résolution. L'ouïe ne perçoit pas directement ce que la vue saisit dans l'immédiateté du regard. L'écoute se déploie en deux temps: celui de la recom

position de l'énigme d'abord, celui du déroulement temporel de la musique ensuite; bien que la dimension spatiale de telles musiques polyphoniques ne soit pas absente. Le statut de l'image comme support peut lui aussi être vu dans une double dimension. L'image est support à la méditation et à la prière, idée chère à la Réforme catholique, depuis les livres d'emblèmes sacrés jusqu'au rôle de l'image pour les jésuites.¹⁰ L'image est aussi support à la méditation sur l'énigme musicale. Dans les énigmes où la musique n'encadre pas l'image (voir par exemple figures 2 et 3) l'emplacement de celle-ci, occupant toujours le sommet de la composition, dominant, littéralement, la partition dans sa forme énigmatique, invite à voir l'image comme une aide à la résolution de l'énigme. La Vierge est souvent penchée, maternelle, sur la partition. Les thèmes des gravures inclinent également à le penser. Les textes des partitions¹¹ corroborent les figures mariales des gravures: le "Virgo gloriosa" (Vierge glorieuse) revient comme un *leitmotiv*, début, centre ou conclusion des prières. L'auteur demande souvent qu'elle nous libère des dangers. L'image dominante du recueil est celle d'une Vierge glorieuse. Une Vierge triomphante, consolatrice, protectrice: image d'une Vierge rassurante, assurant la voie pour le lecteur en proie aux multiples voix de l'énigme musicale.

NOTES

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À Annick Delfosse, en souvenir de nos discussions mariales du *cortile* vatican.

- 1 La littérature moderne s'est peu intéressée à ce compositeur. Les éléments biographiques sont repris par Kunz et Casini Cortesi. Le seul auteur à s'être penché sur le manuscrit dont il sera question ici est Gerbino. Cet ouvrage a le grand mérite de porter l'attention sur le manuscrit conservé au Vatican ainsi que de lancer des pistes de recherche en histoire culturelle de la Rome du XVII^e siècle mais le but de l'auteur n'est pas d'analyser en détail l'immense potentiel de ce manuscrit pour l'étude des rapports entre texte, musique et image.
- 2 Nous possédons peu de documents qui nous permettent de cerner la pratique de dévotion privée, et encore moins de documents musicaux. Chacun d'entre eux est précieux. Sur la dévotion privée, voir Delumeau 225 et suivantes.
- 3 La cryptographie est un terrain de recherche connu dans le domaine de la musicologie, voir Sams pour un panorama général.
- 4 Bien que le procédé soit décrit par Zarlino (66) par "soggetto cavato delle parole" ce qui donna l'actuel raccourci "soggetto cavato", Valentini emploie toujours

l'expression "sopra le vocali" ici préférée. Ce procédé tant procédé d'invention musicale que de révérence se trouve déjà dans la messe de Josquin Desprez *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae*, l'exemple certainement le plus connu de cette technique sur les voyelles d'Ercole I d'Este duc de Ferrare (1471-1505).

- 5 Le sanctuaire de Lorette, au Nord de l'Italie, où la maison de la Vierge était arrivée miraculeusement en 1294, connut un grand succès dès le XV^e siècle. La Vierge de Lorette se voit honorée par un poème, les litanies, interpellant la Vierge par des invocations dont un grand nombre sont issues du Cantique des Cantiques, entre autres sources vétérotestamentaires. Les litanies sont formalisées en 1599 par Thomas Sailly, jésuite de Bruxelles. Dans l'iconographie de l'Immaculée Conception, on retrouve, même avant Sailly, des éléments de ces litanies. A ce sujet, voir Stratton et Morello et al.
- 6 A ce sujet, voir Venturoli. Valentini a découpé des gravures qu'il a collé dans son manuscrit (de tous les formats, ce sont des gravures religieuses isolées ou qui proviennent de livres religieux). Ce n'est pas ici le lieu de rechercher la provenance de ces images si tant est que cela soit possible. Très peu des gravures du manuscrit gardent trace de leur provenance originale. Dans quelques rares cas cependant, Valentini a conservé l'inscription originale qui indique sa préférence pour des gravures se référant au fondateur de la congrégation. Voir par exemple le canon énigme *Iste confessor Domini* (f. 17), avec une image de Néri dans sa chasuble brodée priant la Vierge et l'Enfant, l'inscription de la provenance de la gravure est exceptionnellement conservée ("S. Philippus Neri / Florentinus Congregationis / Oratori Fundator. Obijt. Romae / An. 1595").
- 7 Sur l'iconographie de l'Immaculée Conception, qui se base en grande partie sur la femme de l'Apocalypse, voir Morello et al. et Stratton.
- 8 Quatre énigmes vont user de ce procédé qui veut que la partition soit écrite sur une seule ligne, et non sur une portée à cinq, une lettre placée devant indique la note de cette ligne, la note du dessous sera automatiquement la note conjointe descendante et celle au dessus la note conjointe ascendante, la mélodie ne peut donc forcément qu'avoir trois notes différentes.
- 9 Sur l'instrumentalisation politique de la figure mariale, voir Delfosse, notamment 114 et suivantes sur les chants. Sur la légitimité des airs profanes récupérés par les missionnaires dans les cantiques, voir la conférence de Dompnier.
- 10 Sur la production de livres d'emblèmes jésuites et l'utilisation des emblèmes, de la didactique à la mission, voir par exemple Bolzoni.
- 11 Notons que Valentini préfère des textes de sa composition brochant autour des thèmes mariaux plutôt que les textes des antiennes mariales.

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**The *Künstlerroman* as Romantic Arabesque:
Parody, Collaboration, and the Making of
The Modern Vasari (1854)**

Cordula Grewe

In January 1855 the London periodical *Athenaeum* dedicated a lengthy review to a new German novel, *Der moderne Vasari* (Oxenford). Part *Bildungsroman*, part artist biography, the sumptuously produced volume had been released only a few months earlier. The immediate attention paid by the English journal reflected the international profile of the author, Friedrich Wilhelm von Schadow Godenhausen (1788–1862). Appointed in 1826 director of the Düsseldorf Academy, the recently ennobled artist headed one of Europe's leading schools and was widely regarded as a venerable elder of the German Nazarenes. These romantic artists, who had dedicated themselves to the artistic renewal of medieval art and piety as early as 1809, had unexpectedly entered public discussion in England around the time of the *Modern Vasari*'s publication. After all, it was at this point that the German Nazarenes inspired the controversial project to decorate the newly built Houses of Parliament at Westminster with frescoes.

The title of Schadow's novel, *The Modern Vasari*, expressed a core belief of the Nazarene movement, namely, that the renewal of modern art had to spring from a return to the old masters of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Indeed, it gestured back to the sixteenth century by evoking the "father of art history," Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), and his collection *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*. Despite this ambitious claim of pedigree, Schadow himself emphasized the different nature of his project. While Vasari's accounts, he stated, were more for reference, his own book was "zum eigentlichen Lesen" (5 April 1853; "truly to be read"). The crucial difference to the *Vite* was the frame story, "eine an sich sehr anspruchslose Novelle" (ibid.; "an unpretentious novella"), which in Schadow's words braids together biographical sketches, artistic views, ideas, and judgments (ibid.).¹ The "unpretentious novella" gave the book its subtitle, "Reminiscences of an Artistic Life" (Oxenford 43). Set in contemporary Düsseldorf, the frame story chronicles the life of the city and its art scene, paying special attention

to the socioeconomic side of art production around 1850. Fusing a variety of literary genres – from songs, poems, prose narration, and theater plays to art instruction, biographies, and the description of paintings – *The Modern Vasari* presents broad ranging reflections on the role of academies and art societies, art criticism and art history, exhibitions and museums in Biedermeier Germany. Yet the multifaceted text was not the book's only attraction; rather, the *Athenaeum* review ended with particularly favorable comments about *The Modern Vasari*'s lavish outfitting.

One word more in commendation of this delightful book. It is choicely printed, and adorned with dainty medallion portraits and fanciful vignettes: an elegant specimen of that publishing art which is unprovided with a special name, but which is so serviceable in covering our drawing room tables with agreeable objects. (Oxenford 45)

Composed by Schadow's friend and former student, Julius Hübner (1806–82), these dainty and fanciful illustrations are the focus of this article.

While I have discussed the book's literary structure elsewhere (Grewe, "Portrait of the Artist"), an in depth analysis of the various types of images which punctuate the narrative is still missing. Addressing this lacuna, this essay examines the conceptual function and structural role of the novel's formal appearance. Focusing on Hübner's parodic vignettes, I show that the illustrations are not merely ornamental embellishment, but function as aesthetic interventions that construct a metadiscourse on Schadow's aesthetic positions. They assert the book's romantic character as an arabesque, an open ended, non linear form of writing, which Friedrich Schlegel had defined in 1799 as a genre to end all genres, a "bunte Allerley von kränklichem Witz" (Schlegel, "Brief" 114; "colorful hodgepodge of sickly wit": Schlegel, "Dialogue" 95) that combines all possible forms and encompasses every imaginable subject. Already the *Athenaeum* reviewer, John Oxenford (1812–77), connected *The Modern Vasari* with this arabesque practice of romantic writing by comparing Schadow's book with E. T. A. Hoffmann's experimental novel *Lebens Ansichten des Katers Murr* (*The Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr*; 1820–22). Oxenford's comparison is somewhat surprising, as the 1854 publication seems a far cry from Hoffmann's fireworks of fantastic wit and ironic self reflexivity. Yet, where Schadow's text fails to reflect upon itself generically (in the manner of the early romantic novel), Hübner's vignettes add precisely this element of self referential complexity, making the entire work more Hoffmannesque. The images are thus integral to the novel's arabesque outlook. At the same time, text and decoration are woven together to form one holistic experience so that reading and viewing are simultaneous and interchangeable activities. Finally, Hübner's illustrations reflect on the illegibility of the arabesque, which the text locates poignantly in the decline of the audience's competence in decoding such intellectual riddles.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS AND THEIR HISTORY

Schadow had dabbled in poetry and literature throughout his entire career, and published numerous articles on art, art instruction, and the nature of criticism from 1828 on (Grewe, "Wilhelm von Schadow"). Yet only when his failing eyesight forced him to retire, at least temporarily, from painting and teaching obligations did his ambitions grow to novel size. Schadow must have begun working on the novel around 1850 or 1851, as he already dictated his manuscript by January of 1852. A year and a half later, in October 1853, the manuscript was finished and shortly afterwards accepted by the Berlin publisher Wilhelm Hertz. Schadow now began thinking about the design of the book itself and approached Julius Hübner to create the title page as well as the portraits of nine artists selected by the publisher (Schadow, 16 November 1853). For the execution in wood engraving, Schadow proposed hiring Hugo Bürkner (1818–97), another Düsseldorf graduate, who was running a highly successful studio in Dresden and had worked with Hübner before.² The final version of *The Modern Vasari* featured three types of images: first, seven comic vignettes with chubby putti; second, nine medallion portraits of selected artists; and third, a single full page emblem as the book's frontispiece. The collaboration between the three men was smooth, but time consuming. Hopes that the book would be ready for the annual Easter book fair in Leipzig were shattered because of the trio's "gemeinsame Trödelei" (Schadow, 4 April 1854; "mutual dawdling"). The book finally appeared later that same year, probably in the fall of 1854.

Schadow's interest in the visual adornment of his book was certainly nurtured by the exceptional culture of graphic design and book illustrations that flourished in the years of his Düsseldorf directorship. This popularity was intimately linked to the invention of new printing techniques at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which revolutionized the artistic possibilities of the graphic medium and expanded the range of reproduction. A defining factor for book production was the development of a refined version of wood printing. Like the traditional woodcut, its advanced successor was compatible with type so that text and image could be printed simultaneously. Yet, in contrast to the older technique, modern wood engraving could achieve an exceptionally fine degree of detail and finish formerly the domain of copper engraving. Thus, it became the ideal medium for the elaborate and sumptuous illustrated books that the market increasingly demanded. With the rise of romanticism, book illustration became a field of experimentation, reorganizing and redefining the relationship of word and image. *The Modern Vasari* is a beautiful example of the new aesthetic possibilities. Poignantly, Schadow hoped that the "sinnreichen Illustrationen" (Schadow, 6 December

1853; “meaningful illustrations”) might even compensate for the deficits of his “Werkchen bis dat qui cito dat” (ibid.; “little work he gives twice who gives promptly”).

While communicating intensely about questions of design, Schadow and Hübner also engaged the crucial question of the images’ distribution throughout the text. To my astonishment, the two artists did not develop a coherent plan and settled for a surprisingly asymmetrical decoration scheme. Consequently, most images accumulate on the first thirty pages, where the frontispiece emblem is followed first by the vignette of a putto writing (opening chapter one) and then four of the nine portraits.³ This barrage of images ends abruptly on page thirty two, at the beginning of chapter two, where Hübner’s second vignette, a trumpet blowing putto, kicks off a thirty page chapter of pure text. Even the structure of the chapter openings varies. While the first four and the last two chapters start out with a vignette followed by a chapter heading and a poem, chapters five and six break with this sequence by substituting the vignette with a medallion portrait. In sum, these fluctuations and variations create the feeling of an open ended flow, which in turn reinforces the arabesque structure of the text itself. Once again, we see here how the images configure the perception of the text. The novel’s emblematic frontispiece, in turn, provides instructions about reading the illustrations themselves.

SCHADOW AS EMBLEM

The Modern Vasari opens with an emblem (fig. 1). This frontispiece functions like a visual foreword; it sets the mood of the frame story, while encapsulating the artistic principles expounded in the text. Moreover, based on a portrait of none other than Schadow himself, it also documents the autobiographical nature of the account that follows. Let us first turn to this last aspect. The emblem’s center image, its *pictura*, is a three quarter profile of an elderly man with prominent features into which deep furrows have imprinted the signs of old age. Thick eyebrows shed dark shadows over half closed eyes. The man’s hair, only slightly thinning, is disheveled, springing up in wild ornamental lines. Lost in thought, the old man is resting his head on his left hand, a pensive gesture that evokes sorrow and mourning. The muscles of his cheeks are tense from the motion of sucking energetically on his meerscham pipe, which is tucked into the corner of his mouth. His gaze lowered, he emits a thick cloud of smoke from which the words emerge “Vanitas Vanitatum Vanitas!” a reference to Eccles. 1: 2 “Vanitas of vanities, says the Preacher,



Fig. 1. Hugo Bürkner (1818–97) after Julius Hübner (1806–82), frontispiece “der Alte” (“the old man”), 1854. Wood engraving, 15 x 23 cm., from: *Der moderne Vasari* von Wilhelm v. Schadow. Illustrationen by Jul. Hübner. Holzschnitt von H. Bürkner. Collection of the author.

vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (King James). The biblical quotation resonates with the lines “Quid mundus ni fumus? Fumans obliscere mundum!” (“What is the world but smoke? While smoking, forget the world!”), which appear on a whimsical scroll above the old man’s head. Pinned to a frame of wooden sticks, this *inscriptio* intensifies the mood of resignation already conjured up by its pendant, the smoke filled *subscriptio*. Below the emblem, a caption identifies the *pictura* as a depiction of “der Alte,” whom the novel’s opening lines reveal as the source of those “reminiscences of an artistic life” it is presenting. Simultaneously, it divulges the novel’s status as a *roman à clef*, as the old man is a portrait of Schadow himself.

Having clarified the relationship between the author and the book’s main narrator, that “chief oracle of wisdom” (Oxenford 43), the emblem also provides a key to the novel’s main themes and pictorial mode. First, the emblem is programmatic in its fusion of word and image, which last but not least contains an affirmation of the project’s historicist connection to the Renaissance, to sixteenth century Italy, where the pictorial literary genre of the emblem book grew out of medieval allegory and bestiaries. But more importantly, the emblem, as a genre, alerts the reader that a moral lesson will be taught, but only at the price of some intellectual effort. Its placement on the opening page indicates a surplus of meaning, hidden but detectable under the literal surface of the text. Inscribed into this gesture toward the necessity of allegorical reading is, second, a characterization of the author himself, both physically and metaphorically. The likeness renders Schadow’s physiognomy with great acumen, and depicts in an equally realistic manner his habit of socializing over a pipe. Smoking, often accompanied by a good cup of coffee as a social activity, is a recurrent theme in the life of Schadow’s alter ego, “der Alte” (“the old man”). At the same time, the emblem creates a palpable and convincing equivalent to the introverted, pessimistic mood that Schadow was prone to in these years. The emblem’s impression is one of claustrophobic confinement, as the portrait of “der Alte,” an intense close up, seems pressed into a space too constricted for the man’s substantial presence. With no prospect of escape from this binding situation, resignation seems inevitable. The text subsequently supports this interpretation, as Schadow’s characterization of his alter ego as “der Alte” and “der Invalide” throughout the book perpetuates the nostalgic world weariness visible in his emblematic likeness.

It is important for understanding the novel’s pictorial logic that the biographical element encompasses an art historical dimension. Thus, the dates 1837 and 1854 (featured on the scroll and in Hübner’s ligatured signature, respectively) not only celebrate twenty years of unbroken comradeship. They also connect the print to the portrait’s original function, namely, its use in 1837 as the source for the main character of Hübner’s monumental painting

Job and His Friends, which the painter had finished to great acclaim in 1838 (Monschau Schmittmann 181–83). Job seems a particularly meaningful allusion, for Schadow and his peers saw in the Old Testament figure a metaphor for the suffering of righteous artists, that is, themselves, who endure ridicule and pain as God's apostles in a godless world. The inter pictorial reference inserts the quiet suffering of the portrayed man into a biblical frame so that the image simultaneously transcends its concrete personal context while forcefully capturing a central aspect of Schadow's persona, his deep piety and devout Catholicism. As the personal blends into the artistic, the emblematic fusion of portrait and allegory also promotes Schadow's views on art. It enacts that synthesis of idealism (the allegorical context) and realism (the portrait itself) which Schadow had made the core of his practice, theory, and teaching. Not surprisingly, discussions of this key principle, a kind of "naturalist idealism" (Grewe, "Wilhelm von Schadow" 126–278), resurface numerous times throughout the novel.

THE VIGNETTES' PARODIC INTERVENTION

The serious tone of the introduction is immediately punctured by an ironic interruption. The first vignette, which marks the beginning of the actual novel, gives a comical spin on the emblem's serious multifaceted iconography (fig. 2). Night has fallen. The single flame of an antique oil lamp illuminates a sparse chamber whose most prominent piece of furniture is a heavy, coarse wooden table. Several books and an inkpot are huddled together on its surface, serving the needs of a putto who has made himself comfortable on a low footstool. His chubby body exudes amused self contentment, as does the broad grin on his face. The mischievous expression hidden behind the earnest countenance of the oversized mask betrays dubious intentions. The evocation of a masquerade points to the ironic nature of the putto's writings, which he is scribbling into the pages of an opened tome propped up in front of him on a flimsy book holder. Yet which reader will not forgive his parodic transgression given his charming plea "Nichts für ungut!" ("No offense!") inscribed below the image with an emphatic exclamation point?

Brightly lit, the stark white of the mask recalls the dull plaster of death masks, but the cheery atmosphere immediately dissolves this sinister association and instead evokes carnival or the popular custom of masked balls. The mask thus stands for a period when rules are broken, laws bent, and values inverted. The mask's physiognomy resembles again that of Schadow, in whose name the cherub is filling line after line. Schadow appears here as a



Erstes Kapitel.

Troh zog der Jüngling in die Welt hinaus,
Fest stand der Mann in manchem harten Strauß,
Beruhigt kehrt der Greis zurück ins Haus,
Belächelt still die Welt und ihr Gebräus.

Er blickt zurück in jene fernen Weiten,
Um sie im Geist noch einmal zu durchschreiten.
Wollt ihr auf seinem Wege ihn begleiten,
Zeigt er ein Bild euch jüngst vergang'ner Zeiten.

Fig. 2. Hugo Bürkner after Julius Hübner, "Nichts für ungut!" ("No offense!"). Schadow, *Der moderne Vasari* 1.

writer, but one reliant on others. In its comic distortion, this motif captures the author's real life dependence on the eyes and hands of others; the mask's closed eyes reflect the blindness that haunted Schadow and forced him to put aside the painter's palette, which hangs here on the back wall. Reasserting once again *The Modern Vasari's* autobiographical character, the mask also refers to another author's autobiographical prose work, namely, the *Düsseldorfer Anfänge: Maskengespräche* (Düsseldorf Beginnings: Masked Conversations) by Karl Leberecht Immermann (1796–1840). First published in 1840 and reprinted as the third part of his *Memorabilia* in 1843, Immermann's work, like Schadow's novel, occupies itself with the Düsseldorf art scene and interjects discussions of art and aesthetics into its narrative. While Immermann had once been Schadow's best friend, his *Maskengespräche* were highly critical of the academy director, and it is not unlikely that Hübner's vignette is meant to mark the novel it adorns as an alternative account to Immermann's version of their communal life. At the time of the novel's first publication, many readers undoubtedly understood this reference.

The vignette's metaphor of masking and unmasking calls for an extensive reflection on its allegorical meaning. Several levels come into view. On the one hand, the putto emerges as a traditional allegory of genius and youth. On the other hand, he embodies a rhetorical strategy, one that seeks to establish an ironic distance to its own central categories. The playfulness he incarnates has two levels of signification. It outlines the thematic field of the romantic novel, playfulness here standing in for concepts such as chaos, arabesque, and fairy tale. In this sense, the vignette enacts as well as marks a moment of self reflexivity, which alerts the reader to the multiple levels of production and interpretation embedded in the book as a whole. At the same time, the putto's playfulness also signals lighthearted entertainment, if not a certain frivolity, which Schadow certainly delivered, or at least tried to deliver, in the novel's love story. To a certain degree, these significations are mutually exclusive, which highlights the productive role assigned to the reader, who is asked to weave together the novel's disparate elements, even if there is neither promise nor true hope of forever dissolving their internal tensions.

The element of romantic irony in Hübner's comic vignettes also becomes manifest in the cherubs' rococo garb, a style the romantics detested. Already on page eight, Schadow launches an invective against this eighteenth century aristocratic style. Woefully, he laments the misguided taste of the revered Prussian king Frederick the Great, whose mind he decries as having been clouded by a regrettable appetite for the French rococo painter Watteau. By making fun of the rococo style as a childish affair that dresses up nature in silly costume, Hübner's vignettes distance their maker and his mentor from the flippancy and superficiality that they associated with the "kecke, ja freche



Viertes Kapitel.

O Kennerschaft! O Kennerschaft!
 Wer einmal die sich angeschafft,
 Der wird gar häufig irr.
 Wenn er den Schnaase und Numohr
 Gelesen, kommt es ihm so vor,
 Als ob er nimmer irr.

Die Bücher sind mit Recht geehrt.
 In allen Stücken wohlgelehrt
 Und voll Philosophie.
 Doch ist es noch nicht ausgemacht,
 Was die Autoren ausgedacht,
 Verleihe das Genie.

Mit festem Blick und klarem Sinn
 Was man zum Urtheil stellet hin,
 Zu richten mit Geschick,
 Hierzu will es ein kluges Haupt;
 Jetzt aber jeder Dummkopf glaubt
 Sich Meister der Kritik.

Fig. 3. Hugo Bürkner after Julius Hübner, *Putto before Easel*. Schadow, *Der moderne Vasari* 96.

Pinselführung” (*The Modern Vasari* 8; “audacious, if not racy brushwork”) of eighteenth century French painters. Hübner’s use of the rococo style translates into visual terms the scorn that Schadow expresses in the novel toward those who consider such facile nothingness “Genialität” (ibid. 8; “geniality”). Behind the humorous façade thus lurks a fundamental critique, for Schadow, like his Nazarene brethren, saw the rococo as the epitome of modern art’s objectionable decadence. The cherubs’ folly forms a counterpoint to the artists’ own striving for a renewal of art on the basis of a return to religion and to the old masters. Yet, despite his ideological accordance with Schadow’s position, Hübner did not pass up the chance to subject the romantic position itself—the novel’s essential arabesque structure—to an ironic unmasking. By parading romantic irony as rococo masquerade, Hübner’s vignettes unveil the intimate connection between romantic arabesque and French *rocaille*, a source resolutely overlooked, if not outright denied by the romantics. In dressing his putti in rococo dress, Hübner adds a level of self-reflexive deconstruction to the romantic claim of aesthetic reform. While affirming the aesthetic positions of the text and the genealogy of art told in it, his vignettes also undermine their stability.

MIMESIS AND ILLUSION

Hübner’s erudition and wit peak in the vignette on page ninety six, which introduces chapter four. This design is perhaps art historically the most pertinent among the illustrations (fig. 3). It is the prelude to a poem, which mocks the arrogance of those self-declared connoisseurs whose expertise rests solely on reading cursorily around in art history, and Schadow names here two famous representatives of the field, Karl Schnaase (1798–1875) and Karl Friedrich von Rumohr (1785–1843). The glasses on the putto’s nose immediately denounce him as somebody whose vision is blurred. Since the Middle Ages, glasses often denoted those who seek to enhance their physical sight, but remain spiritually blind. In a religious context, this kind of merely mechanical seeing was often associated with the Jews; in the secular world of art, the motif became a common trope for the ignorance of the critic. Accordingly, Hübner’s putto stares intently at the picture in front of him, his hands folded across his knee as a sign of his attentiveness; yet stricken with ignorance, self-deception, and a fatuous mind, even such a concerted effort will not help him to understand the true meaning of art, nor will the reading material that serves as his throne. Moreover, the cherub’s outfit betrays the obsolescence and falsity of his evaluative criteria; proudly dressed up in the insignia of an

eighteenth century aristocrat – épée, dandy’s cape, and a pompous powdered wig – he stands for the philistine critic who rejects romantic art. But Hübner’s vignette has more to offer than a witty spoof on shallow amateurs and salon visitors. It also contains an astute commentary on the nature of art, its power to deceive, and its relationship to spiritual truth.

For centuries, debates over the essence of art had evolved around the relationship between reality and image, between mimesis and invention. In Hübner’s design, the shadow becomes a powerful metaphor for the act of transformation implicit in this relationship and the act of art making. The first slippage occurs between the putto’s face and its shadow; given the angle of figure and easel, the strict profile view is at odds with the putto’s positioning. Yet not only that; while the putto seems cheery and mellow, his shadowy *ef figy* utters a scream of great horror. As disgust distorts the facial features of the silhouette, the face also ages, leaving behind the image of an elderly man. Two things, then, come into play here, and both center on the mimetic nature of the visual arts: the allusion to the origins of art in outline drawing and the role of illusionism for the efficacy of art.

The origins of art are evoked by a classic trope, the profile view cast in shadow onto the canvas, which alludes to a famous legend recorded by Pliny the Elder (Rose and Zangs 155). In an act of love, a Corinthian maid, Dibutade, outlined the shadow of her sleeping lover, about to depart, onto the wall behind him so that she might enjoy his image whilst he was gone. Schadow’s attentive reader will immediately recognize this reference, as the story is already presented on page forty as part of a theatrical performance, albeit with reversed gender roles. As if reflecting on this staging of Pliny’s legend, Hübner’s visual rendition adds a further dimension to the myth. Folded into his evocation of Pliny is a reference to the fashion of silhouettes and cut outs, which at the end of the eighteenth century had emerged as a favorite pastime and a skillful method of commemoration. Evoking the performance of art as a parlor game, Hübner gestures toward another form of entertainment, the *tableau vivant*, which takes up ample space in Schadow’s frame story. The vignette thereby speaks to Schadow’s ambivalence *vis à vis* the transformation of art into amusement. Seeing the significance of this form of entertainment for securing the art community’s social standing, Schadow was an active facilitator of *tableaux vivants*. Yet at the same time, he condemned such parlor games as mindless diversions that distract from a more serious engagement with art. Hübner’s vignette embodies this ambiguity, itself mixing critique with complicity.

Turning now to the question of art’s efficacy, we have to decode the vignette’s illusionistic references. Here, the putto’s horror draws our attention to the image of the insect, which crawls along the canvas’s surface, thus

defacing what seems to be the head of a young woman bathed in the glow of a radiant nimbus. The identity of the small insect is far from unambiguous. Is it a fly? Or is it rather the shadow of the bee that hovers above the canvas as if it wants to have a closer look at the figure outlined on the white surface? Lately, Margaret Rose and Gabriele Zangs have seen in the shadow a bee (156). I, however, perceive the black mark as a fly, and I would propose that the relation between bee and its fly like counter image embodies the same kind of negative inversion that occurs in the translation of the putto's smiling face into its horrified shadow silhouette. Applying a lesson from Hadrianus Junius's 1565 *Emblemata*, the relationship between bee and fly could be interpreted as the opposition of *ingenuus candor* (sincere, genuine candor) and *obtrectatio* (jealousy, envious disparagement). According to Junius's emblem, the bee, which draws sweet honey from bitter thyme, symbolizes that candor befits the learned, while the dark fly, which sucks pus from a horse's abscesses, embodies the resentful jealousy that suits the enviers (Henkel and Schöne 919).⁴ But once again, the interpretative possibilities are not exhausted with this explanation.

Following the transformation of bee into fly, the question arises why the silhouette is so dismayed. On the simplest level, the appalled reaction reflects a common behavior vis à vis an animal familiar to everybody as a pest. On a more sophisticated level, however, the fly is also an emblem of artistic skill, of the artist's ability to create illusions. This iconographic connotation of the fly brings us back to the core of Pliny's legend, the invention of the mimetic arts or, put differently, to the question of the role of mimesis in the visual arts. For the Renaissance, the life like fly became what Zeuxis's grapes had been for Pliny: the epitome of mastering the art of illusion (Land). Thus, Schadow's famous model, Giorgio Vasari, illustrates Giotto's supreme naturalism and superiority over his master, Cimabue, through an anecdote about a painted fly: as a young man, Giotto "once painted on the nose of a figure, which Cimabue had completed, a fly so natural looking that the master, returning to continue the work, tried more than once to chase the fly away with his hand, thinking it was real, before he realized his error" (Land 13). If Vasari showed off Giotto's technical abilities and humor, Antonio Averlino, better known as Il Filarete, used the anecdote to demonstrate the superiority of Renaissance over ancient painting. While Zeuxis had been able to fool birds into mistaking his grapes for real ones, Giotto could even dupe people (Land 14). This emphasis on painting's capacity to deceive is, of course, part of Schadow's insistence on naturalism in art, in particular his partisanship for color. Hübner's iconography, too, affirms the value of painting's illusory powers, which more radically idealist members of the Nazarene movement vehemently renounced. For artists such as Peter Cornelius (1783–1867) or



Fig. 4. Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869), *Charter of the Brotherhood of St. Luke* (detail), 1809. Etching, 25.4 x 43.3 cm. Lübeck: Bibliothek der Hansestadt.

Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869), the genres of drawing and cartoon represented the supreme expression of the idea, the essential epitome of the creative process, and thus the carrier of art's moral, ideal core. Schadow, by contrast, saw the creative process as only completed after the last dab of color had been applied. Of course, Schadow's insistence on painting's sensual qualities was still indebted to the Nazarenes' religious mission. And befitting Schadow's piety, Hübner's illusionistic play indeed has a religious dimension as well. This layer of religious meaning is once again inscribed in (and by) the

iconography of bee and fly; but this time, meaning is not embedded in the relationship of the insects to each other, but in their function as attributes of the female figure, whose contours are reluctantly emerging on the virginal canvas.

THE MADONNA AND THE FLY

The putto's black silhouette has such a stark presence that most viewers will only slowly register the canvas's actual motif, barely visible in the upper portion of the canvas: a female head surrounded by a halo of light rays. At first, an identification of the mysterious motif seems impossible; too faint are the outlines, too fragmented the body. Yet, to the adventurous interpreter, the two flying insects might again provide the iconographical key. Here, we have to go back to the Renaissance fascination with the life like fly. The artist who was perhaps the most captivated by the *trompe l'œil* representation of the small bug was Carlo Crivelli (c.1430/35 c.1495). Flies appear in several of his paintings of saints, most notably in a *Madonna and Child* of 1480 in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.⁵ Is Hübner's unidentified bodiless woman thus a Madonna? The presence of a bee supports this identification, as this industrious, productive insect is a common attribute for the Madonna. Yet even together these allusions might be little more than mere conjecture, were it not for the ox, which leisurely stretches out behind the easel. Its halo identifies the creature clearly since it is the attribute of St. Luke, patron saint of painters and eponym of the *Lukasbund* ("Brotherhood of St. Luke"), that artist fraternity of German expatriates in Rome that shaped Schadow's formative years. Hübner's ox is a direct quote from the *Lukasbund*'s signet (fig. 4). In a final twist, Hübner's vignette thus evokes Schadow's dedication to and battle for religious art through an allusion to the legendary portrait session that the Madonna allegedly granted the evangelist. Yet, once again, it seems insufficient to read the image in strictly biographical terms. If we follow the logic embedded in the emblem on the book's front page, we have to read the particular in relation to the general; thus, the reference to Schadow's crusade for modern religious art might also contain an overarching message. I would like to suggest that this message asserts art's capacities to create religious meaning through material form. In Hübner's hands, illusionism becomes a crucial element in evoking the divine.

Coming back to the Madonna and the fly, the important lesson we can learn from the games played by Crivelli and Hübner lies in their insistence on a close link between the playful deception of the eye and the observer's religious experience. Let us dwell on this idea for a moment. The master of

all flies is Beelzebub, which in Hebrew means “lord of the flies.” His subjects are often a plague upon God’s people, as in Exodus 8:21–22, where a swarm of flies descends upon Egypt. Thus, if Crivelli’s viewers, duped by his brilliant illusionism, try to shoo the illusionist fly away, they try to brush aside the devil as well. “Crivelli then,” as Norman Land has suggested,

invests the Plinian topos—which we may call *deceptio* or ‘fooling the viewer’—with a new gravity and a new meaning; the Plinian cliché attains a theological significance appropriate to the image of the Madonna and Child. Moreover, in both a spiritual and physical way, the picture compels our participation in its illusion. As the viewer physically attempts to brush the fly away, there emerges between him and the painting a deep sense of spiritual communion. We participate in the painting and commune with it by rejecting the arch deceiver, Satan, in the form of the fly, which, in turn, has deceived our eyes. (Land 14–15)

The possibility of such communion also motivated Schadow to insist on the corporeality of painting, even if his ideas of realism were far less radical than those of a Crivelli or the Northern Renaissance.

ON ILLEGIBILITY

Uncovering the multiple layers of meaning detectable in Hübner’s vignette, the interpreter becomes inevitably aware of the image’s instability, or perhaps better its mutability, its constantly changing character. Rather than projecting the discovery of one ultimate truth, Hübner’s allegories suggest a variety of explanations that do not cancel each other out, but coexist. The playfulness of the vignettes thereby acts out the meaning of “illusion” that is embedded in the word’s Latin root: *ludere*, to play. Inevitably, the insight into the image’s instability also raises a question about the limits of our interpretation. To what extent does Hübner’s humorous fly sustain the level of deep allegorical reading that I have presented so far? I do not think there is an ultimate answer to this question. Indeed, the vignettes’ subversive charm derives precisely from a vibrant oscillation between emblematic depth and lighthearted amusement. Certainly, many of *The Modern Vasari*’s contemporary readers would have overlooked the complexity of its illustrations. They might have been inclined to look at the book’s droll embellishment through the lens of pocket calendars and literary almanacs, seeing nothing more in Hübner’s inventions than comical, purely decorative ornaments. But even if the sensitive reader grasped their function as an ironic trope, as a topsy turvy world of satire, the need for an expansive iconographical knowledge might still have prevented their successful decoding.

The many twists that our interpretation of Hübner's parodic vignettes has taken are a striking testimony to their complexity. Indeed, they manipulate an astounding repertoire of iconographic traditions, which in turn means that their wit and critical potential rely upon our ability to recognize the fireworks of references. But, as Schadow remarks in the novel, the familiarity with these centuries old systems of pictorial communication had waned in the modern age. In his *Modern Vasari*, he addresses the breakdown of a unified basis of cultural knowledge that, as he observes, has resulted in the incapacity of modern audiences to comprehend allegories and iconographic schemata (Schadow, *The Modern Vasari* 154–55). As a recent example, he points to the fresco cycle for Berlin's Altes Museum conceived by the city's star architect cum painter, Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841). When *The Modern Vasari* appeared, the project had been underway for more than ten years. Musing on Schinkel's attempt to represent the development of the human spirit in the garb of ancient Greek myth, Schadow concludes that antiquity as a source for public imagery has been exhausted (Schadow, *The Modern Vasari* 152). Yet, he confesses that he has no convincing alternative to offer, now that Christianity, too, has ceased to be the fabric of all experience.

A funny anecdote from the novel's frame story illustrates the problem of the audience's visual illiteracy. Excited about a grand festivity in honor of a visit by the Prussian king, the family of the honorable "Regierungssekretär R" ("Government Secretary R") is busy with preparations to participate in one of the planned tableaux vivants. The daughters, Henriette (alias Jette) and Gustchen, are asked to depict "horae" (Schadow, *The Modern Vasari* 38), but do not know what or who they are. The mother tries patiently to explain the ancient myth to her daughters but to no avail. Neither of the girls seems able to understand "wie eine Person eine Stunde oder eine Stunde eine Person vorstellen könne" (ibid., "how a human being can represent an hour, or an hour a human being"). In exhaustion, the mother states that "solcher Unsinn käme in keines Regierungsbeamten Kopf, und könne nur von alten Heiden und jungen Malern erfunden werden" (ibid., "such nonsense could never enter the mind of a state official, and could only have been invented by old pagans or young artists").

Schadow's account raises the fundamental issue of whether the entire system of allegorical signification was doomed to collapse. Not surprisingly, much of Nazarene practice was dedicated to providing explanatory frame works that might stop this process and secure a basic pictorial language that provided somewhat stable means of communication. Indeed, Schadow's novel is driven by an urge to stabilize meaning; it ultimately seeks to restructure the arabesque as a binding agent inverting its original character as a provocative means that undermines the stability of meaning (Grewe, "Objektivitierte Subjektivität"). At the core of *The Modern Vasari* lies a paradox: on the

one hand, the novel's structure and the logic of its illustration acknowledge that the production of fixed signification is impossible, and they make creative use of this insight. On the other hand, the interplay of text and image simultaneously seeks to construct exactly the kind of stabilizing systems it has postulated do not exist.

EPILOG: THE MODERN VASARI AS COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

In January 1854 Schadow wrote to Julius Hübner how delighted he was that his friend thought of his "Novellen Publication als *unser* Unternehmen" (Schadow, 18 January 1854; "novella publication as *our* project"; original emphasis); for, he added, "ich mache gern mit dir Compagnie" (ibid.; "I'm happy to join forces with you"). Schadow's comment drives home the notion of *The Modern Vasari* as a collaborative work. As such, the illustrations do not just illustrate but rather enhance, shape, and restructure the text they accompany. The correspondence between Schadow and Hübner highlights the active, independent, and determining role that Hübner played in the development of the individual motifs and their stylistic idiom as well as the entire layout of Schadow's text. The fusion of text and image thus enacted the ideal of the medieval workshop held dear by the *Lukasbund* and the wider Nazarene movement alike. The combination of different hands and authorships, as well as their technical execution, into one perfectly integrated product was thus not merely a default, but a consciously anti capitalist model of non alienated work, which even implicated the participant with the least creative part of the production, Hugo Bürkner.

As the product of a close friendship and intellectual collaboration, Hübner's illustrations represent a series of empathetic and insightful reactions to an existing narrative. While they work with Schadow's ideas and reinforce certain aspects of the narrative and are informed by art theoretical discussions, they also develop an independent life. They punctuate the novel in an uneven rhythm that highlights the text's arabesque structure and heightens the awareness of the text as a loosely connected hodgepodge of diverse literary pieces. At the same time, the illustrations slow down the reading process, as they call for prolonged study. By forming a particular connection with the poems they are paired with, the vignettes become nodal points of intensified word image relations that propel the story forward, while simultaneously holding it back, turning back on itself. This structural significance of Hübner's pictorial interventions is reinforced by their function as a metatext, which comments upon the aesthetic positions established in the text. The vignettes enact the kind of

self reflexivity typical for the romantic arabesque; but now, the reflection of the text upon itself is replaced by a reflection of the visual upon the written word. At the same time, the satirical note of Hübner's vignettes is central to steady the novel's comic and cheerful tone, which Schadow's tendency to melancholy and depression repeatedly threatens to undermine.

Schadow emerges from his novel as a remnant of a bygone age. Nostalgia for the past and a tenacious adherence to the romantic idealism of his youth breathe through the moments when he speaks in the novel. Certainly, he is determined to look upon the development of art with the milder and more universal attitude which he deems characteristic of the aged, and to avoid the impatient intolerant one sidedness of youth (Schadow, *The Modern Vasari* 2). Nevertheless, the remarks of Schadow's alter ego "the Alte" divulge a deep rooted melancholy, even bitterness, mixed in with hardly suppressed resentment towards his critics. The vignettes help to stabilize the ironic component of Schadow's frame story, while aiding Schadow's intention to use the arabesque as a means of reinforcing (rather than questioning) the novel's underlying ideology, from the insistence on "naturalist idealism" to the propagating of religion and a conservative social structure. While the selection of portraits was the publisher's, the vignettes embody Hübner's most personal response to the manuscript he was proofreading. They provide a running commentary and creative intervention that not only reinforce but also reshape both content and narrative structure. In this sense, they are integral to the effect and meaning of the novel; in the end, *The Modern Vasari* shows that a text is more than merely a printed version of a manuscript. The history of the book is, Schadow's work asserts, a collaborative story.

NOTES

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- 1 Although Schadow himself calls his work a “novella,” I refer to it as a novel, as this category is more in step with the period’s genre definitions. As an amateur poet, Schadow did not seem precise in his use of terminology.
- 2 The artists selected were Asmus Jakob Carstens, John Flaxman, Antonio Canova, Johann Gottfried Schadow, Bertel Thorvaldsen, Peter Cornelius, Johann Friedrich Overbeck, Christian Daniel Rauch, and Rudolf Schadow. The spelling of the wood engraver’s name varies, appearing as both Bürkner and Bürckner.
- 3 The vignettes appear on the first page, followed by Carstens (11), Flaxman (18), Canova (21), and Johann Gottfried Schadow (23).
- 4 Exsorbet sanie[m] hulcerum atra musca:
Mel dulce haurit ap[er]is thymo ex amaro.
Doctos ingenuus decere candor,
Obtrectatio liuidos putatur.
- 5 Tempera and gold on wood; overall 37.8 x 25.4 cm; painted surface 36.5 x 23.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum, New York, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7.5). For an image see www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/european_paintings/Madonna_and_Child/viewObject.aspx?&OID=110000489&PgSz=1.

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The “Inscapes” of Louis le Brocquy

Karen E. Brown

For me, as perhaps for our Celtic and Gallic ancestors, the human head can be regarded ambivalently as a box which holds the spirit prisoner, but which may also free it transparently within the face. Paradoxically, as we know, the face is at once a mask which hides the spirit and a revelation, an incarnation of this spirit. (le Brocquy, “Notes,” qtd. in Walker, 147)

In 1964, painter and illustrator Louis le Brocquy (b. Dublin, 1916) “discovered” Polynesian ancestral skulls displayed in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. The skulls are over modelled in clay often with cowrie shells inserted for eyes, and the artist described them as being “painted ritualistically to contain the spirit” (le Brocquy, *The Head Image* 7, 22). A year afterwards le Brocquy drew an analogy between them and the head cult of Celto Ligurian origin which had been practiced near Aix en Provence, in Irish mythology such as the story of *The Táin*, and in archaeological sites such as the carved portal heads at Dysert O’Dea (le Brocquy, *The Head Image* 22; Walker 51; Kinsella).¹ From 1968, the artist developed the head image in book illustration, tapestries, and “studies towards” portraits of leading Irish literary and cultural figures including W. B. Yeats (1865–1939), James Joyce (1882–1941), and Samuel Beckett (1906–89; figs. 1–3). My response to these head images has led me to refer to them in the title of this essay as “inscapes.” This was a term used by the English Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89)² which resonates with le Brocquy’s “revelations” encapsulated in the quotation above. In his writings le Brocquy frequently uses metaphors derived from landscape and archaeology to describe the conception of his head images. For example, “As I conceive it, there lies behind the face an interior landscape which the painter tries to discover” (le Brocquy, “Notes,” qtd. in Walker, 147), and, “I think of the painter as a kind of archaeologist, ... patiently disturbing the surface of things” (le Brocquy, *The Head Image* 24). In works such as figs. 1–3 these concepts are rich: each of the faces is rendered in oils on a white canvas background, and paint is applied with flicks and jabs, the brush often loaded with several bright colors. Interestingly, in a discussion about his landscape paintings in watercolor, le Brocquy stated that he had painted more head images in watercolor than in



Fig. 1. Louis le Brocqy (b. 1916), *Image of William Butler Yeats*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 93 x 73 cm. Cork: Crawford Municipal Art Gallery. © The artist. Courtesy of Pierre le Brocqy.

oils, and that this experience had helped him to “release” his oil paintings (le Brocqy, *The Irish Landscape* 10). In a work such as *Image of William Butler Yeats* (1994; fig. 1) this “release” is apparent in the brush strokes around the contours of the face, in lost and found edges around the sides of the face, and in the areas of thick impasto which add a third dimension to the image.

Art historians, critics, and poets including Anne Crookshank, Dorothy Walker, Anne Madden, Seamus Heaney, and John Montague have written eloquently about the artist’s head images.³ However, in the light of recent

inquiries in art history, Irish studies, and word and image studies, it is timely to explore an interdisciplinary analysis of verbal and visual relationships in them.⁴ This involves applying the "indiscipline" described by W. J. T. Mitchell to le Brocquy's work.⁵ Scholars working in the fields of Irish literary and cultural studies today are very aware of hegemonic narratives in Irish history and literature,⁶ and I contend that the interpretation of le Brocquy's work has been in part a narrative construct, and that the creation of this narrative has been simultaneously verbal and visual in its inner workings. To apply Mitchell's "indiscipline" to le Brocquy's case study therefore creates a "moment of breakage or rupture" (Mitchell 541) in existing scholarship, and allows recent developments in disciplines most often related to literature to have a bearing on how we understand these images. To demonstrate this, I will examine le Brocquy's responses to Irish literary figures by carrying out (to borrow the artist's own metaphor) an "archaeological" (le Brocquy, *The Head Images* 10, 24; *Images* 14) survey of both his head images and his words. This will reveal le Brocquy's process of selection from the work of Irish writers, and expose constructs of Celticism, nationalism, and modernism in his work.

Le Brocquy's first head images were of ancestral Irish figures, with titles such as *Ancestral Head* (1964) and *Reconstructed Head of an Irish Martyr* (1967).⁷ But following a commission from the Swedish gallery owner Per Olov Børjeson in 1975 to contribute to a portfolio of thirty three aquatints of Nobel Prize winners by thirty three artists, le Brocquy began to focus on portraits of Yeats (fig. 1). In a series of essays and interviews he recorded his working method, stating that he painted from memory and from hundreds of photographs of the poet, attempting to conjure up a mental image.⁸ He then transposed this image onto canvas, trying to find a spiritual quality; a "Yeatsiness, an essence of Yeats" (*Images* 13). He compared the process to summoning the spirits of the dead (*Images* 15), an appropriate analogy in view of Yeats's spiritualism and affiliation with the Order of the Golden Dawn.⁹

Richard Ellmann has recorded the many changes in Yeats's style, method and personality during his lifetime, and le Brocquy probably struggled with these constant shifts, seeing a definitive portrait of the poet as almost impossible. This is evidenced by his showing of one hundred "portraits imaginaires" (le Brocquy, *À La Recherche*; "imaginary portraits") of Yeats in a Paris exhibition of 1976. When faced with a head image of Yeats, viewers immediately recognize a ghost like quality. The head emerges from its white background as if from another world, lacking focus, definition, or color; a transitory image capable of disappearance. In synaesthetic terms, it could be argued that this is an attempted re enactment of the poet's writings by the artist, and by turning to the artist's essays we find some evidence of this. Le Brocquy writes about the "profoundly Celtic sense" of time consciousness

in Yeats's work, and how he reincarnates the head image from the Celtic or "Gallic" world into modern day portraits (le Brocquy, "Notes," qtd. in Walker, 143, 147).¹⁰

Throughout his career, Yeats made a systematic study of ancient Irish literature; he was initiated into theosophy, and sourced his creativity from the *Anima Mundi* (Foster, *The Arch Poet* 161, 313, 345) of his ancient Irish ancestors. During the Irish Celtic Revival, his cultural nationalism was a reaction to the modernization and urbanization of Ireland.¹¹ In complicity with Yeats, le Brocquy linked ancient Irish occult practices with the twentieth century Irish poets' and artists' ability to summon the spirit of their ancestors in a work of art, and described his painting technique as "images jerked into coherence by a series of scrutinized accidents" (le Brocquy, "Notes," qtd. in Walker, 152).

However, Yeats's system is perhaps more historical and dialectic than le Brocquy suggests. Today's critical Irish reader is aware of the "Celticism" at work in Revivalist writers such as Yeats's associates Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932) and George Russell (AE; 1867–1935). More recently, Brown and Mattar have addressed the issue of how Revivalist writers adapted ideas to serve their own aesthetic and ideological pursuits¹² and both authors draw special attention to Yeats's "proper dark" (W. B. Yeats, "The Statues" line 31). For example, Brown discusses the interrelationship between occultism, cultural nationalism, and the limits of reason in "The Statues" (Brown, *Celticism* 221–30),¹³ and Mattar draws attention to the role of comparative anthropology in the poet's work, including Sir James Fraser's *The Golden Bough* (Mattar 63–82). A discussion which polarizes transitional Irish poetry into the categories "national" and "modern" is therefore too simplistic, largely owing to aspects of Yeats's later oeuvre, including his search for the primitive, and the consciousness with which he linked Irish art to that of other countries in Europe (Brown, "Ireland, Modernism" 36–37; Gillis 141–209).¹⁴ These aspects align Yeats's work with preoccupations of modernism, and could suggest that le Brocquy's reading of the poet is a little benign, carrying the legacy of Revivalist ideals into the latter half of the twentieth century.

However by combining themes from Yeats's early literature with his own, modernist style, le Brocquy was drawing the reader/viewer's attention in particular to the modern potential of the poet's writings through the integration of text and image. Le Brocquy's head images fuse Celticism (the "Celtic" head, spiritualism) and modern painting (departure from Renaissance perspective, experimental painting technique). And he justified this fusion in his essays and interviews by tracing "repetition" and "circular thought" in Irish texts and images from *The Book of Kells* (c. 800 A.D.), in which spiralling, insular illustration is intrinsic to the text, to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (begun 1922), in which Joyce departs from traditional linear narrative (*The Head Image*

7). Furthermore, in his essay entitled "Notes on Painting and Awareness," le Brocquy created links between Yeats and Joyce, breaking down poetic paradigms of "traditional vs. modern," and founding his theories on their use of a cyclical notion of time which he saw as rooted in their Irish heritage:

Elsewhere is not Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* compared to Finn Macool lying beside the Liffey, his head in Howth, his feet in Phoenix Park, his wife beside him, watching the microcosmic "fluid succession of presents" go by like a river of life? (le Brocquy "Notes," qtd. in Walker, 142)

Le Brocquy's work therefore invites an analysis of how Yeats's Revivalism compares with Joyce's reaction to (or against) it. Joyce, like Beckett, is most often read as exploring language and personal identity in reaction against the Celtic Revival, cultural nationalism, and parochialism in Irish literature. As Ezra Pound (1885–1972) said in response to Joyce's *Dubliners*:

One is so tired of the Irish or "Celtic" imagination ... Mr Joyce ... is not an institution for the promotion of Irish peasant industries. He accepts an international standard of prose writing and lives up to it. ... He gives us things as they are, not only for Dublin, but for every city. (qtd. in Deming, 67)

So, how did le Brocquy adapt his painting and form his theories in response to the experimental literature of Joyce?¹⁵

Like Joyce, le Brocquy spent most of his working life living in voluntary exile, and he also attempted to define his Irish identity by employing Stephen Dedalus's method of "silence, exile, and cunning" (Joyce, *Portrait* 269). Whilst Joyce dedicated himself to aesthetic modernism, he remained preoccupied with his youth and with Dublin. Similarly, le Brocquy developed a consciousness of Irish identity abroad and experimented with modernist techniques.¹⁶ To quote Stuart Gilbert in reference to Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922):

The meaning of *Ulysses* ... is not to be sought in any analysis of the acts of the protagonists or in the mental make up of the characters; it is, rather, implicit in the technique of the various episodes, in the nuances of language, in the thousand and one correspondences and allusions with which the book is studded. (Gilbert 20)

Le Brocquy was not interested in creating a naturalistic, traditional form of portraiture. When we look carefully at a head image by le Brocquy such as *Study Towards an Image of James Joyce* (fig. 2), we notice that the work seems to evolve from the centre outwards, that there are no clearly defined outlines; no beginning or end. As with his head image of Yeats, we are unusually conscious of tensions between fine detail and heavy impasto; we are drawn into and around the image until realization emerges. Le Brocquy was still preoccupied with inducing the "accidental" discovery of an image, calling himself an "archaeologist of the spirit" (*Images* 24) and he said that the quality he admired most in painters was "*stamina*. ... The absolutely necessary commitment of



Fig. 2. Louis le Brocquy, *Study Towards an Image of James Joyce* (detail), c. 1977. Oil on canvas, 70.3 x 70 cm. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast. Image courtesy of Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland. © The artist. Courtesy of Pierre le Brocquy.

the painter to his material, in which he can die into his material” (*Images* 62; original emphasis). Following a period of reflection on his subject matter, le Brocquy becomes merely a channel for a spiritual form of painting, creating a “revelation ... essentially the showing forth of an idea already latent in the mind” (le Brocquy, *The Head Image* 8). This insistence on accident and discovery is reminiscent of the Joycean universal “epiphany” or moment of spiritual revelation,¹⁷ a “showing forth”:

But to me, a Dublin man peering at Joyce, a particular nostalgia is added to the universal "epiphany" and this perhaps enables me to grope for something of my own particular experience within the ever changing landscape of his face, within the various and contradictory photographs of his head, within my bronze death mask of him and, I suppose, within the recesses of my own mind. (le Brocqy, "Notes," qtd. in Walker, 151)

In his early career, Joyce was under the influence of the Jesuit teaching he had received during his school and college years, in particular the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), Walter Pater (1839–94), and Hopkins.¹⁸ Thomistic aesthetics demonstrates that through our experiences of beauty in the world we can comprehend the beauty of God, and indeed le Brocqy stated that it was through Joyce that he came to understand Aquinas's maxim on beauty: "Aquinas says: *ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur integritas, consonantia, claritas*. I translate it so: Three things are needed for beauty; wholeness, harmony and radiance" (Joyce, *Portrait* 229; le Brocqy, "Notes," qtd. in Walker 136–38). In Joyce's *Stephen Hero* (1904–05) we see the most sustained development of the Joycean epiphany fictionalized in the experience of the protagonist,¹⁹ and in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) epiphanies occur to Stephen Dedalus at significant points along his spiritual development. Stephen explains:

The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing. ... The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure ... the enchantment of the heart. (Joyce, *Portrait* 231; original emphasis)²⁰

Le Brocqy, on translating this idea into his *painting*, referred to his method of "groping and watching ... you want to discover, to uncover, to reveal" (*Images* 63), and also stated, "The hand can act as an independent being to bring about the emergence of the image. ... There is a brain in the hand" (le Brocqy, "Notes," qtd. in Walker, 149). His portraits of Joyce may therefore be understood as "inscapes," for the artist carefully charts a "spiritual manifestation" (Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 216); from initial tactile experience, to analytical reflection, to an experience of wholeness and beauty.

Thus le Brocqy theorizes confidently about the nature of the aesthetic image, basing his theories on the early writings of Joyce. Nevertheless, it is necessary to ask if le Brocqy's paintings truly re-enact the Joycean epiphany. On studying Joyce's head image (fig. 2), the viewer may not recognize qualities of "wholeness, harmony and radiance," indeed the head remains out of focus. The act of seeing is an involved process of signification, functioning through a complex interplay of memory and visual experience, and so a person familiar with Joyce's literature would be more likely to "see" as the artist intended.



Fig. 3. Louis le Brocquy, *Study Toward an Image of Samuel Beckett* (detail), 1979. Oil on canvas, 79 x 79 cm. Dublin: Trinity College Dublin. © The artist. Courtesy of Pierre le Brocquy.

Importantly, in both Joyce's and le Brocquy's work, the text and the image are foregrounded, creating a self conscious, experimental idiom which departs from naturalism. But it is debatable whether le Brocquy's portrayal of Joyce evokes a synaesthesia of word and image.

The role of memory in le Brocquy's head images is also important in understanding his portraits of Beckett. He began to paint head images of Beckett in the 1970s and they are arguably his most powerful works, partly because of Beckett's well structured features, but also, importantly, because they were close friends. In *Study Toward an Image of Samuel Beckett* (fig. 3), for example, the brush strokes create strong, almost faceted verticals, horizontals, and diagonals, which lead us inexorably to focus on Beckett's right eye, the "window" to his soul. Beckett saw rupture as an important element in modern writing,

linking it to what he called a "rupture of the lines of communication" be cause of the breakdown of subject and/or object (Beckett, *Disjecta* 70-76). And le Brocquy employed this idea when he wrote of Beckett's awareness of "the space which intervenes between (the artist) and the world of objects" (le Brocquy, "Notes," qtd. in Walker, 149).²¹

The strongest point of convergence between the work of le Brocquy and Beckett, however, seems to lie in the idea of the essential isolation of the human individual, which includes the limitations of language (or paint for that matter) to communicate fully with another person. This theme runs through out le Brocquy's work, from one of his first portraits, *Caroline* (1956),²² of a child with Down's syndrome, to images centering on the human torso (generally female) such as *Woman* (1959),²³ to his later exploration of the head image. Alienation also permeates Beckett's writing. In *Waiting for Godot* (1948), for example, there is a breakdown in communication between Vladimir and Estragon, and it manifests itself again in the doubling subjectivity of *Stirrings Still* (1988; "One night as he sat at his table head on hands he saw himself rise and go"). By considering le Brocquy's career and focusing on his head images, I have traced the shifts in his work under the influence of three of Ireland's greatest writers. Similar developments are apparent in his illustrative work, as he progresses from an illustration characterized as objective, descriptive, and an appendage to the text (Montague, *A Chosen Light*), to a more spontaneous technique (Joyce, *Dubliners*), to a more abstracted style of illustration, springing from the text and standing in relation to it (Beckett, *Stirrings Still*; Oppenheim 181). Anne Madden writes about the latter:

Most of the drawings vibrate with a displacement and reappearance of the interior self. ... The most moving, to me, are the ones of Sam in layers, one self and another, onion like, and at the very end of the book the empty husk, like a spiritual black hole. (Madden 269)

This critical re appraisal of le Brocquy's "inscapes" in terms of word and image relationships reveals that the artist has understood but at times manipulated his readings of Irish writers, adapting their theories to his own aesthetic and ideological purposes. In the case of Yeats, le Brocquy concentrated on his early work, harboring and developing ideas surrounding Celtic Revivalism. With Joyce, le Brocquy also looked principally to the writer's early work, adopting the idea of the universal "epiphany" in the realization of his images. And finally with Beckett, le Brocquy's involvement became intensified, and it is perhaps in this mature phase that le Brocquy comes closest to creating a new space, existing as "shadows thrown by the text" (Joyce, *Dubliners*, "Artist's Note"), situated between word and image and approaching an "Irish synaesthetic."

NOTES

- 1 Dysert O'Dea in Co. Clare, Ireland is the site of a Romanesque church with or nate head carvings on the doorway.
- 2 "I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it" (Hopkins 161).
- 3 Walker's book includes essays by Earnán O'Malley, Jacques Dupin, Claude Esteban, Seamus Heaney, an introduction by John Russell, and an extensive bibliography on le Brocquy.
- 4 A critical re appraisal of le Brocquy's work in its post colonial context has been initiated by Róisín Kennedy in her recent article "Made in England."
- 5 Mitchell explains: "If a discipline is a way of insuring the continuity of a set of collective practices (technical, social, professional, etc.), 'indiscipline' is a moment of breakage or rupture, when the continuity is broken and the practice comes into question" (Mitchell 541).
- 6 In recent years Irish studies have in particular debated the use of post colonial discourse in an Irish context. See for example Deane; Gibbons; Leerssen; Lloyd; Eagleton; Foster, *Paddy*; Longley, *The Living Stream* "Introduction: Revising Irish Literature"; Gillis. Cullen advocates the study of Irish art in terms of its colonial past, and dialogues between Irish studies and history of art have been debated at the Association of Art Historians conference "Contestations," University of Ulster, April 2007.
- 7 Louis le Brocquy, *Ancestral Head*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Coll. of the artist; Louis le Brocquy, *Reconstructed Head of an Irish Martyr*, 1967. Oil on canvas 130 x 91 cm. Washington, D. C.: Hirshhorn Museum.
- 8 See in particular the interviews reproduced in Walker; *Images*; le Brocquy, *The Head Image*. Le Brocquy met the poet Yeats as a child through his mother, Sibyl le Brocquy.
- 9 Foster's two volume biography of Yeats details Yeats and his wife George's affiliation with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. See in particular Foster, *Apprentice Mage* 101–07 for a discussion of the poet's involvement with the Order in 1880s and 1890s London.
- 10 Yeats also showed an interest in the head in his writings. See, for example, W. B. Yeats, "A Bronze Head" (*The Collected Works* 340).
- 11 See W. B. Yeats, "The Statues," lines 28–32 (*The Collected Works* 336–37).
- 12 Other recent scholarship on the Irish Celtic Revival includes Leerssen, Murphy and FitzSimon (eds.), and Matthews. For an overview of recent scholarship on the Irish Literary Revival, see Longley, "Not guilty?"

- 13 "what can seem a benign Celticism, blending cultural nationalism and occult imaging, can mask something altogether more sinister: ... something awesome out of the racial dark" (Brown, *Celticism* 230).
- 14 In their studies of 1930s Irish poetry, Brown and Gillis break down this paradigm by attempting to establish the socio cultural construction of modernism. Both agree that, by the 1930s, Yeats complicates the issue by moving away from the Celtic Revival ideals in literature.
- 15 For an exploration of Joyce's relationship with the visual arts, see Lerm Hayes.
- 16 "It is said that no one from that city [Dublin] can escape its microcosmic world, and I am no exception. Joyce is the apotheosis, the archetype of our kind and it seems to me that in him behind the volatile arrangement of his features lies his unique evocation of that small city, large as life and therefore poignant everywhere" (le Brocquy, "Notes," qtd. in Walker, 151).
- 17 "Epiphany," translated from the Greek as "a showing forth." In theology, the Epiphany refers to the presentation of the infant Jesus to the three wise men in the manger, when the men recognised him as the son of God.
- 18 Valéry Larbaud reports that Joyce spent his evenings in Paris in the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève reading St. Thomas and Aristotle. See Noon 34.
- 19 "By epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, ... He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate of moments. ... Imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised" (Joyce, *Stephen Hero* 216-17). Joyce's *Stephen Hero* forms part of the first draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and was first written in Pola and Trieste in 1904-05.
- 20 Le Brocquy quotes from this extract in his "Notes" (qtd. in Walker, 136-38).
- 21 This existential space is also reminiscent of the work of the sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1901-66), who in *City Square* (1947-48) and other works saw the space between two objects or between the artist and his subject as being of more interest than the object itself. For a pertinent analysis of the relationship between Beckett and Giacometti, see Megged. This space is also present in the work of the contemporary Irish artist Deborah Brown (b. 1927), whose recent work links Beckettian themes with Irish mythology. See Pyle 69-70; 83-84.
- 22 Reproduced in le Brocquy, *The Head Image* 29.
- 23 Tate Gallery, London. In the late 1950s, le Brocquy's wife Anne Madden developed a spinal injury and was receiving treatment for it, at which point his work began to concentrate on images of the spine and the theme of human isolation. This theme formed the focus of the exhibition "Louis le Brocquy: A Celebration of the Artist's Ninetieth Year." Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 10 May-10 December 2006.

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**American Scenery/Canadian Scenery:
Conflicting Views of Indigenes in Mid-Nineteenth-Century
British Portrayals of the American Continent**

Robert Grant

This essay sketches the shifting, contingent representations of Native American and other indigenous populations in mid nineteenth century Britain and the United States by considering a transatlantic partnership of the American essayist and journal editor Nathaniel Willis (1806-67), and William Henry Bartlett (1809-54), a British landscape artist well known in his home country for paintings and engravings of different parts of the globe. During his relatively short lifetime, Bartlett traveled through the United Kingdom, Europe, the Mediterranean, and Middle East in pursuit of what he described as “lively impressions of actual sights” (Bartlett i), and visited North America on four separate occasions. Willis was also well traveled. He visited the United Kingdom regularly during his lifetime and traveled widely on the American East Coast, and the two men’s peregrinations remind us just how “locomotive” the leisured classes were on both sides of the Atlantic at this time, and of the extent to which a culture of arts and letters was a shared, transatlantic experience.

Willis had made Bartlett’s acquaintance when the latter visited the United States in 1835 and, in 1837, the British publisher George Virtue began production of the first of their two collaborations: *American Scenery*. The fifty three steel engravings with accompanying letterpress were issued in parts from 1837 to late 1839, and then as a two volume work in early 1840. They were a huge success. The two volumes were reissued several times well into the 1870s, while the engravings, as well as pirated copies of them, appeared frequently in magazines, other books, and prints. Such was the popularity of *American Scenery* that the pair produced another set of prints of Canadian views also published in two volumes two years later entitled *Canadian Scenery* (1842). This too was regularly reprinted during the following decades, as well as being translated into French in 1843. The two did not cooperate on any other works although, a year after his final visit in 1852, Bartlett published another work with illustrations of North America: *The Pilgrim Fathers*. Two

years after his death, in 1856, a final work, with thirty one engravings, all of which had appeared in *American Scenery* or *Canadian Scenery*, was published by Bernard Bolingbroke Woodward as *The History of the United States*.

The mid nineteenth century print market was a competitive one, as can be seen from the many other illustrated works published between 1840 and 1842, which included William Allen's *Picturesque Views on the River Niger* (1841), Horace Hayman Wilson's *Scenery and Architecture of India* (1841), and John Lloyd Stephens's *Incidents of Travel in Central America* (1841). Such works joined text to often quite lavish images in an effort to appeal to a growing British market for the travelogue, for the colonial prospect, and for records of the leisured pursuits of the middle and upper classes abroad. The works were also launched into a wider cultural and political field that included Parliamentary debate over systematic colonization of South Australia and New Zealand and the passing of the Union of Canada Act, press reports about the progress and conclusion of the Opium War in China, the founding of the Colonial Land and Emigration Society, the British occupation of Natal, and the signing of the Webster Ashburton Treaty establishing the United States Canadian border east of the Rockies. At the same time, the period saw increasing reports of inter racial tensions in the British colonies, from frontier skirmishes in the Eastern Cape Colony to attacks by Aborigines in the Australian bush and growing Maori opposition to British colonial expansion in New Zealand. Native American attacks on European settlers had also been a mainstay in accounts of westward expansion from the earliest English colonies, and reports of hostilities at various points along a straggling North American frontier continued into the 1840s. By then, however, the Anglo American conquest of the trans Appalachian West was effectively complete, although small groups of Native Americans such as the Senecas in New York remained in official reservations. Others were little more than outlaws or unlanded remnants, as with some Seminoles in the swamps of Florida, Cherokees in the mountains of North Carolina, and Choctaws in the scrublands of the Mississippi but, by then, removal of a large part of the original Native American population had been accomplished and the main theater of conflict in the far West had yet to open. As a consequence, Native Americans could be readily erased from representations of Eastern seaboard landscapes such as those in *American Scenery*, which, despite the expansive promise of its title, went no farther west than the Niagara Falls; for Bartlett had done no more than follow the popular tourist route there from New York City through the Hudson Valley.

As a consequence, *American Scenery* concentrated largely on leisure activities, tourist sites, and scenes of the picturesque or sublime, and Native Americans flitted only hauntingly through the letterpress in an eerie homology of their description there as ghosts inhabiting landscapes now fully surrendered to



Fig. 1. William Henry Bartlett (1809–54), *Lake Winnipisseogee*, 1840. Steel engraving by Robert Wallis, 28 x 26 cm. Nathaniel Willis, *American Scenery*, vol. 2, 40. By permission of the Trustees of the British Library, shelfmark 1501/123.

European settlement. Thus, in his description of *Village of Little Falls*, an image in which the evidence of solid, local commercial enterprise was framed by a rusticated sublime, Willis suggested the wildness of the Mohawk valley still guaranteed a home for the *spirit* of that eponymous Native American population now physically eradicated from the landscape in spite of its modern mills, aqueducts, and steam engines (Willis, *American Scenery* 2: 265). In an analogous inversion of visual presence and textual erasure, Willis identified the single engraving in the volume in which Native American figures did appear, a view of *Lake Winnipisseogee* (fig. 1), with “the early inhabitants of this part of the country,” juxtaposing an historically sentimentalized presence in the engraving with the actual facts of their absence in the accompanying text (Willis, *American Scenery* 1: 40).

Wigwam in the Forest (fig. 2), by contrast, from the title page of the first volume of *Canadian Scenery*, placed the indigenous population at its very opening, a presence that fully populated the accompanying textual descriptions of the British colony. Nevertheless, Willis’s choice of sources (much of the text comprised compilations from writings by Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, George Heriot, and Catharine Parr Traill) combined with



Fig. 2. William Henry Bartlett, *Wigwam in the Forest*, 1840. Steel engraving by John Cousen, 18 x 17 cm. Nathaniel Willis, *Canadian Scenery*, vol. 1, title page. By permission of the Trustees of the British Library, shelfmark 789.e.18.c.12.

Bartlett's images to effect artfully quite complex construals of indigenous and European settler relationships: this shadowy, primitive world blended First Nation peoples relatively harmlessly into the Canadian forest gloom. The foregrounding of women also feminized that presence while simultaneously confirming their "savage" condition with accompanying descriptions of the First Nation members of the "weaker sex. ... [who] serve as domestics, as tailors, as peasants, and as oxen" (Willis, *Canadian Scenery* 1: 7). Text and image thereby reduce the indigenous inhabitants to a condition markedly distinct from that of the more recent European arrivals in the country who, elsewhere in the two volumes, command the bright, lofty heights in images such as *View from the Citadel of Quebec* (fig. 3).

David Hamer has discussed the semiotics of urban progress in the promotion of settler societies such as Canada, noting how temporal outlooks and ideas of present progress and future prospects preoccupied both writers and artists; how beliefs about "natural" evolution were implicated both in the imagining and building of new towns; and how verbal and visual representations of these colonial sites/sights signaled shifting relations between aboriginal

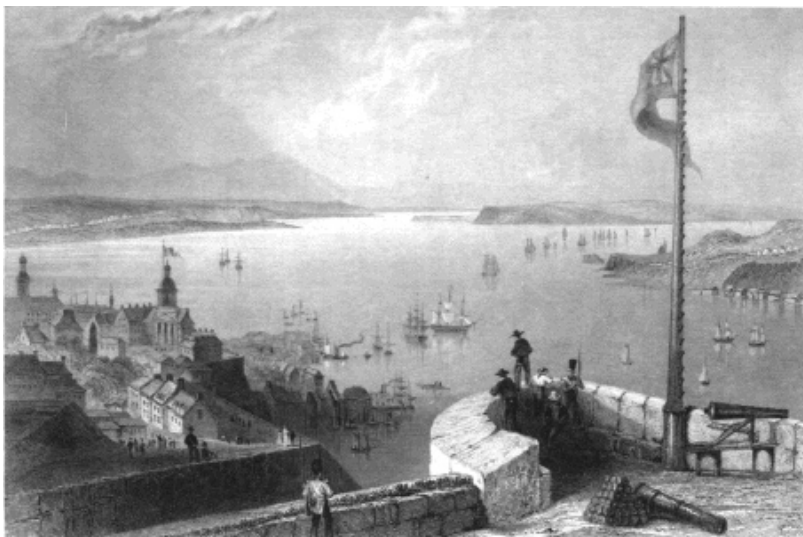


Fig. 3. William Henry Bartlett, *Citadel of Quebec*, 1840. Steel engraving by Ebenezer Challis, 14 x 18 cm. Nathaniel Willis, *Canadian Scenery*, vol. 1, opp. p. 125. By permission of the Trustees of the British Library, shelfmark 789.e.18. c.12.

inhabitants and new arrivals. He has pointed, for example, to the predilection amongst colonial prospect makers for panoramic outlooks as the means *par excellence* for evoking economic, social, and moral advance (Hamer 49–50). The elevated, expansive outlook of *View from the Citadel of Quebec*, in this regard, accentuated both the apparent ease of grasping that distant landscape and, through the details surveyed, its mastery by European habitations, roads, and harbor works. This and similar pictured prospects, such as *Mr. Robinson's House, Hobarton* from Henry Butler Stoney's *Residence in Tasmania* (fig. 4), with their attendant descriptions of each colony's peculiar advantages, its promise, and progress were a common component of the mid nineteenth century colonial "booster's" arsenal.

As I have argued elsewhere, such images largely produced their effects by the placement and disposition of their *staffage*, promoting a particular vision of the settler enterprise that was to be "read" from them, as much as from the many assurances of a colony's peculiar fitness for what was understood to be the quintessentially "English" settlers who populated the pages of such volumes (*Representations* 5, 14, 143–46 and 168–73). The precursors to these colonial prospects were visual records of picturesque tours of Britain and a tradition of British coastal views. The visual devices of the picturesque and



Fig. 4. Henry Butler Stoney (1816–94), *Mr. Robinson's House*, 1856. Wood engraving by A. Wood, 11 x 19 cm. Henry Butler Stoney, *Residence in Tasmania*, opp. p. 31. Author's collection.

sublime deployed to represent those more distant landscapes thereby tapped into a tradition found in engraved compilations by the likes of William Cooke, William Daniell, and Clarkson Stanfield that celebrated British commercial power and national unity. At the same time, drawing on a set of signifiers derived from the popular British genre of rustic scenes by George Morland and David Wilkie, among others, in which the subject's setting, pose, attitude, and relationship to the viewer were important cues to contemporary class relations, the images also attuned colonial life to familiar British prototypes. Such images were, in effect, proof of the Briton's ability to conquer the most distant landscape, reconciling the exotic with the familiar through a set of stable visual referents. But, if their colonial counterparts transfixed white settler progress, they would often actively, even aggressively, celebrate indigenous decline. In the case of Tasmania, there was, perhaps, more in common with the America that Willis and Bartlett described than other parts of the British colonial world. The cultivated terrain and leisurely promenaders outside *Mr. Robinson's House*, for example, faced a page detailing the occupier of that genteel abode as

friend and pacificator of the Aborigines, who succeeded in collecting the scattered remnants of the tribes whose depredations and murders had become quite alarming. ... [Y]et by kindness and persuasion, Mr. Robinson allured them to quit their hiding places, and submit to the Government. (Stoney 31)

Such a description of his enterprise in relation to the Aboriginal population of Tasmania is at best questionable: the aggressive depopulation of the island was more an act of violence than of friendship, more genocide than pacification. But here, the starkly drawn contrast between an image of nascent civilization and a description of transient savagery, the solid visual figuring of the newly created spaces of colonial civility and the curt verbal assertion of indigenous evanescence, of hard fact and the ghostly impress of a race now disappeared, are as effortlessly evoked and just as effortlessly glossed as Willis's and Bartlett's treatment of Native Americans in *American Scenery*.

There has long been an argument that British attitudes to indigenous populations were transformed during the late 1850s and 1860s by highly publicized incidents such as the 1857 Indian Mutiny (the same year Stoney's volume was published), the second phase of the New Zealand Land Wars between 1859 and 1868, and the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 (see, for example, Curtin vi; Metcalf 289–327; Belich 289–327). As Andrew Bank and Alan Lester have suggested of the Xhosa wars in the Cape during the 1830s and 1840s (Bank 364–83; Lester 62–67), however, and as I have argued elsewhere for early conflicts in New Zealand (Grant, "Prospective Gaze" 135–36), that transformation was arguably well underway by the 1840s, marked by a shift in terms from the description of "native nations" to "native races." The "Exeter Hall interest" as that humanitarian grouping of missionary societies, the Anti Slavery Society, and Aborigines Protection Society was now increasingly dismissively termed, had been in the ascendant during the late 1830s and early 1840s but, from the mid 1840s, its authority came under challenge. From 1836, it had gained some support at the Colonial Office through James Stephen, Permanent Under Secretary of State for the Colonies and a member of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society,¹ as well as from Parliament's willingness to legislate for the details of colonial policy but, with the arrival of Earl Grey and Stephen's successor, Herman Merivale, in 1847, this began to change. The new Colonial Secretary left the details of colonial affairs largely to local discretion while, for his part, Merivale recognized that relations between settlers and indigenous populations were the product not so much of policies hatched at home as of the complex dynamics of local colonial situations themselves, which were often very different depending on their setting and/or history (Merivale 523–63).

At the same time, these were years during which theories of race were deepening and becoming more complex. The call for a specifically ethnographic field of study by men like William Edwards and James Cowles Prichard, along with the establishment of the Ethnological Society of London in 1842, increased a focus on the representation rather than protection or conversion

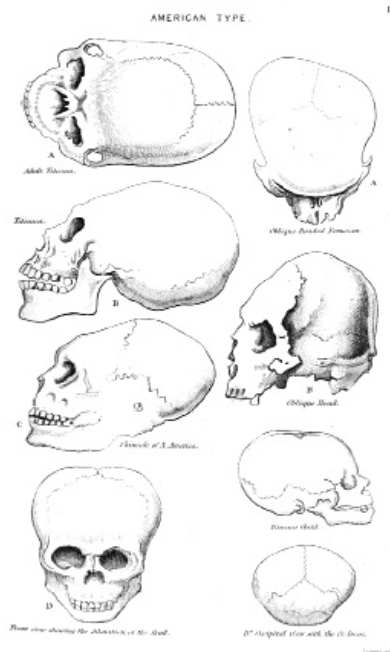


Fig. 5. Charles Hamilton Smith (1776-1859), *American Type* [skulls], 1848. Anonymous wood engraving, 17 x 10 cm. Charles Hamilton Smith, *The Natural History of the Human Species*. Author's collection.

of indigenous populations and, as the “savage” world opened to Europeans, the new discipline of ethnology sought to place the “civilized” world in relation to it, mapping race globally as well as increasingly in the physical features of different races. Thus, during the 1840s and 1850s, ethnologists such as Robert Latham engaged in immensely detailed categorizations of racial and linguistic difference. Others contested Lamarckian laws of heritability, Cuvier’s functionalism, and the uniformitarianism of Lyell; but the dominant strand, exemplified by writers such as Robert Chambers, Charles Smith, John Kenrick, and Robert Knox (1850), increasingly came to be concerned with the great binaries of black and white, savage and civilized. Of course, the idea of Caucasian or Anglo Saxon superiority was nothing new. It had been an explicit part of the eighteenth century theories of writers such as Johann



Fig. 6. Charles Hamilton Smith, *N. America* [heads], 1848. Anonymous colored wood engraving, 17 x 10 cm. Charles Hamilton Smith, *The Natural History of the Human Species*. Author's collection.

Blumenbach, Henry Kames, and Charles White. The difference was that an eclipse of the philanthropic interest, along with a growing systematization of racial investigation, resulted in a new vigor and new claims of legitimacy for such assertions that were based on the “scientific” application of philological studies, anthropometric and physiological investigations that “proved” there was a hierarchy of races astride which the Anglo Saxon or Caucasian stood proudly.

For most commentators, by the 1850s the disappearance of indigenous populations seems to have been accepted as a *fait accompli*, lamentable perhaps, but nevertheless a form of providentialism that helped explain European expansion, and Native Americans were inevitably amongst those so doomed. Knox believed they would be gone within a century or two: “the American human animal is one which seemingly cannot be domesticated cannot be civilized. When brought within the Saxon house and pale, he becomes consumptive, and perishes” (Knox 168 69). Charles Smith saw the race as

“constantly subdividing, exterminating by mutual slaughter, or perishing from constitutional liability to disease.” In this hierarchy, Native Americans were what he characterized as a “subtypical stem” of one of the three “typical races”: the “woolly haired tropical type,” a kind of mongrelized admixture of Mongol, Malay, and even Phoenician (Smith 232–61). They thus took their place with the low, sensual races that included the African, and their physical attributes became a measure of their lowly status. Images such as *American Type* and *N. America* (figs. 5 and 6) then gave physical form to Smith’s ruminations on “the facial angle which distinguishes the three typical races” (Smith 155) and differences in cranial capacity that he considered a direct measure of intellectual faculties (Smith 155–56, 159). These are images and descriptions of a very different order from those produced by Bartlett and Willis, but they were nevertheless part of a continuum of evolving prospects of racial difference. Linguistic, as much as artistic forms, conventions, stylistic modes, and handlings framed these prospects and effected important informational (or disinformatinal) work.

These dissonances demonstrate that this discourse of racial difference was dynamic, defining and redefining itself in response to ever renewed encounters with its “other” and to the shifting fault lines of economic, social, and cultural power in different colonial settings. Nevertheless, at its most basic, this increasing emphasis on biological difference pathologized the body of the “other” by ascribing to it all that was taken as directly opposite male, European, bourgeois existence. James Cowles Prichard, for example, ascribed black coloration to “an unorganized extra vascular substance,” the *rete mucosum*, which could occur even in Europeans. He linked the darkening of white skin with pregnancy, fever, violent disruptions of normal life, even with being a beggar (Prichard 1: 234–36). Skin color became the locus of a whole complex of negative associations and meanings—laziness, mental inferiority, sexual excess—that were simply givens within a field of knowledge that claimed scientific objectivity. The coupling of race and biology had here come to guarantee European domination of the globe, and the Anglo Saxonism of Carlyle, Knox, and Smith construed racial destiny as working itself out across space as well as time. For some writers, as a consequence, America could be viewed as British destiny writ large. “[W]e were Anglo Saxon Americans,” one anonymous American commentator wrote in the *American Review* in 1846, “[i]t was our destiny to possess and to rule this continent” (qtd. in Ayres, 207).² By 1869, indeed, the English M.P., traveler, and writer Charles Wentworth Dilke was able to observe, “[t]hrough America, England is speaking to the world” (Dilke 1: viii).

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, British attitudes to their transatlantic cousins had been ambivalent. At the other extreme, some

commentators had enthused vociferously for a country that promised freedom from the “insolence of wealth and ... servility of pauperism” that must be endured at home (Birkbeck 8–9). As much as such early nineteenth-century accounts of the American polity offered a reproach to British social and economic conditions, the United States had long been seen as inheritor of a distinctively British liberal tradition. By the 1840s, links between the two countries were strengthening, not least through the economic ties of cotton production and manufacture. Continued British emigration was bringing greater familial connections, while intellectual and literary exchange was growing with the increasing facility of transatlantic travel. At the same time, explanations of racial difference had always circulated trans globally, although the expunging of Native American title in the 1830s and the politics of abolitionism in the 1840s and 1850s made the transatlantic dialogue particularly important. Indeed, as Edward Ayers has argued, by

the 1850s, white Southern nationalists eagerly pored over the newspapers, journals and books of Britain and Europe, finding there raw material with which to create a vision of the South as a misunderstood place. The founders of the Confederacy saw themselves as participating in a widespread European movement, the self-determination of a people. (Ayers 62)

At the same time, as Robert Young has argued, American debates about race and slavery had a material impact in Britain (Young 124). American ethnologists such as Louis Agassiz, John Nott, and George Gliddon were published in Britain, and their volumes made frequent references to their British counterparts. Transatlantic exchange of a more popular type also confirmed bodies of belief about Anglo-Saxon “manifest destiny” and the inevitable disappearance of the Native American race. In addition to publications like Willis’s, for example, American artists such as Samuel Hudson, John Banvard, John Rawson Smith, and Henry Lewis brought panoramas of the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers to Britain (see McDermott; Marsh; Oettermann 323–40; Dippie 291–95), and contemporary reviews reveal that their brightly colored Native American figures, wigwams, and encampments were understood to effect a contrast with settler agriculture, houses, towns, and cities that highlighted the progress of westward migration (see, for example, Charles Dickens “The American Panorama,” qtd. in Oettermann, 329–30). Here, Native Americans re-enter the frame as picturesque but largely impotent observers of the Anglo-American civilizing of the trans-Mississippi American West after being absented from what were effectively the already civilized prospects of Willis’s and Bartlett’s Eastern seaboard America.

These panoramas also formed part of a much richer jumble of metropolitan colonial bricolage. In 1851, for example, the various exotics on display in London included “The Arctic Regions, the Lakes of Killarney, and the Ruins

of Pompeii” at Buford’s Panorama; Wyld’s Great Globe “[e]xhibiting the different divisions of the world on its concave or interior surface”; “Scenes Illustrative of Life in India” at the Oriental Diorama in St. James’s; a moving panorama of “Fremont’s overland route to Oregon, Texas, and California” at the Egyptian Hall; “The Route of the Overland Mail to India” in Regent Street at the Gallery of Illustration; “Mr. Brees’s View of New Zealand” at the Linwood Gallery in Leicester Square; Gordon Cumming’s “Exhibition of Trophies of the Chase, African Curiosities, &c., collected ... during five years sojourn in the Interior of Africa”; and George Catlin’s exhibition at Waterloo Place of Native American costumes, portraits and weapons (Cunningham xxxvi xxxvii). This was also a period of great public interest in “Indian Galleries” on both sides of the Atlantic and, while Catlin, along with John Mix Stanley and Seth Eastman, vied for Congressional patronage in the United States, Paul Kane was commissioned by the Canadian Assembly to complete twelve works showing First Nation peoples in 1851 (Dippie 281).

These were projects that sought to capture the features of a race, as Catlin described it, “rapidly traveling to extinction before the destructive waves of civilization” (Catlin, *The North American Indian* 5). Thus, in 1842, the *Edinburgh Review* was able to see his earlier *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* (1841) as constituting a kind of relic of a people doomed to extinction in just a few short years, placing Native Americans at the nation’s farthest frontier, beyond even history, apostrophizing them with the wild animals of the west as earlier writers had done, and making a specific shift from the present to the past tense in describing the Mandans (“Catlin on the North American Indians” 421).³ In *Letters and Notes*, Catlin had evoked primitive simplicity colliding destructively with European sophistication, a topos figured most compellingly in the section that detailed the story of Wi jun jon (Pigeon’s Egg Head), a young man who had visited Washington D.C. with a delegation of Assiniboiné where he discarded his fine Native American dress and returned west as an Eastern dandy, decked out in army uniform, boots, white gloves, beaver hat, and umbrella, something Catlin figured as a parable of innocence lost amidst the “giddy maze” of civilized life (2: 194). In this kind of description, whatever biographical detail Catlin provided, Wi jun jon’s individual identity was subordinated to what was essentially a caricature of difference that exaggerated and satirized what were projected as distinctive racial characteristics to signify a whole category of people purportedly in terminal decline.

As a number of writers have argued, by focusing on providentialism, racial predestination, and ideas that the continent was the “natural” inheritance of the American nation, “manifest destiny” rationalized a deliberate federal policy of Native American removals and the use of ruthless military force

in the conquest of the American West (Hine and Faragher; Goetzmann and Goetzmann; Madsen). Far from being an innate drive in the Anglo American population, however, the concept was a self conscious creation of a group of political propagandists who drew on and amplified a core of longstanding tropes, global in their extent, and applied to the most varied landscapes from America to Tasmania, the Cape Colony to Australia, Canada to New Zealand but, as always, forming a *leitmotif* that glossed the violence of European encroachments on indigenous populations, flora, fauna, and landscapes.

Racial attitudes were clearly interwoven in very complex ways across the Atlantic, part of a roiling strain that ran through European ideas about race from at least the sixteenth century. In an America increasingly in thrall to the doctrine of “manifest destiny,” the erasure of Native American presences in *American Scenery* had an awful, if inevitable logic: the evanescence of Native American presences was confirmed by their very absence. In *Canadian Scenery*, by contrast, that presence was more contingent, subject to containment and management. *Canadian Scenery* appeared to historicize First Nation peoples and reinforce the emerging rhetorics of race as biology that was an essential force in shaping British imperial inter racial relationships. Bartlett’s skill with the rubrics of the picturesque and sublime in effect normalized the exclusion/inclusion of Native American/First Nation *staffage*. Given their respective geopolitics, it arguably suited the United States more than Britain to see Native Americans as a “disappearing race” and, because of the ways in which Anglo Saxonism was celebrated in the two countries, such differences may actually help explain the abiding popularity of Willis and Bartlett’s volumes: in America, the work of racial domination must be seen to be done; in Britain, it is a work that is always in hand.

NOTES

- 1 It was once generally agreed that Stephen had a direct and very personal influence on colonial policy. More recently, this view has been challenged and Stephen has been seen as fully aware of the different interests competing for the attention of the Colonial Office and well able to balance them (see, for example, Adams 82, 90–93, and 165–68).
- 2 On the rise of British Anglo Saxonism, see Horsman and McDougall.
- 3 For earlier uses of this topos, see Wright 183 and Keating 1: 73.

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**Cartoonists as Matchmakers:
The Vibrant Relationship of Text and Image
in the Work of Lynda Barry**

Miriam Harris

In 2004, the Chicago based cartoonist Chris Ware designed and edited a special edition for the literary journal *McSweeney's* that was devoted to the field of comics and graphic novels.¹ Essays on historical luminaries and innovators such as George Herriman, Charles M. Schulz, and Philip Guston rubbed textual shoulders with the work of contemporary graphic novelists such as Art Spiegelman and Lynda Barry. Barry's inclusion within such a pantheon is utterly deserved; the riveting mix of poignancy and hilarity that is signature Barry has been published since the 1970s and has won both ardent fans and major critical praise. The comics artist and creator of *The Simpsons*, Matt Groening, has acknowledged her as a major influence.² Across the United States and Canada, Barry's *Ernie Pook's Comeek* strip is syndicated in newspapers and independent magazines, and several universities have placed her books *One Hundred Demons* and *Cruddy* on their required reading lists for courses in literature.³ However, while the work of graphic novelists such as Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware has inspired a considerable amount of academic writing, the quantity of theoretical reflection to date upon Barry's work remains surprisingly thin. In considering this phenomenon, and as an admirer of her unique intertwining of words and images, I have wondered as to its possible cause. Maybe it is because her approach within the *Ernie Pook's Comeek* series can be superficially assigned to an arena that seems quite straightforward: narratives about childhood memories, told in a confessional style by child and adolescent narrators who employ the visual and verbal signposts of that age group. Her work contains the ability to pack an almighty punch, yet the source of that impact is not immediately apparent. While it can be claimed that some of Barry's strips contain the anguish of an Anna Karenina, or the modernist stream of consciousness of a Leopold Bloom, Barry's world is nevertheless peopled by much more youthful subjects. There are inventories of favorite objects and foodstuffs, scrawled letters sent to best friends lamenting unrequited crushes, diagrammatic drawings that detail one's teachers' worst attributes. As a result,



Fig. 1. Lynda Barry (b. 1956), "Beyond the Earth" (1989), from *Come Over, Come Over*, 16-17.

it is easy to explain the power of these sequences as solely emanating from the vivid freshness of a child's consciousness and the amusing musings triggered by the confusion of puberty.

Another reason why Barry can be relegated to a nostalgic childhood niche is the fact that her drawings possess a deliberate eccentricity and looseness that recalls the art of children, and of other "outsider" artists, such as the art of the insane. She is not in thrall to photorealism. However, her use of a more naïve style does not diminish her level of conceptual sophistication. Rather, it

heightens one's recollection of being a child—a state that we all once occupied despite efforts to distance ourselves from it and become respectable, acculturated adults. Children occupy a peripheral position in Western society, and they have not yet imbibed wholeheartedly social rules. Barry's comic strips parallel the libidinous impulses of a child, vulnerable, creative, and cruel. Like Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, children can offer penetrating insights into society's inhibiting structures. Barry's child characters inhabit a North American world (with specific markers such as the Sears catalogue, for instance), but as a child who grew up in New Zealand and who finds much that resonates in these strips, I believe Barry evokes experiences that may strike a chord in any reader who has felt his or her expression constrained by adult strictures. In the strip *Beyond the Earth*, for instance, three different perspectives—those of Marlys, the narrator, and the teacher—are brilliantly evoked through a contrast in drawing styles and writing. In the first panel, the teacher, adopting a rather patronizing tone, bids the class to describe a favorite planet and writes: "Let us pretend to take a long, long trip through space."⁴ Her words are expressed through a "grown up," mechanically generated, typographical font. While seeming to encourage the class's imaginations, she probably is entirely unprepared for the delicious lunacy of Marlys's paper, which describes her own planet, Marlys, with exuberantly scrawled words and images (fig. 1).

Jonathan Fineberg, in his book *The Innocent Eye*, explores the great impact that children's art had on modernist artists such as Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Jean Dubuffet. Seeking freer modes of expression than the dessicated conventions that dominated salon painting, and captivated by Freud's theories of the repressed child buried within the unconscious, these artists sought to reclaim what had been quashed. Fineberg points out that the more profoundly Picasso revealed such inner forces, the more he was dismissed by critics as just being a child. His images disturbed the critics, Fineberg writes, because "nothing could be more shocking than to reveal what all the forces of civilization (through the norms of etiquette, familial socialization, and formal education) have systematically undertaken to repress into the adult unconscious, namely the frank sexuality, aggression, and possessiveness of the young child that lives on, hidden in all of us" (Fineberg 128). Like Picasso and Dubuffet, Barry can be viewed as straddling the worlds of the adult and the child, offering contrasts in both her writing and drawing style between the deeply relished and joyful megalomania of Planet Marlys's youthful leader, for instance, and the dry restraint embedded in the adult teacher's mechanically generated text.

If one compares Barry's work with that of Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware—two other comics creators who both write and draw—visual and



Fig. 2. Lynda Barry, “The Relationship That Would Not Die” (1981), from *Big Ideas*, 70–71.

verbal complexity seems to be more easily identifiable in the latter two. In Spiegelman’s *Maus*, the past and present sometimes converge within the same panel, characters drawn as different animal species resonate on a symbolic level, and there is an ongoing reflection on the struggle between verbal accounts and the visual depiction of the incomprehensible horror of the Holocaust. Chris Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan* resurrects nineteenth century Chicago and juxtaposes it with contemporary locations. Typographical variety triggers associations with different eras and also steers superb compositional innovation. The distancing technique of diagrams is used to achieve effect in documenting the heartbreak of divorce and Jimmy’s emotional numbness.

But Barry is also a masterful pusher of the textual and imagistic envelope, and over the rest of this essay I will focus on certain examples from her oeuvre that rely for their impact upon a vibrant and complex relationship between word and image. Most of my examples will come from Barry’s long running *Ernie Pook’s Comeek*, which explores the lives of sisters Maybonne and Marlys, their quiveringly sensitive younger brother Freddy, and cousins Arna and Arnold. The anarchic exploits of a more recent Barry creation, Fred Milton Beat Poodle, will also be examined. With these characters as mouthpieces, Barry considers darker themes that have traditionally been the substance of novels, such as the abuse of the disenfranchised and the human capacity for cruelty and violence. There are painful reflections on lost love, betrayal, and disappointment that startle any reader anticipating the frothier fare typically associated with comics. And thrown into the mix are also stretches of side-splitting funniness, joy, and connectedness.

I believe that the co-existence of words and images is one of the reasons why Barry is able to evoke such a wide spectrum of themes and emotions. Barry has been a hugely original comics creator since the late 1970s, when *Ernie Pook’s Comeek* was first published, and she has refused to be constrained by conventions or the compartmentalization of media. Stories narrated in the first person, once the province of poetry and prose, are now commonplace

in the sphere of graphic novels, and Barry can be regarded as a significant paver of the way. In fact, I believe that she deserves to be accorded trailblazing status; reminiscences about childhood in graphic novels such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003), Jeffrey Brown's *Miniature Sulk* (2005), and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006) are contemporary examples of Barry's demonstration that comics can treat this subject with the depth worthy of serious literature.

In Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics*, McCloud observes that a number of comics, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, have employed a strict segregation of image and text. Images aspired to represent phenomena, words to describe thoughts and feelings. However, artistic innovators such as the cubists, dadaists, and abstract expressionists created a space where words took on imagistic properties, and images could evoke interior states through color, composition, and gesture. These artistic developments have in turn influenced the creators of comics. To illustrate this concept, McCloud draws an image/text pyramid (53), and places comics characters with a strong sense of realism to the lower left, more simplified but recognizable figures to the lower right, and abstract creations at the top. He positions Barry towards the center but to the right, meaning that she occupies a zone where the demarcations between word and image are very permeable. Just as the typographic innovations of the dadaists heralded a new way of looking at and reading poetry, and the emotionally charged mark making of the abstract expressionists revolutionized the visual arts by asserting that form and gesture were sufficient subjects in themselves, Barry's close intertwining of text and image has opened up many possibilities for the comics realm.

A significant outcome of her delight in interdisciplinary fusion is that there is often an element of surprise in Barry's work, a sense that we are viewing the familiar in an entirely new way. In observing the titles from a variety of her strips over the years, it is apparent that pictorial elements have crept into her treatment of type—letters swell voluminously, cast shadows, sprout spikes and tendrils, beam hallucinogenic rays. They are letters belonging to a new mutant species (fig. 2).

They seem strangely alive; their life force also stems from the vigor with which their lines are formed. Barry is a master of the expressive line, which, whether fluid or scratchy, pulses with energy. One of the jokes behind her more recent creation, "Fred Milton Beat Poodle," is that he is drawn with just a few loopy curves, like a shorthand symbol. In a strip from the late 1970s, *How to Draw Cartoons* (fig. 3), a raw exhilaration drives the shaping of her words and images, so that both text and image can be considered expressive marks, as well as signs denoting meaning. They share the same space with each other, without the usual demarcations of speech bubbles or boxes. They evoke as



Fig 4. Lynda Barry, “Girls and Boys” (1980), from *Girls and Boys*, 16–17.

well as collapse cartoon conventions, and Barry’s irreverent rearrangement of the familiar is echoed in her “mix and match” guide to drawing cartoon characters. A hybrid merger asserts itself over twentieth century comics classics such as *Nancy*, *Spiderman*, and *Peanuts*. In a postmodern dip into cartoon history, Barry creates a new breed that challenges the traditional canon.

A vibrant and osmotic relationship between drawing and writing is also evident in an early strip from the book *Girls and Boys* (fig. 4), in which a girl is expressing her revulsion at “Vivian Stink Face” who “smells like P.” Using a capital letter “P” to denote urine conjures memories of childhood jokes such as the recital of nearly the entire alphabet when queried as to why “P” was excluded, one offers the response “it’s sliding down your leg.” But using the letter “P” also plays with traditional modes of communication and meaning,

and is a polymorphous representation displayed in the work of e. e. cummings, Guillaume Apollinaire, the concrete poets, and the painter Joan Miró all artists who have questioned the status quo, and the rationale behind accepted linguistic and aesthetic constructs. Just as Apollinaire arranged his words into streaks of rain in “Il pleut” (qtd. in Drucker, 113), prompting readers to ponder why a poem should not also be an image, Barry playfully puns on another liquid substance, *P*, so that it may be read as a sound, signifier, and pictorialization of a pungent emanation. While being less fragrant than Apollinaire’s poem, it also encourages us to see anew. In this strip by Barry, the permeable boundaries between image and text also extend to the body’s surface, which emits odorous vapors, fumes of rage, as well as droplets of spit. The body doesn’t obey the etiquette present in cartoons such as *Tintin* where panels depict moments and characters frozen in time, but instead multiplies itself like a figure in an Étienne Jules Marey blurred photograph, suggesting manic movement (cf. Dagognet). In the last frame, in which boundaries have been dissolved, there is also an eruption of energy, a challenge to the status quo of the previous panels, which allows Vivian to triumph over her previous powerlessness when she throttles the nasty Francine and showers her with spit.

Numerous Barry strips portray the body in motion, or the body’s leakages and sensory equipment. The effect, I believe, is to evoke a strong viscosity, and this is another reason why much of her work resonates on a gut level. In his book *The Aesthetics of Comics*, David Carrier relates comics to Descartes’s dualism of mind and matter. “Comics, with their balloons,” he writes, “represent that relation of inner states and outward bodily expression which characterizes persons” (Carrier 73). The body is a vital presence in Barry’s drawings. Her linework can travel with a hurtling velocity that threatens to zoom out of the frame; one is aware of the driving force of the hand and arm behind her marks. Her lines can also convey a tremulous vulnerability and sensitivity. Barry summons a full range of the senses with just a few strokes. Smells are communicated in quivering lines radiating from the malodorous source, such as in the strip *Sears Catalogue* when a doll filled with milk is left out in the summer sun. McCloud writes that because the olfactory sense is an invisible one, its representational lines in comics are symbols, and “symbols are the basis of language!” (McCloud 128). Barry’s utilization of such symbols—images which are also language—is another example of the boundary crossing zone that she inhabits.

In fact, in perusing her work, it seems to me that she employs symbols to the hilt in her images, conveying a multisensory world. Stars and big cartoony lumps on the head express dizziness and the pain of being hit. Dotted lines leading from the eye to the focus of interest suggest spying. Speed lines communicate motion, and there are many examples of imagistic repetition that

denote a wild movement, as in the last frame of the *Girls and Boys* sequence. In a strip featuring an overfed dog desperate to escape, Pixie the dog's frantic exit creates a metaphorical cloud of smoke. Speech is subject to an assortment of symbols that transmit its volume and tone, from the organic curves of the speech balloon to the jagged edges of the angry scream, and the dotted out line of the whisper. Songs are also sung, accompanied by musical notes, and swear words are rendered through an assortment of typographical symbols.

Not only does Barry evoke a world of the senses, but she also makes internal moods physically tangible. McCloud observes that "even when there is little or no distortion of the characters in a given scene, a distorted or expressionistic background will usually affect our 'reading' of characters' inner states" (McCloud 132). Barry's backgrounds often articulate or extend upon characters' emotions, with sci fi like vortexes, darkly scratched lines, and psychedelic spirals. She also extends this embodiment of the internal to the body's leakages and secretions. Just as the boundaries between Barry's images and text can be permeable, so can inner and outer conditions share the same space. In visual and textual representations that summon associations with Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject,⁴ Barry allows the body to release tears, vomit, the imagined, and in the case of Maybonne and Marlys's younger brother Freddie, psychosis. In a lighter vein, Fred Milton Beat Poodle often intersperses his poetic philosophizing or political rants with references to turds, and his greatest compliment is "Number One Toilet!"

I have drawn attention to the visceral power of Lynda Barry's images, because I believe that this is an integral quality to consider in relation to her use of text. If, following the example of David Carrier's equation of speech bubbles and characters with Descartes's mind/matter separation, one equates the box of text occupying the upper portion of the panels with the concept of the body, the words occupy the position of the head, and express the narrator's thoughts. The internal/external dichotomies that I have outlined so far therefore extend to the narration, with both a lively exchange between the words and images as well as some marked contrasts. Although a viewer is almost immediately struck by the raw vitality of the images, there is so much text in the uppermost section that the reader is forced to slow down and ponder the meaning of the words. A quieter tone consequently emerges, befitting the reflective content of the narration, and adding a further dimension to Barry's strips.

The vigorous flow of the linework in the strip *Is It My Business?* (fig. 5) has a strong horizontal emphasis, which propels the panels along until you reach the final panel, where the energy turns in on itself, and the black figure becomes a full stop. Maybonne is lying in bed, turning over the evidence that a friend is the victim of sexual abuse. By asking questions she draws



Fig 5 Lynda Barry, "Is It My Business?" (1989), from *Come Over, Come Over*, 54–55

the reader into her quandary and we share her helplessness; calling on God offers no refuge. In the last panel she gets up and looks out the window. We move from Maybonne's bedroom to an external shot where she is framed like a caged animal. The stymied energy and image of entrapment are echoed by the profoundly disturbing question "Yeah but if it's already her father, where is she supposed to run to?" Finishing on a note that accentuates both Maybonne and her friend's vulnerability and powerlessness heightens the social and political issues frequently present in Barry's work. The life force and freewheeling creativity implicit in the drawing are ground down by violent parents and teachers, soul numbing conventions, loneliness, and societal prejudice voiced in the text.

In the strip *Spill the Wine* (fig. 6), where a rumor has been spread that Maybonne is a "lesbo" because she was found holding hands with another girl, Nancy, during a séance, the final panel depicts Nancy running out of the frame. Maybonne is abandoned by her friends within a bleak landscape of bare trees. The stream of consciousness flow of her thoughts reflects a vitality in the use of tangential asides and a shunning of punctuation. Such an advocacy for freedom, which is also present in the liberating force of Barry's drawn line, is further displayed in the content of Maybonne's words: "Her whole life is who's a queer and now I'm a queer because I don't think queers are weird but I was even stupid to say it because I forgot this is a plastic world so if you have a free mind, better shut up."

Scott McCloud identifies seven ways in which text and image can relate in comics: pictures can illustrate without significantly adding to a largely complete text, words and pictures can send essentially the same message, and words can just add a soundtrack to a visually told sequence. Words can also "amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa," or exist in a parallel combination where text and images follow different paths without intersecting. In a montage, words can be "treated as integral parts of the picture" (McCloud 154), and in an interdependent relationship, words and pictures unite to express ideas that neither could convey alone. *Spill the Wine* relies on interdependency, but there is also an additive quality where Maybonne's textual ruminations about the song "Lola," or Sue Acker, "a bitch to the 10th power!," are able to be unleashed without distracting the reader because we are anchored by the constant image of Maybonne walking. As in many of Barry's strips, a great quantity of words share the space with the images; Matt Groening, who has been friends with Barry since they were students at Evergreen State College, has cited her as an influence in his own tendency to fill panels with more text than one typically finds in comics.⁵

There is a richness in Barry's sentences and an ear for a distinctive voice that invite comparison with Mark Twain's child narrator, Huckleberry Finn,

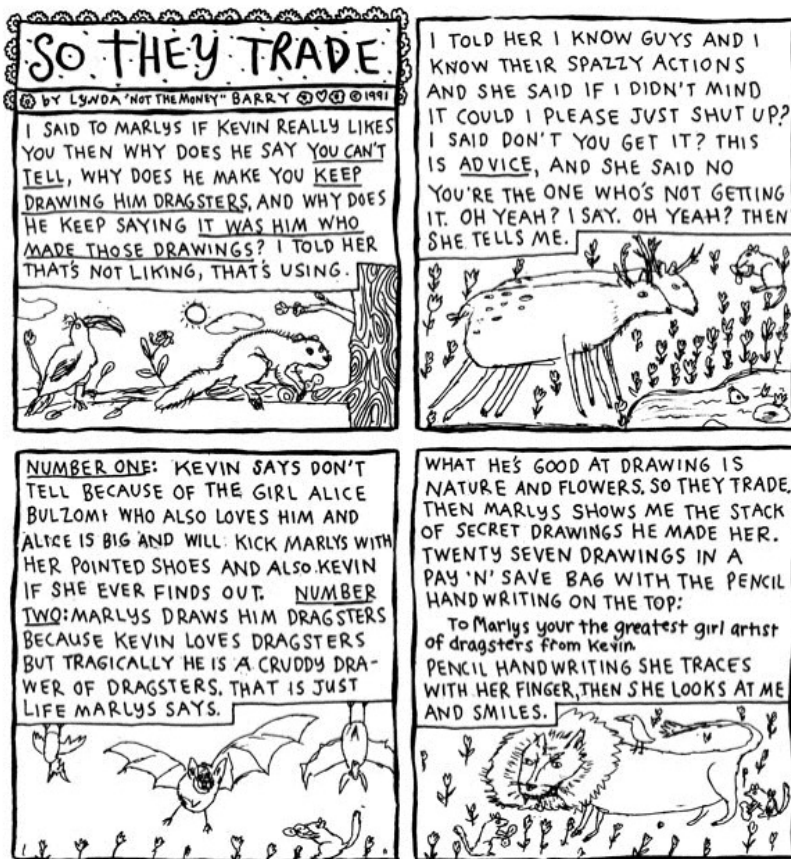


Fig. 7. Lynda Barry, "So They Trade" (1991), from *The Greatest of Marlys*, 98.

or J. D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield. Barry's narrator, Maybonne, yokes slang and references to pop culture with existential dilemmas, and conjures up vivid images in color that add an extra layer to the black ink drawings with lines such as: "Then there's the word lesbo on my locker in green el marko" (*My Perfect Life* 17).

The relationship of words and pictures in the highly resonant strip, *So They Trade* (fig. 7), initially seems baffling. It appears to be a parallel one, with the delicate scratchy drawings of animals perhaps living in a world beyond Maybonne's window, and having little to do with the text. The words take you

on a journey into Marlys's infatuation with a classmate called Kevin, and there is evocative writing that captures the relationship between the sisters, such as: "I told her I know guys and know their spazzy actions and she said if I didn't mind it could I please just shut up?" However the last panel brilliantly solves the puzzle—the sensitive drawings of flora and fauna are actually Kevin's, which Marlys trades for her expert renditions of dragsters. Preconceptions of gender divisions are therefore swiftly dissolved, and Barry again succeeds in helping us view the world in a new way. While *Spill the Wine* captures a unique sense of a character's voice through words, *So They Trade* extends the notion of the personal signature to the individual nuances of the human hand; both the words and drawing are invested with different characteristics according to which characters are writing or drawing. Hence Maybonne's words frame a segment where Kevin's voice, or handwriting appears: "To Marlys your the greatest girl artist of dragsters from Kevin."

In *Snow Girl*, snapshot drawings of a snow covered morning enable Barry to let loose with a stream of poetic writing. The writing appeals to all the senses, especially that of sound. Sound is the subject of lines such as "My Aunt and my Mom got night shift so tiptoe and whisper and try to keep silent about the gorgeous surprise: it's snowing," and "one dog in the distance is barking not vicious but excited and waggy," or "Mr Pashri our neighbor comes out with his thermos, he starts up his car and starts scraping" (*The Greatest of Marlys* 216). Sound is also communicated through the mesmerizing rhythm of the passages, which remind me of e. e. cummings's "in Just," another poem which rhapsodizes the sensory joys of a season (qtd. in Moore, 326). In the last panel, noise hilariously intrudes upon Arna's quiet enjoyment, with the loud speech bubbles of Marlys shrieking "Snow!"

Barry's best strips are invested with all the richness and lyricism of the literary classics, and in the strip "Emily Dickinson Poem Number 341," she even depicts Marlys comforting Arna, in tandem with an Emily Dickinson poem. Being a virtuoso draughtsperson does not necessarily guarantee a facility with words, but Barry is gifted at both, and in marrying the two. Her powerful illustrated novel, *Cruddy*, written in 2000, about a sixteen year old female serial killer, also took the reader on a wild journey which thwarted conventional expectations. Steeped in gore, murder, hallucinogenic drug taking, and child abuse, it certainly demonstrated that the adolescent experience does not always mirror a Disney movie. Yet at times *Cruddy* is surprisingly hilarious.

The fluid interchange between image and text, and the vibrant relationship that she maintains between the two, seem to be an intrinsic part of Barry's makeup; in an e-mailed response to some questions I had sent her, she wrote: "The way that I got the story in *Cruddy* going was to write it with a paintbrush which is what I use to make my comic strips although the paintbrush used for

Cruddy was larger. It was like I had to draw the manuscript. I concentrate on making nice letters and then the story comes. If I concentrate on the story itself then nothing happens.” Barry has spoken of the very active way that she combines words and images, comparing her approach with that of a surgeon in an ER trauma unit: “When I draw or write it is very much about trying to keep something alive, from the first living stroke of the paintbrush or pen. There has to be that risk of death, or the work itself is dead on arrival, dead from the beginning.” Interestingly, she goes on to remark that “Children do something similar when they play. There is always an element of danger and trouble when kids play.”⁶ This last statement, I believe, brings together the multiple interests informing Barry’s work, where words and images energetically commune and react to each other on the page, fuelled by the irrepressible vitality of the child whose mysteries she recognizes, and indeed welcomes.⁷

NOTES

- 1 David Eggers is the founder and regular editor of *McSweeney’s Quarterly Concern*, but he invited Chris Ware to be the guest editor for a special volume on comics.
- 2 Matt Groening, interview with the author, 7 April 2000.
- 3 University websites on the Internet providing course lists in December 2006 demonstrate that Lynda Barry texts are taught by the University of Washington and Kansas State University. Georgia Southern University, DePaul University, and the University of Florida also teach comics courses that allow students to focus on an artist of their own choice.
- 4 Barry’s frequent depiction of substances that are usually kept hidden, and which may prompt revulsion, is an example of her refusal to obey traditional etiquette features that Kristeva ascribes to her theory of the abject in *Powers of Horror*.
- 5 Matt Groening, interview with the author, 7 April 2000.
- 6 Lynda Barry, e mail message to author, 5 May 2000.
- 7 I would like to thank Lynda Barry and Matt Groening for their generous communication with me about their work, and the editors of this volume, especially Catriona MacLeod, for their very helpful input. Lynda Barry also kindly granted permission to publish the images that have been included in this essay.

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CONFLICT

The Truth of the Word, the Falsity of the Image: *Transmetropolitan's* Critique of the Society of the Spectacle

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In this essay, I investigate the binary opposition between words as true and images as false, in Warren Ellis and Darick Roberts's *Transmetropolitan* comic book series, which deals heavily with the notion of truth in a dystopian future and was published in the period between 1997–2002. The series' protagonist Spider Jerusalem is a journalist trying to show a world that doesn't care what the truth is. In a world saturated with images, resembling a Baudrillardian nightmare, Spider is peculiarly attached to writing, even working for a newspaper called *The Word*. Spider is positioned as a Messiah like figure who, coming down from the mountain, will bring truth and revelation to the people.

Transmetropolitan is a science fiction comic book, published by DC Comics and presenting a satiric view of life in an unspecified future. The stories take place in an unnamed city, which becomes a mix of all the negative aspects of a metropolis. Although much of the comic book centers on politics in the City, there are plenty of encounters with strange technologies and strange ways of living, as one would expect from a science fiction story.

I read the text as a critique of current media saturation and as the struggle to reinstate the real in a world overrun by the hyperreal. I argue that the text tries to find the "smoking gun" of current media culture in order to transcend the images and get back to an original past. That *Transmetropolitan* is a comic book creates a peculiar double bind in that it is precisely both word and image and so itself enacts the very problematic the text investigates. I will conclude the essay by exploring how images and words, specifically text boxes, work in juxtaposition, focussing on how the words comment on the images.

A common thread in much recent science fiction has been the prominent position of media and images and the impact that these will have on our world. One horrible scenario is Steven Spielberg's view in the 2002 film *Minority Report*, where we get personalized advertisements via retinal scan recognition. Similar concerns are exhibited in Ellis and Roberts's *Transmetropolitan*, where images are not only prevalent, but even aggressive. One of the more extreme

examples of this is the “buybombs” or “block consumer incentive bursting” (Ellis and Roberts, *Lust for Life* 45). These buybombs are brief flashes of images, shown so fast that they cannot be perceived immediately. What they do instead is: “load your brain with compressed ads that unreel into your dreams” (ibid. 47). Buybombs are, in other words, intense and overwhelming commercials which cannot be resisted, as they only function within your dreams, right in the unconscious.

As Steven Shavero points out, such a strategy is extremely useful (Shavero, *Connected* 25). It is, however, also terribly invasive since our dreams are the most private experiences we ever have. They are also a typical metaphor for our desires and invading this space represents the utmost violation of human privacy. That this invasion is mediated through television is clearly a powerful symbol of the text’s view of television and visual culture, especially because it comes at the end of a story where Spider has done nothing but watch television the entire day. Such an activity is regarded as clearly damaging and dangerous, and his assistant’s boyfriend even calls him crazy for subjecting himself to it.

While watching television, Spider needs to react against the lies that he sees, choosing to harass various call in shows by revealing a number of unpleasant truths. As Spider says: “That’s what I hate most about this fucking city lies are news and truth is obsolete!” (Ellis and Roberts, *Lust for Life* 40). However, while Spider may be able to criticize television and generally wreak havoc and get at least some truth out there, television exacts its own revenge. The fact that Spider, a famous journalist, makes harassing calls to various shows becomes a story in itself. Spider becomes television as he has antagonized all the channels and this is one of the worst things that could happen to him.

Unlike what happened at the Angels 8 Riot, where Spider stopped the police from brutalizing members of the Transient movement, an episode I will address later, in this case he personally becomes the news without any forms of truth attached to him. What the news clip mentions is only that Spider has “terrorized” call in shows, indicating that here it is Spider’s persona which is of interest, not his journalistic work. Spider himself is horrified when he realizes that he has in fact become television, where his actions and his persona overshadow the criticism which he directed at the various shows and presenters. In other words, as Spider becomes news, his criticisms disappear because the media only focus on him, not on what he said.

We find here a serious indictment not just of television as medium, but also of what is usually shown on television; certainly Spider indicates that there is no truth to find there, only lies. Another way of stating this is to say that *Transmetropolitan* regards form and content as intimately bound together and that television as a medium is simply unable to reveal the truth about

anything. When we consider the buybombs, we see how television, and by extension all visual culture, functions as a negative part of Spider's world and of the City in general.

Norman K. Denzin's comments on the rise of the cinematic society can illuminate the process which takes place in *Transmetropolitan*: "The movies became a technology and apparatus of power that would organize and bring meaning to our everyday lives" (Denzin 15). Denzin continues: "Reality, as it was visually experienced, became a staged, social production. Real, everyday experiences, soon came to be judged against their staged, cinematic video counterpart" (Denzin 32). This process has clearly continued not only in our own age but also further in the world of *Transmetropolitan*. It is, of course, also old news in academic discourse where the death of the real has been considered many times. The most prominent theorist is obviously Jean Baudrillard, who addressed the notion of a society of simulation. Jonathan Bignell summarizes Baudrillard's points, stating that:

Baudrillard does not argue for a critical practice because for him pragmatic activity must be founded on notions of the real, the social or the community, which have been absorbed and nullified by capitalism and its law of value, and replaced by complicit simulations produced in the media. (Bignell 29)

Baudrillard is useful in this context because he contends that this implosion of the social is only catastrophic

in regard to the idealism that dominates our whole vision of information. We all live by a fanatical idealism of meaning and communication, by an idealism of communication through meaning, and, in this perspective, it is very much a catastrophe of meaning which lies in wait for us. (Baudrillard 103)

Baudrillard's concept of idealism of meaning holds that people believe that communication should be completely transparent to the content of meaning. Spider Jerusalem has a desire for such a state of affairs as well, but while Baudrillard argues that hyperconformity can bring down the system under its own weight, Spider Jerusalem believes that if the truth comes out, then people will learn and turn away from the hyperconformity and towards a fully developed subject position, rather than occupy the empty object position which Baudrillard argues is the state of television viewers. In other words, meaning will be judged by the truth value it holds, as opposed to being reduced to spectacle. Spider's reasoning is that when meaning is converted to spectacle, it becomes empty and useless.

As we can see, Spider has a very nostalgic view of the world, which is something that I will return to later, but for now we can note that in a world permeated by images, Spider's preference for the word over the image is not only nostalgic but even rebellious. Spider is identified primarily with his

columns rather than his own persona; in other words with his words over his appearance. Spider is dressed in black, which in this case can be seen as a representation of what John Harvey refers to as an effacement, a desire not to attract attention to one's own person, while still speaking loudly (Harvey 14).

As we know, Spider has no interest in fame but is interested in his messages being heard, a peculiar double bind which Spider never reflects on. Visually, his black clothes make Spider stand out from the colorful world he moves through and he becomes easy to identify, easily recognizable in a comic book often overloaded with visual reference points. This is significant for a comic which portrays a future world we may have trouble navigating due to its difference from our own. Such a radical differentiation of this world is a typical strategy of science fiction, where estrangement from our world emphasizes the distance from the fictional world.

Spider's choice of clothes indicates that his style is one of personal, visual effacement, probably revealing the desire to generate as little noise as possible in communications. Obviously, his writing style is far more flamboyant and personal, but that is a slightly different matter. Style, as defined by Dick Hebdige for a subculture, is a movement which goes against nature and interrupts the process of normalization. It is a code which offends the silent majority, challenges the principles of unity and cohesion, and contradicts the myth of consensus (Hebdige 18).

Such offenses and challenges to the principles of unity and cohesion are exactly what Spider is trying to effect on the City and its culture, but at the same time it is also what the text *Transmetropolitan* tries to do to our culture. Ellis has stated that this is the comic where he can get a few things off his chest (Ellis, "Some Great Graphic Novels"), and while much of Spider's anger can appear rather infantile at times, it also seems evident that many of the statements are quite personal.

The text's way of representing a counterculture, even within a subculture such as comics, can be seen in a number of ways. First, *Transmetropolitan* was originally published under DC Comics's Helix imprint, and when that imprint folded, *Transmetropolitan* continued under the Vertigo imprint, which is DC's imprint for smaller comics. So, already during production, *Transmetropolitan* was marked as a subculture within a subculture. Furthermore, the stories themselves are filled with four letter words and various profanities, and there are often depictions of nudity, just as pornography is a stable presence in the City's environment. Some stories contain strippers, prostitutes, drug dealers, and drug users, among whom we may count Spider. In other words, the comic bears all the signs of being offensive to a large number of people.¹

This is not to say that offensive behavior is always countercultural, but it is clear that there is a desire to generate attention and discussion about

the issues which are raised. Drugs, for instance, are portrayed as the only countermeasure to the buybombs and thus indicate, as already mentioned, the extent to which consumer society relies on a form of mind control.

As a countercultural text, *Transmetropolitan* defies what Hebdige terms the parent culture, and it does so by parodying what is regarded as the norm (Hebdige 79). The culture of the City seems similar to Bakhtin's carnivalesque (Bakhtin, "Folk Humor and Carnival Laughter" qtd. in Morris, 199), where everything is accepted, but unlike Bakhtin's desire to see the carnivalesque as socially subversive, it is shown here to be an empty carnival, one which seems decadent, especially from our culture's point of view. Much of what occurs in the City is portrayed as moral collapse. The favorite fast food is cloned human flesh, referred to as "long pig." Even though there are no social taboos left to be broken, the text still paints a very bleak picture of this society. It is most definitely not a utopian world, nor is the relative freedom regarded positively. Instead, the City is portrayed more like ancient Rome, a decadent empire in decline where the masses are kept happy and content with any kind of perversity they may desire.

It is here that we must recognize that what is parodied is not the parent culture in a generational sense (Ellis, born in 1968, must be said to belong to the parent culture), but rather the "parent culture" *is* contemporary culture, the postmodern age, the "society of the spectacle," as Guy Debord termed it, or whatever we might prefer to call it. Through science fiction's typical hyperbolic strategy, our own Western culture is parodied and ridiculed. However, it definitely seems that there is a longing expressed for a re instating of certain values which our contemporary culture has apparently destroyed.

As Zygmunt Bauman states, capitalist society modifies utopia into individual consumption, a culture where pleasure is not contingent on a specificity of time and place, but instead is preoccupied with the construction of systems of media spectatorship and consumption which will deliver the same mobile pleasures of looking to each citizen (qtd. in Bignell, 28). According to Denzin, we all become voyeurs in a cinematic society where reality is the social re enactment of visual fictions (Denzin 32). Humans, then, become commodities rather than individuals. This is visually represented in *Transmetropolitan* in an instance where we see a stripper who instead of nipples has barcodes (Ellis and Roberts, *Transmetropolitan: Back on the Street* 55).

Both the comic and Spider are nostalgic for a time when this has not yet occurred and in many ways the blame is laid squarely on the rise of visual culture, which is seen as the cause of hyperreality and the death of the subject. There are many examples of Spider's nostalgic view of the word, but the most clear case is that of his newspaper's name, *The Word*, with its almost biblical connotations.

Another telling clue is Spider's laptop, a marvellous wonder of technology which is not just a computer but also a telephone and many other devices rolled into one. Yet, its keyboard resembles that of an old fashioned typewriter (Ellis and Roberts, *Lust for Life* 112). This is an example of what we might call an old fashioned future or simply a general nostalgic thrust in the design of the future, what Fredric Jameson refers to in his discussion of nostalgia films (Jameson 19). It is clear that most of the *Transmetropolitan* world is not influenced by this appropriation of a missing past, but Spider's writing evidently is. There is constantly an "old" feel to his columns, such as the fact that they are visually represented in the Courier font, also reminiscent of old typewriters.

We can apply to Spider's activity what Hebdige refers to as

"noise" (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy "out there" but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation. (Hebdige 90)

Spider thus represents "noise" in two ways: visually, for the reader, since the columns break with standard comic book representation, and culturally, for the City, because he attempts to break the visual culture by employing written text. Semiotically speaking, *Transmetropolitan* thus represents a desire to present subversive and blocked readings of contemporary culture, attempting to disrupt the visual logic by the introduction of an alternative frame of reference: the written word, which functions as a symbol of truth. This desire for subversive readings is further emphasized by a number of intertextual references, all of which point to anti establishment people or events.

The basis of Spider can be traced primarily to Hunter S. Thompson, *Rolling Stone* journalist and author of several books on politics and some fiction, of which *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) is obviously the most famous. Not only is Spider Jerusalem visually inspired by Thompson's appearance, but his journalistic style is clearly also that of Thompson's gonzo style. Spider describes his view of journalism a number of times, as for instance:

Him [Wolfit, journalist teacher] and his "plain old observation" had him covering goddamn flower shows. How he had the balls to found a journalism school. Anyway. You don't learn journalism in a school. You learn it by writing fucking journalism. You teach yourself to wire up your own brain and gut and reproductive organs into one frightening machine that you aim at the planet like a meat gun. (Ellis and Roberts, *Lust for Life* 11)

Point: Journalism is not about plans and spreadsheets. It's about human reaction and criminal enterprise (ibid. 15; original emphasis).

Add to this Spider's expansive drug use and his first person writing style, and we have an archetypal gonzo journalist, a type found when the journalist merges his or her own personality with that of the subject matter, and thus erases the line of objectivity which is usually the hallmark of journalism. The term is also used, and in this case suitably, for drug influenced stream of consciousness writing. Although there are differences between Spider's and Thompson's points of view, they are both mainly interested in politics and social change.

In addition, the stories are permeated by the belief that one journalist with a scoop can change the face of politics; such a belief can certainly be regarded as a reference to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, whose articles arguably caused the downfall of President Nixon. Spider is always taking pictures and recording what he hears in order to use it for his columns. There is even a direct reference to the Watergate affair, when Spider offers one of his contacts the nickname of "Deep Throat" to which he gets the response "I'm armed, you know" (Ellis and Roberts, *Dirge* 45). Although this is clearly a joke, it does indicate the nature of Spider's work and his mode of operation.

Other references are evident in the title of one of the trade paperback collections, which is called *Lust for Life*, and is most likely meant to refer to Iggy Pop's 1977 song and album of the same name, rather than to Vincente Minnelli's 1956 film about van Gogh. The reference to Iggy Pop can be seen as an extension of the general discourse of punk aesthetics, indicating a certain kinship with Pop's general career and even with the lyrics to the song, as it deals with drug use as an escape from the drudgery of reality.

If we turn to the visual style of *Transmetropolitan*, we can first conclude that it is most definitely a post '80s comic book. Its visual style emphasizes unusual panel structures and designs, just as the type of transitions used is not traditional. Unlike the usual superhero style, this comic employs practically all types of transitions as Scott McCloud defines them (McCloud 70-72), the exception being the non sequitur, a case where the connection between two aspects is unclear and often non-existent. We can particularly note the frequent use of moment to moment transitions and aspect to aspect, both of which are indications that this is not always an action filled comic book. Aspect to aspect is defined by McCloud as a transition which "bypasses time for the most part and sets a wandering eye on different aspects of a place, idea or mood" (McCloud 72). So, an aspect to aspect transition may occur between two separate places, for instance, connected only by a common theme. *Transmetropolitan* alternates between slow paced scenes and sudden jumps and ruptures, setting a narrative pace which is different from most superhero comics and does not emphasize violent conflict.

What is most significant in the present context, however, is the use of anchorage (i.e., text directs reader through use of images) and relay (i.e., text and image complement each other). As Matthew P. McAllister argues in his introduction to *Comics and Ideology*, there are two ways of looking at a comic book and how it presents ideology: “On the one hand, the communicative elements in comic art encourage the form to occasionally create a closed ideological text, imposing on the reader preferred meanings” (McAllister 3), but,

[o]n the other hand, techniques such as the ease of comics to visually change the point of view on a comic strip or book and the semantic space created by the sometimes ambiguous relationship between word and picture make comics a potentially polysemic text, encouraging multiple interpretations, even ones completely oppositional to any specific artistic intent. (McAllister 4)

The possibility of such oppositional readings is not necessarily a bad thing; in many cases it is actually preferable for a commercial text to remain at least somewhat open. John Fiske terms such texts “producerly” (Fiske 104), to distinguish them from what Roland Barthes refers to as “readerly” or “writerly” texts (Barthes, *S/Z* 4–5), and such a position is useful in that it allows the reader a large degree of freedom, hence creating a personal sense of enjoyment which is unique but still requires the text to be read within certain limits dictated by the text itself. As such, superhero comics, for instance, can be enjoyed by a wide variety of readers despite constant objections that the genre is fascist in nature—for instance that some are born superior to others and as such have a right to use power (physical or otherwise) to enforce their moral views on those they believe to be offenders. This is an argument which has been re-stated a number of times, for example in Roger Sabin’s *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels* (162) and by Patrick Parsons in his article “Batman and his Audience: The Dialectic of Culture” (66). However, *Transmetropolitan* cannot be considered a comic book that is interested in freedom of interpretation regarding its ideological intentions. Instead, we find a strong emphasis on anchorage over the technique of relay more often used in comics.

Roland Barthes defines anchorage as when “the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote controls him toward a meaning chosen in advance” (Barthes, *Image Music Text* 40), and relay as when “text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level ...” (ibid. 41).

Anchorage, then, subordinates the image to the word, while relay grants them equal status. We find several examples of *Transmetropolitan* opting for

anchorage to ascertain specific readings of the events and images in the stories. To put it another way, words are often given a higher status than the images; the images must be kept in line in order not to be taken the wrong way. I will here leave out a more complex discussion of whether words are always interpreted in the way the sender desired. *Transmetropolitan* seems to argue that words are far more trustworthy than images.

Spider's words are constantly shown breaking the flow of images in society, and similarly in several cases break, or fix, the floating chain of signifieds on the page. We can take the Angels 8 Riot from the first collection as an example, which is where Spider is re catapulted back to his old fame before he left the City (Ellis and Roberts, *Back on the Street* 60–63). The plot revolves around a group of people called Transients who have genetically modified themselves to become an alien species. In order to get attention and respect, they demand to secede from the City, which results in the police attacking the Transient mob.

We as readers are presented with the riot from an omniscient perspective, as we see panels from all over the City, information to which Spider does not have access. However, all panels are commented on by Spider's column. The sequence of images begins with Spider sitting on the rooftop, surrounded by the strippers, looking down at the riot, while typing on his computer. The sequence moves to Spider's editor, back to Spider, to scenes with Transients being beaten, to Spider sweating because of the strain, his fingers on the keyboard. Then we get another abrupt transition, to ordinary citizens going about their business, suddenly seeing Spider's words on public screens. We get a panel of people staring intently at these screens, before we return to Spider and a crying stripper. The next page shows Spider sweating and smoking, and then moves to his editor smoking, back to Spider's hands typing, and to a final panel of the riot, seen from Spider's perspective.

In these scenes, Spider's remarks are interpretations of what is happening; that they hit close enough to home is simply meant as a function of Spider's penetrating mind and excellent journalistic abilities. The juxtapositions in this case work as anchorage, where the words are the truth of the matter and the facts. Words constrain our interpretation of the images in a specific direction; in many comic books, particularly superhero ones, fights are not negative in the sense that they are here. Often fights are the justification for reading the story, not as a way to gorge on violence but rather to enjoy spectacular layouts and dynamic drawings. In other words, because DC Comics primarily publish superhero comics, many readers could conceivably read—and thus misunderstand—the fight scenes as morally unproblematic.

In *Back on the Street*, then, we find that Spider's comments serve two functions; one is to control the images in the diegesis, to point out to people

in the City what is going on, and to show the truth of the events. The second is to control and constrain the reader's interpretation, to make sure that there are no oppositional readings of the images where pleasure is derived from the fight scenes. The second function, then, is a metafunction which guides the reader's protocol and "cancels out" certain readings that are otherwise often preferred by superhero comic books. Note that this function can still fail, of course, as readers may find pleasure in the images which runs contrary to the captions.

The images remain important for the text primarily in two ways. The first is to help guide the reader's emotional response: showing one of the strippers crying is a clear cue for this scene to be read as tragic. In this case we have a word image relationship which functions as a relay. An example of anchorage is the fist punching the Transient's face (Ellis and Roberts, *Back on the Street* 61), an image which could be interpreted in many different ways. Here, however, Spider's words direct and control the potential meanings into just one: tragedy.

The other important use of the images is slightly different: they generate emotional reactions. As Steven Shaviro argues, "[w]e respond viscerally to visual forms, before having the leisure to read or interpret them as symbols" (Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* 26). Here we come upon the one thing with which words have more problems than images; conveying emotions quickly and viscerally. All reading depends far more on interpretative moves before it can affect us, emotionally or otherwise. Because of this dependency on interpretation in reading, images are used in the Angels 8 Riot as a way of communicating the text's preferred meaning to the reader (but not to the readers of Spider's column), and it is in this connection that the relay function is used: to allow word and image to communicate the same message.

Still, what stops the Angels 8 Riot and what saves the Transients are of course Spider's words. That his column is displayed where everyone can read it, is sufficient cause for the police to be called back. This is clearly a very idealistic way of portraying the power of words, but it is also evidence of how *Transmetropolitan* denounces the image filled society for a hope of returning to a better past.

What is interesting about this, of course, is the medium in which Ellis's critique takes place; it seems peculiar to choose a visual medium to criticize visual culture. It may be that there is no real explanation for such a choice, except for the fact that images may simply be needed to be noticed in today's culture and that *Transmetropolitan* remains an example of contemporary visual culture. On the other hand, the comic book medium – unlike film, for instance – allows for the easy integration of words and images, and so provides Ellis and Roberts with a solution and a way to criticize the society of

the spectacle by employing words in a kind of disciplinary fashion, keeping control over the images and making sure that the reader understands that there is a certain and unfalsifiable truth.

NOTES

- 1 An example of this is its removal from Denver's libraries in August 2005, which Warren Ellis noted on 13 August of that year in his blog ("Denver Thinks I'm Dirty").

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Le magazine français *Vu* (1928–40): Naissance de l'information visuelle et utopie de la substitution de l'image photographique au texte écrit

Danielle Leenaerts

C'est le 21 mars 1928 que paraît le premier numéro du magazine *Vu*, numéro inaugural d'une aventure éditoriale qui s'étendra sur douze ans, jusqu'à l'aube de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Compte tenu du paysage de la presse de l'époque, on peut en effet considérer comme aventureux de créer un magazine d'informations générales dont le contenu est prioritairement fourni, non plus par des journalistes, des hommes de plume, mais plutôt par des photographes, qu'ils soient reporters ou artistes. L'Allemagne avait déjà ouvert la voie, avec des titres phares comme le *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* ou l'*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*.¹

S'il s'en inspire vraisemblablement, Lucien Vogel crée *Vu* avec la volonté d'en faire une tribune libre, c'est à dire de confronter, sur des questions d'actualité, des points de vue multiples, voire divergents. Notons que l'indépendance politique d'abord proclamée par le magazine, qui le distingue de ses homologues allemands, se trouvera cependant contredite à plusieurs reprises avec l'expression d'opinions nettement à la gauche sur l'échiquier politique. En 1936, sa prise de position en faveur de la République espagnole et contre la bourgeoisie française, vaudra d'ailleurs à Lucien Vogel d'être démis de ses fonctions de directeur par les actionnaires du magazine.

Si l'on peut qualifier cette publication de progressiste, c'est au moins autant sur le plan de la forme que du contenu. Sous le titre "Remarques sur un nouveau journal illustré", le premier numéro présente ce rôle nouveau que le magazine entend attribuer à l'image photographique, en l'occurrence renseigner sur toutes les manifestations de la vie contemporaine et surtout en traduire le rythme. Le modèle auquel il est fait référence dans ce texte de présentation est celui du cinéma, dont le défilement est en quelque sorte transposé au support fixe qu'est le papier. Nous verrons que la référence cinématographique est aussi évoquée en tant que modèle narratif pour la séquence photographique et, dans une moindre mesure, pour le photoreportage.

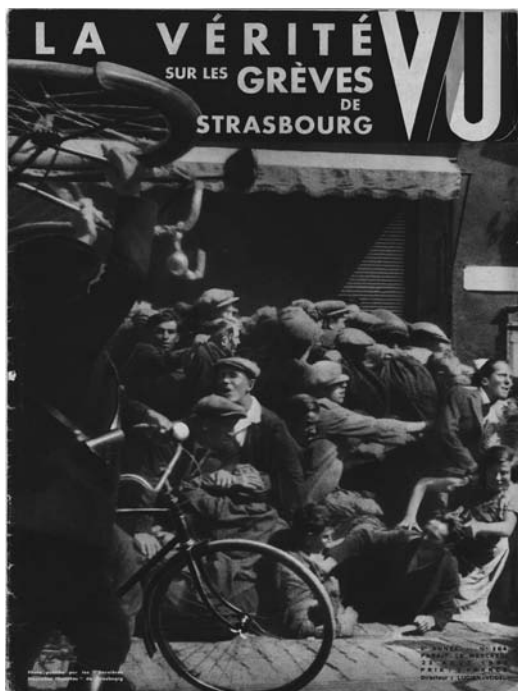


Fig. 1. *La vérité sur les grèves de Strasbourg*, *Vu* 284 (23 août 1933). Photographie publiée par les *Dernières Nouvelles illustrées* de Strasbourg.

C'est à l'étude de ces formes narratives que nous nous proposons de procéder, afin de tenter de comprendre en quoi elles parviennent à concurrencer le texte écrit dans le champ du journalisme. Mais avant d'aborder ces formes complexes, nous allons d'abord apprécier l'importance quantitative de l'image dans *Vu*, au travers des reproductions pleine page et des rubriques photographiques.

1. PRÉSENCE QUANTITATIVE DE L'IMAGE

La valorisation de l'image photographique comme support d'information autonome se traduit bien sûr par le nombre. On compte en effet, sur une pagination d'environ 28 pages, une moyenne de 67 photographies par numéro. A

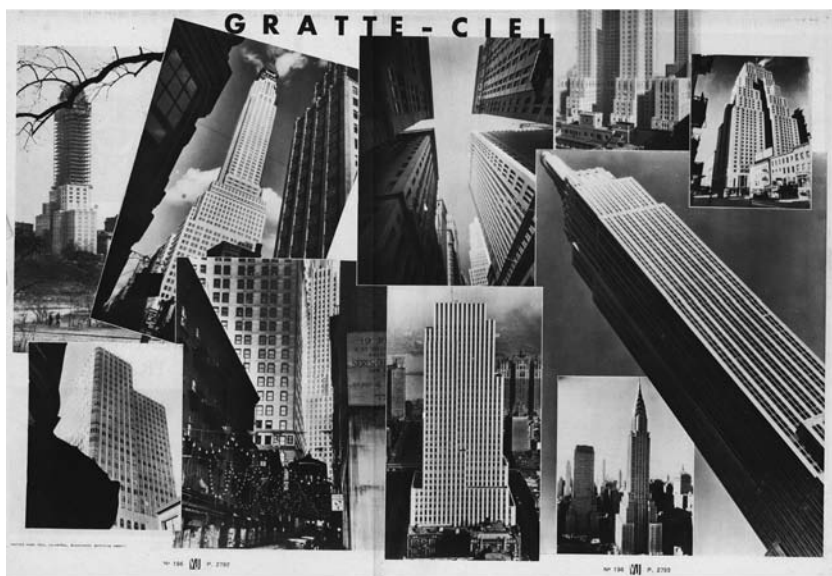


Fig. 2. Marc Réal, Marc Blanchard, Berenice Abbott (1898-1992), *Gratte ciel*, Photographies parues dans *Vu* 196 (16 décembre 1931): 2792-93.

cette fréquence de plus de deux photographies par page, l'image acquiert de fait un statut plus conséquent que celui de simple illustration, rôle à laquelle elle était jusque là confinée dans la presse illustrée.

L'accroissement de la quantité d'images photographiques est encouragé à l'époque par l'amélioration des techniques de reproduction en héliogravure,² qui justifient sur le plan matériel la véritable explosion de la presse magazine dans l'entre deux guerres. L'écueil qui subsiste néanmoins concerne les délais d'acheminement des images, en ces temps de balbutiements de l'aviation. Obtenir des images d'actualité reste difficile et particulièrement lent, ce qui justifie la périodicité de ces publications. Ainsi, *Vu* choisit de paraître à un rythme hebdomadaire, s'autorisant par voie de conséquence un certain recul par rapport à l'actualité brûlante.

Dans l'économie générale de *Vu*, le choix de la prépondérance de l'image sur le texte se manifeste dès la page de couverture (fig. 1), qui reproduit systématiquement en pleine page une image d'actualité renvoyant à un développement en pages intérieures. À partir de 1930, les quatrièmes de couverture accueillent eux aussi une photographie pleine page, l'ensemble offrant ainsi un véritable écrin visuel au magazine.



Fig. 3. Alexandre Liberman (1912-99), *Pour se libérer de la crise, l'homme devra-t-il faucher ce qu'en un siècle il érigea?*, photomontage paru dans *Vu* 259 (1^{er} mars 1933): 278.

Hormis ses pages de couverture, *Vu* consacre régulièrement la totalité de la surface d'une simple ou d'une double page à la reproduction d'images dont l'accompagnement textuel se réduit à sa plus simple expression. On en trouve une illustration dans une double page issue d'un numéro spécial consacré aux États Unis. Cette composition (fig. 2) évoque l'emblème architectural par excellence de l'urbanité nord américaine: le gratte ciel. L'effet visuel recherché consiste à donner au lecteur l'impression de démesure, voire de vertige, que suscite cette architecture semblant défier les lois de la pesanteur. Formant un véritable kaléidoscope, les vues en contre plongée ainsi juxtaposées, concourent à un impact que n'aurait peut être pu atteindre une description littéraire.

Outre l'exploitation dynamique de la mise en page, le photomontage s'avère aussi un puissant procédé rhétorique (fig. 3). *Vu* y recourt régulièrement dans le but de synthétiser une idée force. Ce photomontage est issu d'un numéro spécial intitulé "Fin d'une civilisation", condamnant le remplacement progressif de la main d'œuvre humaine par la machine, comme l'un des principaux responsables de la crise économique. Alexandre Liberman, directeur artistique du magazine et auteur de ce photomontage, associe une vue aérienne de paysage industriel et la figure d'un faucheur balayant

celui-ci de sa faux. Jouant sur un rapport de proportions démesuré, Liberman attribue à l'homme l'échelle de grandeur symbolique la plus importante, le faisant ainsi dominer la machine. Si cette inversion proposée comme solution à la crise paraît radicale, elle reviendrait en effet à réduire à néant la réalité industrielle : la légende du photomontage préfère interroger le lecteur : "Pour se libérer de la crise, l'homme devra-t-il faucher ce qu'en un siècle il érigera ?" Bien que la logique d'opposition qui préside au photomontage se trouve quelque peu nuancée par cet accompagnement écrit, le message visuel, de par la place prépondérante qui lui est accordée, prédomine tout de même.

A travers ces exemples, on constate que la visibilité de l'image photographique est assurée dans *Vu* par sa présence quantitative, tant de par le nombre d'images que de par la surface d'impression. Nous allons à présent constater que l'information par l'image y prend des formes spécifiques, à commencer par celle de la rubrique photographique.

2. LES RUBRIQUES D'ACTUALITÉ

Dans l'économie du magazine, les rubriques photographiques se répartissent dans les premières pages pour les rubriques d'actualités générales et dans les dernières pages pour celles consacrées à des champs d'intérêt spécifiques, tels que le théâtre, le cinéma ou la radio. Composées de clichés brièvement légendés, elles reflètent bien la volonté de *Vu* d'inverser le rapport de subordination de l'image au texte. C'est ce que soulignent leurs intitulés qui insistent sur la primauté du témoignage oculaire, tout en faisant écho au titre du magazine : "Vu cette semaine", "Vu dans le monde", "Vu sur scène", etc.

Ces images ne sont pas attribuées à des auteurs, mais proviennent presque exclusivement d'agences photographiques qui centralisent l'information photographique et la redistribuent vers les titres de presse illustrée. Cette matière visuelle fournie par les agences fait bien sûr l'objet d'une sélection par le magazine qui se les approprie. Comme le rappelle Alexandre Liberman, il s'agit là d'une tâche considérable :

Voir tous les jours des représentants de 8 ou 10 agences et leur "courrier" comprenant en moyenne 40 photographies, cela fait un total de 320 photographies par jour. ... De cet amas considérable, il s'agit d'extraire quelque 30 images par semaine qui, seules, verront le jour sur les pages de *Vu*. Ces réflexions mathématiques font comprendre le rôle des représentants d'agences. Ils sont le lien entre l'opérateur et le journal. (Liberman 14)

Ce témoignage démontre, d'une part, la multiplicité des intervenants que requiert l'édition d'images d'actualité et, d'autre part, la relativité du rôle du photographe. Réduit à un simple opérateur, il se contente de livrer une image

condensée d'un fait d'actualité, dont l'équivalent en presse écrite serait la dépêche. Ce qui se donne à voir dans ces rubriques n'est pas tant l'appréciation des faits par ces hommes d'image, que leur relevé, leur signalement dans le concert des événements d'actualité.

La mise en page de ces rubriques sous la forme d'un ensemble brut, d'une mosaïque d'images, contribue à cet effet de présentation brute des faits d'actualité. Le but est de confronter le plus directement possible le lecteur au monde dans lequel il vit. Ces rubriques offrent ainsi une image collective, globale, de la société en action, au sens où l'entend Marshall McLuhan. "Les nouvelles en mosaïque, affirme l'auteur, ne sont ni un récit, ni un point de vue, ni une explication, ni un commentaire. Elles constituent une image collective, en profondeur, de la communauté en action" (McLuhan 262).

Ce dispositif de présentation en mosaïque n'est pas sans évoquer celui conçu en 1928 par Aby Warburg, sous le nom de *Mnemosyne*. Ce système de panneaux mis au point par Warburg, sur lesquels apparaissent des reproductions photographiques d'artefacts, autorise un dialogue entre elles. Pour reprendre les termes de Philippe Alain Michaud, *Mnemosyne* crée une "iconologie des intervalles qui ne porte plus sur des objets, mais sur des tensions, des analogies, contrastes ou contradictions" (Michaud 239). Plutôt qu'une collection d'artefacts, Warburg propose au spectateur, par ce système de panneaux, une inscription de ces artefacts en un espace offrant des variations ou des répétitions. Une inscription qui l'emporte, comme l'observe Michaud, sur la description des formes et sur leur analyse. De la même manière, on peut affirmer que c'est une actualité des intervalles que proposent ces rubriques en mosaïques, en réunissant sur l'espace de la page les images de faits géographiquement distancés, arbitrairement associés par la mise en page.

Notons que, bien que succinctes, les légendes explicatives accompagnant les images des rubriques d'actualité dans le magazine *Vu* sont indispensables à leur compréhension. Pour répondre à leur mission d'information, ces clichés doivent en effet pouvoir être ramenés à un contexte géopolitique ou à un fait précis dont ils sont l'emblème. Démunies de ces précisions, ces photographies resteraient muettes pour certains, polysémiques pour d'autres. La synthèse qu'opère l'image photojournalistique exige en retour ce redéploiement des faits par sa légende textuelle.

Ce traitement synthétique de l'actualité découle donc nécessairement de la mission du photojournaliste, c'est à dire d'offrir une représentation d'un fait d'actualité qui sera restitué dans la presse, dans les plus brefs délais. Nous allons constater que cette contrainte temporelle s'estompe en ce qui concerne le travail du reporter photographe, dont la particularité est précisément de s'inscrire dans la durée. Il s'agit d'une approche qui autorise le photographe à sortir de l'anonymat pour assumer une position d'auteur à part entière.



Fig. 4. Hugo Bernatzik (1897-1953), *Plus vifs que la tortue*, photographies parues dans *Vu* 355 (2 janvier 1935): 18-19.

3. LE REPORTAGE ET LA FIGURE DU PHOTOGRAPHE AUTEUR

Les pages intérieures de *Vu* sont en majeure partie composées de reportages photographiques accompagnés d'un commentaire écrit généralement pris en charge par un journaliste tiers, plus exceptionnellement fourni par le photographe lui-même.

Il appartient au reporter photographe de rendre compte d'un sujet, d'un thème donnés, en en restituant la vision la plus complète possible, cette exigence appelant nécessairement une pluralité d'images. Alors que le photographe journaliste condense, synthétise un événement d'actualité en une seule image jugée exemplaire, le reporter déploie au contraire son sujet, en développe les différents aspects.

Prenons l'exemple du photographe explorateur Hugo Bernatzik, dont *Vu* a l'habitude de reproduire les reportages ethnographiques assortis des commentaires de leur auteur. Dans l'un de ceux-ci, concernant la pêche à la tortue dans les îles Salomon, les images semblent se suffire à elles-mêmes (fig. 4). Présentées dans un ordre correspondant aux habitudes de lecture, soit de gauche à droite et de haut en bas, les images retracent, de part et d'autre du



Fig. 5. Eli Lotar (1905 - 69), *La Villette rouge*, photographies parues dans *Vu* 166 (20 mai 1931): 698-700.

titre, les diverses étapes d'une chasse, facilement identifiables par le spectateur. Les légendes ne viennent que souligner les moments forts et les quelques lignes de commentaire se contentent de contextualiser géographiquement, livrant une information qui n'est donc pas indispensable à leur compréhension.

Cette autonomie de l'information visuelle véhiculée par le reportage, va de pair avec une reconnaissance du photographe en tant qu'auteur. Alors que le photojournalisme tend à faire disparaître la personnalisation du point de vue, derrière l'attribution anonyme à une agence, le reportage revendique au contraire la subjectivité du point de vue, le particularisme d'une vision. Dans le cas présent, ceux-ci se manifestent dans le talent du photographe à rendre l'instantanéité et la vivacité des mouvements des chasseurs, mises en exergue par le titre. Il s'agit clairement d'une appréciation du sujet en des termes purement photographiques, traduisant l'attachement du photographe à l'instantanéité.

Si *Vu* propose des reportages où auteurs des images et de leur commentaire se confondent, on trouve aussi dans le magazine une autre forme de reportage, qui associe un photographe à un journaliste. Que ceux-ci travaillent de concert ou, au contraire, isolément, une place dominante est systématique



Fig. 6. Eli Lotar, *La Villette rouge*, photographies parues dans *Vu* 166 (20 mai 1931): 698-700.

ment accordée à l'élément visuel, qui se trouve une fois de plus privilégié. Prenons, à titre d'exemple, l'association d'un ensemble de clichés d'Eli Lotar, pris aux abattoirs de La Villette et le texte de Carlo Rim, consacré au même sujet (figs. 5 et 6). L'article se présente comme le récit de la visite guidée d'un lieu qui correspond encore en tous points aux descriptions qu'en avait données en son temps Émile Zola. Poste par poste, l'auteur expose les différents aspects du travail d'abattage, comme autant de déclinaisons d'une seule et même réalité: la mort sanglante. Celle ci est signifiée par le qualificatif du titre: "La Villette rouge". Cette métaphore coloriste, éminemment visuelle, ne peut évidemment trouver d'équivalent dans les images, reproduites en noir et blanc. Elle parvient néanmoins à teinter, si l'on peut dire, le travail photographique d'Eli Lotar, qui s'apparente lui aussi à une visite des lieux et à une description des différents postes de travail.

Pas plus qu'on ne trouve de référence directe aux clichés dans le texte, les photographies ne servent d'illustration à l'article. Elles viennent plutôt détailler ce qui échappe parfois au témoignage littéraire. La frontalité des images, accentuée par le gros plan, force le regard du lecteur à faire face à ces représentations crues de cadavres d'animaux. La stratégie mise en place est d'ailleurs clairement lisible: le photographe recourt au plan d'ensemble, plus distancé, lorsqu'il s'agit de présenter les ouvriers au travail; Lotar adopte au contraire le gros plan pour donner à voir les restes d'animaux. Seule exception à cette polarité: la figure détournée³ du dépeceur, qui vient animer la mise en page et rappeler de façon métonymique une main d'œuvre nombreuse, évoquée par un seul individu.

Il faut préciser que ces images avaient été produites pour un tout autre contexte de publication, deux ans avant leur présentation dans *Vu*. C'est en effet Georges Bataille qui avait fait appel à Eli Lotar pour illustrer le mot "abattoir", repris dans le *Dictionnaire critique* de la revue *Documents*. Les images retenues par Bataille, notamment celles des pieds et des peaux, reflétaient son intérêt pour l'informe. Pour reprendre les termes de Georges Didi Huberman, le gai savoir visuel élaboré par Bataille impose une valeur d'effraction de certains rapports entre les objets. Même s'il subsiste en ce qui concerne les images mentionnées, ce n'est pas prioritairement l'effet recherché par *Vu*. L'ajout d'images relatives à la pratique du métier présente en effet une visée descriptive d'un contexte et d'une pratique professionnels.

Notons qu'Eli Lotar figure parmi les nombreux artistes photographes auxquels *Vu* fait appel, que ce soit pour publier des œuvres existantes, puisées dans leurs archives, ou pour leur passer commande de reportages, les confrontant parfois à des sujets qu'ils n'auraient sinon jamais abordés. Cette volonté de proposer au lecteur des images de valeur artistique et non seulement informative correspond à une véritable pédagogie du regard, dont le magazine se veut être porteur. Parmi l'impressionnante liste de ces collaborateurs choisis parmi les artistes photographes de l'époque, on peut encore mentionner Brassai. De ses nombreuses contributions, nous retiendrons le compte rendu d'un fait divers sous la forme d'une séquence, autre mode de reportage photographique présent dans les pages du magazine.

4. LA SÉQUENCE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE OU L'ANIMATION DE L'IMAGE FIXE

Nettement moins représentée dans le magazine, la séquence est pourtant la forme narrative la plus précise qu'autorise la photographie. Composée d'une suite d'images prises les unes à la suite des autres, elle permet de retracer le

déroulement d'un événement, dans sa chronologie. Relativement peu présente dans la presse, peut être en raison du grand nombre d'images dont elle se compose et donc de l'importante surface d'impression qu'elle requiert, la séquence apparaît tout de même dans l'œuvre de rares photographes, notamment celle de Brassai.

Dans un numéro de 1932, *Vu* reproduit en double page un ensemble de huit clichés donnant à voir un fait divers. De part et d'autre du titre "Un homme tombe dans la rue", ces photographies de Brassai montrent l'attroupement progressif de passants autour d'un corps gisant, sur le bas côté d'une rue ruisselante de pluie (Clar). Intervient ensuite une ambulance qui emporte le corps, laissant alors les badauds se disperser, puis la rue déserte, marquée d'une tache sombre à l'endroit où fut découvert l'individu. Le texte de Fanny Clar associé à ces images ne donne aucune précision quant aux circonstances de l'événement, mais se contente d'épiloguer sur le fait qu'une vie humaine représente peu et beaucoup à la fois. Elle précise tout de même que rien n'a été truqué dans la prise de vue, Brassai ayant simplement observé la scène depuis la fenêtre de son appartement, à l'insu des protagonistes.

Une fois de plus, le contenu visuel se suffit à lui-même. La progression de la scène est rendue avec clarté par la séquence, dont la structure respecte une chronologie stricte. L'unité de lieu, soulignée par un cadrage inchangé d'une image à l'autre, concentre l'attention du lecteur sur l'évolution d'un événement aisément intelligible. Observons que cette capacité de la séquence à rendre compte du déroulement d'une action dans le temps, constitue un cas limite de la photographie en tant qu'image fixe. C'est le modèle du défilement cinématographique auquel semble tendre la séquence, qui en serait en quelque sorte la pétrification, l'"arrêt sur images".

Ces exemples puisés dans *Vu*, modèle historique dont se revendiquera en 1936 le magazine *Life*, démontrent les capacités de l'image photographique à véhiculer une information, un message ou un récit de manière autonome. Que ce soit par le recours aux photomontages, aux rubriques photographiques ou aux photoreportages, que l'on peut considérer comme autant de typologies, *Vu* réserve une place de choix à la photographie, en réduisant à l'extrême son ancrage textuel. Ce qui ne veut pas dire que les articles écrits disparaissent pour autant. Ils restent bien sûr indispensables à l'approfondissement des questions d'actualité, aux débats d'idées et composent en moyenne un tiers de sa surface imprimée. En publiant aussi des romans en feuilletons, *Vu* se fait également le support de diffusion de la littérature contemporaine. Si le contenu textuel ne disparaît donc pas des pages du magazine, *Vu* tente de faire jouer à l'image un rôle prépondérant, en substituant celle-ci au texte chaque fois que cela lui est possible. Dans l'histoire de la presse d'information de langue française, le renversement qu'a opéré *Vu* concerne donc le statut de l'image photographique.

Jusque là subordonnée au texte, limitée dans son rôle d'illustration, la photographie est désormais considérée comme source informative à part entière. Si l'utopie du "tout à l'image" n'est pas encore consommée, elle trouve au moins dans ce magazine l'ébauche d'une formulation.

NOTES

- 1 Fondé en 1890, le *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* atteint en 1929 un tirage d'1,6 million d'exemplaires. Kurt Korff, son éditeur en chef entre 1905 et 1933, contribue à asseoir ce succès par la publication en épisodes de romans d'auteurs célèbres (tels qu'Erich Maria Remarque et Bertolt Brecht) et par la place toujours plus importante accordée à l'image photographique. Son lectorat se recrute essentiellement parmi la bourgeoisie. Créé en 1925 par Willi Münzenberg, l'*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (A.I.Z.) est le périodique illustré officiellement attaché au Parti communiste. La matière photographique dont il se compose est due tant à des professionnels qu'à des amateurs, dont un bon nombre appartient à l'association des ouvriers photographes. À partir de 1930, l'A.I.Z. s'attache la collaboration de John Heartfield, qui y publie pas moins de 200 photomontages.
- 2 Technique en creux, l'héliogravure présente l'avantage de respecter le rendu des demi teintes. C'est l'association des rotatives typographique et héliographique qui assure le développement de la presse illustrée. Elle est inaugurée en 1910 par le *Freiburger Zeitung*.
- 3 Terme spécifique au vocabulaire photographique, le verbe "détourer" se rapporte au découpage que l'on réalise à partir d'une photographie, dont on découpe, on "détoure" un élément.

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**From Ekphrasis to History:
Verbal Transformations of the Display of Picture Galleries—
Wilhelm Heinse and Friedrich Schlegel**

Hubert Locher

Some two or three decades ago, art history began to include the study of the contexts of art production and reception in its field of study. In particular, collecting, the history of specific collections and museums including the reconstruction of historical displays of galleries and museums and exhibitions were scrutinized more thoroughly. Also, the history of the critical verbal discourse about art—including the history of art history—became the focus of more intense study. There are good reasons to explore these fields independently, as each has its own specific history. But there is also obviously a strong relation between these spheres that deserves to be looked at more closely. Further exploration of the relation between critical discourse and art displays could significantly contribute, I argue, to one of the most exciting projects of art history and aesthetics: a history of the visual aesthetic experience.¹

The aesthetic experience can only be examined by looking at its transformations or at its products. These are primarily the works of art themselves, their visual transformations, and, not least, the changing visual contexts in which they appear. These can best be studied if they can be connected to written documents that describe works of art and thus represent verbally specific aesthetic experiences of individuals confronted with given situations of varying visual complexity.

Descriptions of works of art have a more or less continuous tradition since antiquity. During the eighteenth century, however, we observe a considerable growth in the literature on art in general, due to a fundamental change that Helmut Pfotenhauer has called the “aestheticizing of art.” This is to say that the beautiful, represented in man made objects to be perceived with the senses, is more and more seen as a medium of knowledge in its own right, to be separated from the true and the good (Pfotenhauer 313). The re-evaluation of aesthetic perception as a way of gaining knowledge was a prerequisite to the rise of the museum, which developed during the second half of the eighteenth century out of the princely collection and became a public place

of self assertion for the members of the educated middle class. It was in this institution that the symbolic appropriation of the realm of the beautiful, once the exclusive property and symbol of the power and intellectual superiority of the aristocracy, actually happened. Yet this appropriation took its specific form in the texts of the new literature of art.

In this essay, I wish to present two examples of such a verbally transformed or realized aesthetic appropriation. Both reflect a specific "gallery experience" (Herding). In both texts we can observe how the situation of a picture gallery offered an opportunity to articulate the writers' emotional and intellectual individuality and identity. We may also take these texts as examples illustrating the direction taken by the response to art in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. At that time, also, Winckelmann's teachings that art of necessity was the product of a national community² led to new approaches in the perception of more recent art.

Between October 1776 and July 1777, the poet Wilhelm Heinse published the description of an existing picture gallery, in the journal *Der Teutsche Merkur*, published by Christoph Martin Wieland.³ "Über einige Gemälde der Düsseldorfer Galerie. Aus Briefen an Gleim von Heinse" (On some paintings of the gallery of Düsseldorf, taken from letters to Gleim from Heinse) will serve as the background for an analysis of a second essay, this time by Friedrich Schlegel, an account of the exhibition of paintings in the Louvre, which he visited in 1802. Schlegel's essay was published in the journal *Europa* between 1803 and 1805. The first part is entitled "Nachrichten von den Gemälden in Paris. An einen Freund in Dresden" (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 1–50; "Notices about the Paintings in Paris. To a Friend in Dresden").⁴

Both essays belong to the genre of the gallery description, were published in similar form and in comparable journals and were conceived as literary contributions to a literary journal without illustrations, thus aimed at translating into words and communicating a visual experience. Both authors use the epistolary form (or at least passages from fictitious letters), seemingly addressing themselves to a friend, who is going to be informed about a situation that the addressee cannot know from his own experience. And yet, despite all these similarities, the comparison of the two texts is enlightening because they represent two contrasting positions in terms of their methodology.

The transformation of a visual display into a verbal account indicates an independent intellectual appropriation. It needs to be distinguished from an only factual representation of a collection, as given in the gallery catalogue, or "Galeriewerk." The "Galeriewerk" has its roots in the seventeenth century but flourishes as a specific kind of illustrated art book in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Usually it consists of a series of more or less lavishly printed illustrations accompanied by a descriptive text. It represents a picture

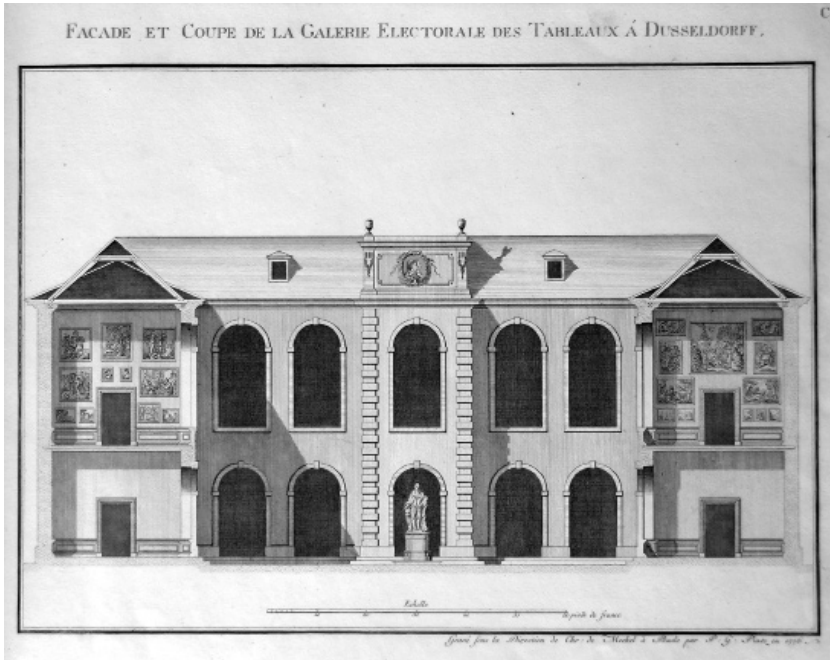


Fig. 1. Chrétien de Méchel (1737–1817), “Façade et Coupe de la Galerie Électorale des Tableaux à Dusseldorf.” Pigage and Méchel pl. C.

gallery by retaining its most important feature—its visuality. The catalogue, on the other hand, can appear without illustrations because its main function is to identify the objects that are contained in a collection. Thus, like a *vademecum*, its purpose is to be a reference book to be read *in situ*, while viewing the collection. The “Galeriewerk” can also contain a catalogue of the paintings, but it is essential that it consist of both text and pictures. This text is usually a short description of the gallery itself and of each object, and conveys mostly biographical and iconographical information. Occasionally, these books present the objects arranged in an order different from that of the gallery, but in that case they always indicate the objects’ actual placement.

Some rare examples of “Galeriewerke” also visually document the display of the paintings in a gallery. This is the case in one of the most interesting books of this kind, Nicolas de Pigage and Chrétien de Méchel’s *La galerie électorale de Dusseldorf ou Catalogue raisonné et figuré de ses tableaux*, published in 1778 in Basel. Instead of the usual full page illustration of single paintings, the book contains a series of plates reproducing each of the gallery’s walls with

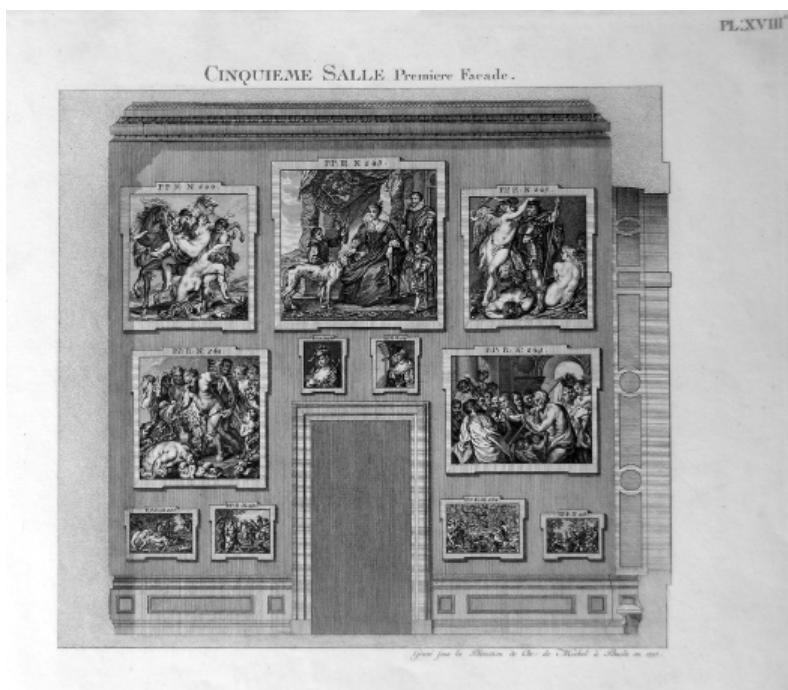


Fig. 2. Chrétien de Méchel, “Cinquième Salle. Première Façade.” Pigage and Méchel pl. XVIII.

its artwork (figs. 1, 2). To us, this “Galeriewerk” is of major interest, because it documents the place as Heinse saw it and was published only two years after the first part of Heinse’s text had appeared in print.

If one compares the two publications, the differences are striking, especially with regard to the role of the author: Pigages’s and Méchel’s compendium may appear to be the publication of these authors but in fact they just document the collecting of the prince who, as the creator of the collection, is its true author. Thus the artist and the curator merely act as servants to the prince. The display of a princely gallery, once established, is presented as if it were a finished, well organized building representing the power of the ruler.⁵ In Heinse’s fictitious letters, on the other hand, princely representation has no place. On the contrary, the collection, which had been made accessible to the public relatively early in order to represent publicly the wealth and power of the prince, offers Heinse the opportunity to appropriate the absolute ruler’s property subjectively and emphatically as a self determined individual.

The most obvious sign of subjectivity and individuality is the epistolary form. Letter writing was the genre with which, during the eighteenth century, both men and women could cultivate and develop their identities as sensitive and sentimental individuals. In the present case the letter takes the form of a personal account of what the writer experienced while viewing the paintings. Nevertheless, its style is not that of a private conversation. Heinse's ambition is literary and even philosophical. This cannot be overlooked, as the author begins his letters by explaining in an entertaining way his ideas about the nature of art and of beauty in general. After these aesthetic *prolegomena*, a series of descriptions of the paintings follows. Each is neatly separated from the others; some are even provided with the title of the painting as a heading. The descriptions are lined up so as to suggest a growing intensity, culminating in the description of the works by Rubens. If different in length and emotional emphasis, every description follows roughly the same principles. We thus have a series of descriptions of differing length and emotional response, intended to prove the efficiency of a method by varying the same procedure.

Heinse's way of approaching the work of art is characterized by Gottfried Boehm as empathy, or an emotional and intellectual participation in the sense of the platonic *methexis* (translated by Boehm as "Anteilnahme" ["sympathy"] or "Teilhabe" ["participation"], Boehm 22). Yet it seems that Heinse has in mind a much more physical kind of partaking, when he speaks of our ability and willingness to unite ("uns vereinigen") with the beauty we perceive (Heinse 265). We are probably to understand his approach as aiming at some kind of embodiment, to be understood as the sensual and emotional absorption or incorporation of a painting through visual perception, reflected in the literary text. This may be exemplified by a quotation from Heinse's description of Rubens's *Abduction of the daughters of Lencippus* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek). Heinse proceeds from a relatively reticent description of the composition of the painting to a more engaged characterization of the physical aspects of the main actors, finally letting one of them speak, or rather "whisper" to the woman he is about to rape:

Kastors Gesicht ist wahrhaftig schöne männliche Jugend, im aufgesproßten braunen krausen Barte. Inbrunst leuchtet überall hervor. Die erhabene Stirn, das in süßer Begierde Wollust ziehende Auge, die Lippen voll Glut, und die Wangen voll Scham, der nervichte Arm, und das Hippodamische der Stellung machen einen reizenden Räuber. "Ach, daß ich dir Leid tun muß! (flüstert er) aber es war nicht möglich, daß du die Meine nicht sein solltest!" (Heinse 315)

The face of Castor is of truly beautiful manly youthfulness framed by his freshly growing brown curly beard. Ardour shines everywhere. The sublime forehead, the eye in sweet desire attracting lust in turn, the glowing lips, and the cheeks blushing with shame, the sinewy arm, and the hippodamic position make a charming robber. "Oh, that I have to do harm to you! (he whispers) but impossible it was that you should not be mine!"⁶

While, as Boehm remarks, the traditional *ekphrasis* from Vasari to Lichtenberg concentrates mainly on iconography and moral content, Heinse in fact stresses the painting's effect on the viewer (Boehm 22). His purpose is to explain art's impact as the result of his subjective visual perception. This experience and its literary transformation are to be understood as the consummation of the union with the work of art as a sensuous, enjoyable, and necessarily creative act.

Thus, while it is possible to let one's eyes be guided by Heinse's deictic descriptions, I do not think that it is his purpose to analyse a work of art critically, or to teach the reader to behold it properly, as was the aim of Jacob Burckhardt's descriptions of paintings almost a century later (Rosenberg, "Von der Ekphrasis"). Rather, Heinse's literary text has its purpose in itself insofar as it wishes to give a complete verbal representation of the visual experience of a painting. Every description appears as the authentic result of an aesthetic appropriation of a work of art without didactic purpose and without requiring to be checked in front of the painting itself. It might, however, still be the case that Heinse's letters offer instructions on how to view a painting by way of giving examples: they demonstrate a specific aesthetic experience as enjoyable, sensual, and intellectual consumption, and as a form of symbolically appropriating objects of "value" in a way open to any sensitive and receptive person of any class.

In this respect Heinse's letters are comparable to Friedrich Schlegel's "Notices about the paintings in Paris." Schlegel's text also does not aim at teaching the viewer how to perceive certain paintings but rather documents an aesthetic both sensorial and intellectual appropriation of works of art. Yet his strategy is radically different. Schlegel in his letters develops a new form of criticism, appropriate for that new work of art postulated by the German romantic philosophers of around 1800. His criticism aims at a description of the particular, "characteristic" qualities of a work in their dialectical relation to the general idea of art. To achieve this aim Schlegel applies a form of organizing knowledge that was of little or no interest to Heinse: history. Around 1800 Schlegel programmatically declared that, "die Wissenschaft der Kunst ist ihre Geschichte" ("Gespräch über die Poesie"; "Conversation about Poetry" KFSA II, 290; "the science of art is its history"), and ten years later he stated, "die beste Theorie der Kunst ist ihre Geschichte" ("Aussichten für die Kunst in dem österreichischen Kaiserstaat," "Prospects for Art in the Austrian Empire" KFSA IV, 230; "the best theory of art is its history"). In ascribing to history a key role, Schlegel established a new kind of criticism that combines subjective visual experience and opinion with a theory based on historical knowledge.



Fig. 3. Sebastiano del Piombo (1485–1547), *Martyrdom of St. Agatha*, 1520. Oil on panel, 131 x 175 cm. Florence: Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti.

This approach finds its shape in an argument that is totally different from the sequence of self contained descriptions by Heinse. Schlegel's descriptions of paintings in the "Notices" are of various lengths. Often, they consist merely of one or two laconic sentences. They are, however, integrated in a structured over arching argument, an historical explanation of the "true" concept of painting. Only rarely does a description seem to aim at an adequate representation of a painting, the most conspicuous case being the description of Sebastiano del Piombo's *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 97–103; *Europa* II.2, 9–15; fig. 3). This painting seems to be the touchstone for his theory of art. In this piece, all the criteria for a truly modern (that is, not antique) work of art are evident as he had presented them in his previous descriptions. The fact that Sebastiano's painting is on a religious theme is to him most important as, in his opinion, art's "symbolische Bedeutung und Andeutung göttlicher Geheimnisse [sey] ihr eigentlicher Zweck" (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 165; "it is the true purpose of art [of any time] to represent symbolic meaning and to hint at divine mysteries"). In this case the subject is not chosen

from the religion of antiquity but from the history of early Christianity, which is appropriate, in Schlegel's view, for a painter of this epoch. The subject of the cruel martyrdom of a female saint is, of course, a difficult one. In an exemplary way it illustrates that a Christian painter, committed to serve the "Wahrheit der Darstellung" (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 99; "representation of truth"), can no longer exclusively follow the ideal of absolute beauty established in the art of antiquity but needs to find a way to represent even the ugly, for instance in the depiction of the dead Christ, or, as in the present case, in the representation of the martyrdom of a saint. Nevertheless, Schlegel believes that the painter can be truthful and at the same time follow the principles of classical ideals. This is indeed plausible in the case of Sebastiano del Piombo's *Saint Agatha*, once one realizes that the painting is, in fact, a modern transformation of the Laocoön group, and that Schlegel's argument can be understood along the lines of the eighteenth century discussion of the Laocoön problem.

If Schlegel's argument in this case sounds as though it has been constructed to prove a theory, it is nevertheless crucial for his criticism that he develops his aesthetic principles on the basis of his own personal visual experience and that he accords every painter the right to express an individual position or opinion (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 13, 59) which are to be respected by the viewer. According to Schlegel, an understanding of art cannot be gained by philosophical analysis but requires the individual experience of a particular work of art. In the act of looking, this results in a step by step process that is reproduced in the composition of the text. It also requires a clear understanding of one's own point of view. He explains "daß ein jeder wohl tut, seinen eignen individuellen Standpunkt d. h. den Kreis dessen was er angeschaut hat, dabei recht bestimmt zu bezeichnen" (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 5; "that each would do well to indicate precisely his own individual position, that is, the range of what he has already seen"). Schlegel uses the word "Kreis" to designate the multitude of works taken into consideration. The use of "Kreis" in this context is rather surprising. The use of the term may be explained as based on the literal translation of the Greek *kyklos*, which Schlegel uses to refer to encyclopaedic reading, that is, the repeated reading of all works considered canonical and required for a deeper understanding and knowledge of literature, as he explains elsewhere in a text on literary criticism ("Lessings Gedanken und Meinungen"; "Lessing's Thoughts and Opinions" KFS III, 51-60).

Thus, Schlegel appears to be adapting the model of the critical understanding of art he had first developed in his literary criticism. Yet, the study of paintings may differ in principle, in so far as the material presence of a work of art varies according to its form of presentation, as it usually is seen as a part of the display of a gallery collection. Schlegel is clearly aware of this. Not only does he discuss the display, when at the very beginning of his

text he describes the rooms where the paintings were hung, including the lighting, but he also mentions recent changes to the presentation. Moreover, a few pages later he explicitly states that every viewing experience results in a new overall picture, acknowledging also that the experience is conditioned by the particular local situation of presentation as well as by the individual point of view of the beholder. Schlegel writes, “Durch jede neue Ausstellung und Zusammenstellung alter Gemählde [wird] ein eigner Körper gebildet, wo manches dem Liebhaber in einem neuen Lichte erscheint, was er bisher nicht so klar gesehen hatte” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 4–5; “through every new exhibition and assembly of old paintings, a particular body is constructed ... where much will appear to the amateur in a new light, that until now he has not seen so clearly”). In any case, we all need to contend with the fact that it is possible “nur einen Theil des großen Ganzen der göttlichen Mahlerei umfassen zu können” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 5; “to grasp only in part the whole of the divine painting”). Therefore, if every possible exhibition corresponds to a certain reading, every reading or viewing of a situation results in a particular picture. All these different readings must be directed towards one aim: the perception of “the whole of divine painting” (Schlegel, *ibid.*), and, in the end, at the “divine body” (Schlegel, *ibid.*) of art, consisting of all genres of art, architecture, sculpture, and painting, each of them composed by single works of art.

As every part of this body contains the whole, like a genetic code, any selection/exhibition/reading cycle is made possible; works of one genre “explain each other” (Schlegel, *ibid.*). Accordingly, Schlegel’s method is based on the characterizing comparison of single paintings and artists. He attempts to identify the general character of each artist. Titian is characterized as a genius with a “Tendenz zu dem Frappanten” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 12; “a tendency towards the striking”); about Correggio he remarks that “Allegorie ist die Tendenz, der Zweck, der Charakter seiner Manier” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 20; “allegory is the tendency, the reason, and character of his manner”); whereas about Raphael it could be said that “Universalität die Tendenz und das Princip dieses Mahlers sey” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 40; “universality was the tendency and the principle of this painter”). Schlegel occasionally even introduces the classical *paragone* between painting and poetry: Mantegna may be compared to Dante, he says, if Titian is like Tasso, Perugino like Petrarch and Correggio like Guarini. Dürer, then, might be called “der Shakespeare, oder wenn man lieber will, der Jakob Böhme der Mahlerei” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 67; “the Shakespeare, or if one prefers, the Jakob Boehme of painting”).

Obviously, Schlegel has a very clear opinion on the importance of each artist, roughly in accordance with the established canon. Considering this, it is remarkable that he does not significantly change his rhetoric when he talks about the works of the “hero artists” Raphael, Leonardo, and Correggio. Due

to the general purpose of the text it is less important to describe the character of the singular artistic genius but to characterize the one school of painting least appreciated by general opinion: the art of the German masters of the past. In this school important masters are to be found, but not only are their names little known, their specific character, according to Schlegel, can only be appreciated within a collective enterprise – as a product of the German nation.

*

If we compare the positions of Heinse and Schlegel, it becomes obvious that the latter's approach is more directed towards a new kind of art criticism which does not so much explain and affirm the achievement of certain masters according to established principles, but rather tries to point out the differences between their individual achievements. Moreover, the author explains and reflects the particular conditions under which he arrives at his judgments, based on an individual point of view he explicitly presents. Clearly, Schlegel does not give up the ambition to describe what "Art" in general is about. His criticism therefore remains a way of expressing, or rather realizing, his subjectivity. At the same time, he understands his critical opinion as a contribution to a discourse: he wants to communicate a specific message, in order to contribute to the revival of a certain kind of painting. Heinse's *Letters*, conversely, are not so much the expression of a certain opinion, but rather, a literary demonstration and celebration of the visual aesthetic experience. Remaining much more within the sphere of the original poetic creation, they need to be read as literary works of art in their own right first and foremost, as poetic transformations of the visual experience, culminating in a congenial literary realization of the paintings of one master: Rubens.

Despite this fundamental difference, both authors emphasize the importance of the individual approach – the personal aesthetic experience. Their respective arguments are demonstratively based on the empirical subjective experience of single works of art presented in existing gallery situations. More important than one may probably think at first is the fact that both authors in developing their argument react to the visual argumentation of a specific display. Heinse's case is made simple. It is, of course, not by chance (if surely due to a certain "elective affinity") that Heinse's text culminates in the celebration of Rubens. His work reflects the triumphal presentation of the works of the Flemish master in the Düsseldorf gallery, documented in the illustrated catalogue, where the work of Rubens is shown and praised at the very end of the book. In Schlegel's case it is more complicated to reconstruct the original situation of the visual argumentation with which he was confronted.

A first hint is given by the fact that he refers to the place of his visit by its old name, the “Louvre.” He does not speak of the “Musée Français” or “Musée Napoléon,” which was the museum’s official name from 1803, after Dominique Vivant Denon became its director on 21 November 1802, and began to rearrange the display (McClellan 131–48; Gaetgens; Rosenberg and Dupuy). Schlegel had visited the gallery for the first time in July and August, but while he was writing his account major transformations were going on. The previous display was not radically changed at once under Vivant Denon. Paintings remained in place according to the current principle of grouping them according to national schools. But Vivant Denon started to systematize this arrangement in a didactic manner, in order to install “a history course in the art of painting,” as he wrote to Napoleon on 1 January 1803 (qtd. in McClellan, 140). Early on in his “Notices” Schlegel disapprovingly remarked that at the time when he was writing the first room, the only one with decent lighting, had been given temporarily to the modern French masters: “das Alterthum [hat] weichen müssen, um den Versuchen moderner Franzosen Raum zu geben” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 3; “Antiquity had to cede to the experiments of the modern French”). The result of this change must have been a strengthening of the “history course” in so far as the most recent French school appeared now to be the most advanced, and the historically conclusive continuation of the Italian Renaissance. Schlegel mentions these transformations but does not speak of any of these more recent artists. Moreover, he explicitly refuses to waste a word on any of the French painters of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries; he does not even mention Nicolas Poussin.

If we have reason to believe that the display of the whole gallery, even before the interventions of Vivant Denon, was intended to position the French school in line with the achievements of the great and universally acknowledged Italian masters, it seems probable that Schlegel from the start reacted to this strategy of display. His “Notices” present his own individual reading and symbolic appropriation of the paintings in the Louvre, directed towards finding a way to re-evaluate and defend the achievements of his own nation. In his critical account Schlegel underscores the conventional distinction of national schools but rejects the idea of a single, linear, and progressive development in the art of painting. This allows him to concentrate on the older Italian masters, in order to articulate, finally, a program for a revival of the German tradition, independent of the virtuosity of the later Italian and French schools, and to return to the truth and authenticity of the German old masters.

The fact that the display was undergoing a constant process of transformation when he saw it, as well as the obvious glorification of the French school, may have provoked him to draw his own conclusions and extend

his reflections. He did so by adding to his “Notices” descriptions of paintings of the German school he saw on his way back from Paris in Brussels, Düsseldorf, and Cologne. His text, then, is to be understood as a theoretical argument developed as an objection to a proposition that had been expressed visually. His argument is developed step by step in the course of the study of the experience of an actual visual situation. Schlegel’s aim is the articulation of a new concept of art, one that concerns him and his compatriots, and to contribute, as he explicitly states, if only theoretically, to the “Construction der deutschen Malerei” (Schlegel, *Gemälde* 47; “construction of the German art of painting”).

NOTES

- 1 Such a project may be close to what Boehm has called a “cultural history of the eye” (Boehm 21).
- 2 On this aspect, and generally on the history of art history as a specific theory of art, see Locher.
- 3 For extensive commentary by Helmut Pfotenbauer 678–756 in the same volume. See also Elliott 51–126.
- 4 Originally published in *Europa* I.1 (1803): 108–57; I.2 (1803): 3–19; II.1 (1803): 96–116; II.2 (1805): 1–41; II.2 (1805): 109–45.
- 5 A description of the book is given by Krause (259–97).
- 6 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by the author.

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Modernizing History and Historicizing Modernity: Baudelaire and Baudelairean Representations of Contemporaneity

Lauren S. Weingarden

“In the aftermath of modernity, and the passing of the postmodern, how are we to know and show what it is to live in the conditions of contemporaneity?” This question was the premise of the 2004 symposium *Modernity and Contemporaneity: Antinomies of Art and Culture after the 20th Century*.¹ Yet, Charles Baudelaire’s mandate for representing nineteenth century modernity resonates here, suggesting an elective affinity between our time and his, and, in turn a genealogy for modernism’s own historicism. This essay contributes to such a genealogy and expands upon my earlier research, in which I examined how Baudelaire and artists such as Édouard Manet and Gustave Caillebotte represented their own contemporaneity to record their own historical moment within the urban context of Haussmannized Paris, in works dating from the 1850s–1880s.² What is problematic about Baudelaire’s art criticism, however, is the discrepancy between his verbal renderings of modernity and the artists’ visual translations of his texts. Thus, while the Baudelairean artists figured Baudelaire’s topoi in the subject matter of their paintings, they each developed techniques of representation that deviated from or conflicted with Baudelaire’s own, albeit conventional, aesthetic expectations. Indeed, Baudelaire defined modernity in reference to Constantin Guys’s ink and watercolor sketches of Parisian society and fashions (rendered for the *Illustrated London News*) and extolled Charles Méryon’s somber etchings of the old Paris (which, Baudelaire claimed, inspired *Le Spleen de Paris*).³

This word and image matrix of modernist practices embraces a larger historical event as well: the transformation of the city of Paris as France’s national capital into the capital of an international modernity. Such a transformation signaled a mutation of Paris as a fixed *lieu de mémoire*—a cohesive monument of centralized rule and technological order—to *lieu d’expérience*—a visceral encounter with fragmentation, dissonance, and change.⁴ Thus, Baudelaire’s corpus of critical writings on modernist aesthetics embodies Paris *vécu*, the site of an incipient modernism, of what I call a Baudelairean modernism.



Fig. 1. Constantin Guys (1802–92), *L'Avenue des Champs Elysées, voitures et promeneurs*, 1852–60, watercolor, wash, ink on woven paper. Paris: Musée Carnavalet.

That Baudelaire becomes a signifier of the modernized Paris is evident in his twentieth century critical legacy, a discourse marked by two opposing views of Baudelaire's modernity and his so called ambiguous response to Paris transformed—at once nostalgic and hopeful.⁵ My purpose here is to show how these critical views span the shift from modernism to post modernism in our own time. Walter Benjamin's essays, completed in 1938–39 ("The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire") here provide a model for equating Baudelaire's antithetical urbanism with a pejorative view of modernism.⁶ By contrast, Christopher Prendergast's *Paris and the Nineteenth Century: Writing the City*, published in 1999, offers a postmodern recovery of Baudelaire's prose poetry and its ironic intent.⁷ In concluding, I will review how Baudelairean artists recast Baudelaire's ironic strategies for their own modernity.

Since my own investigations foreground Baudelaire's art criticism, I begin with an overview of his tenets. Beginning with "De l'héroïsme de la vie moderne" ("Of the Heroism of Modern Life") in the "Salon de 1846" and subsequently in his essay "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" ("The Painter of Modern Life"), written in 1859, Baudelaire mapped the historicist topoi through which modernity was defined in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸ In each of these essays, Baudelaire prescribed an aesthetic of dualities and acts of self doubling as the visceral response to the urban experience and its expression in artistic form.



Fig. 2. Constantin Guys, *Voiture et public de champ de courses*, watercolor, wash, ink on paper, n.d.. Paris: Musée Carnavalet.

When Baudelaire wrote “De l’héroïsme de la vie moderne,” Paris was already marked by sporadic urban renewal schemes. It was in this context that Baudelaire first defined beauty as possessing “quelque chose d’éternel et quelque chose de transitoire” (687–88; “something eternal and something transitory”: 104)⁹ and extolled Paris as—as I propose to call it—a *lieu d’expérience*. Here, Baudelaire wrote, the artist discovers “l’héroïsme de la vie moderne” in “le spectacle de la vie élégante et des milliers d’existences flottantes qui circulent dans les souterrains d’une grande ville” (“Salon de 1846” 687–88; “heroism of modern life,” “the scenes of high life and of the thousands of uprooted lives that haunt the underworld of a great city”: “Salon of 1846” 104–07).

While these uprooted lives are the heroes in Baudelaire’s poetic works, in his critical writing, particularly “Le peintre de la vie moderne,” the artist becomes the hero. Here Baudelaire attributed to Constantin Guys (figs. 1, 2) the dual attributes of the artist as both a man of the crowd and distant from it. In the first instance, he is the exemplary *flâneur* artist,

observateur passionné, [pour qui] c’est une immense jouissance que d’élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l’ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l’infini. ... C’est un *moi* insatiable du *non moi*, qui, à chaque instant, le rend et l’exprime en images plus vivantes que la vie elle-même, toujours instable et fugitive. (“Le Peintre” 795–96)



Fig. 3. Charles Méryon (1821–68), *L'Abside de Notre Dame*, 1850, etching and dry point. Geffroy, pl. opp. 66.

passionate observer, [for whom] it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite. ... [It] is an ego athirst for the non ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies, more vivid than life itself, always inconstant and fleeting. (“The Painter” 399–400)

Accordingly, Baudelaire redefined the “composition double” of modern beauty as constant tension between “un élément éternel, invariable, ... et d’un élément relatif, circonstanciel ... [de] l’époque” (“Le Peintre” 791; “an eternal and invariable element,” and “a relative circumstantial element [of] contemporaneity”: “The Painter” 392). The artist can achieve this aesthetic dualism and, ultimately, cultural renewal, by triggering in the viewer “the shock of surprise.” He does so by rendering the familiar unfamiliar and by presenting “quelque chose de toujours nouveau qui échappera éternellement ... à la règle et aux analyses de l’école” (“Exposition Universelle” 724; “the ever new which eternally elud[es] ... the rules and analyses of the school”: “The Exposition Universelle” 124–25).¹⁰ But to achieve this end, the artist must first experience a process of “self doubling” (“se dédoubler”), which for Baudelaire characterized the artistic creative process, as witnessed in Guys’s activities.¹¹

A man of the crowd from dawn to dusk, at night the artist retreats from the crowd. Alone in his studio, he reflects upon his sensory experiences and renders their essence. “Tous les matériaux dont la mémoire s’est encombrée se classent, se rangent, s’harmonisent et subissent cette idéalisation forcée qui est le résultat d’une perception *enfantine*, c’est à dire d’une perception aiguë,

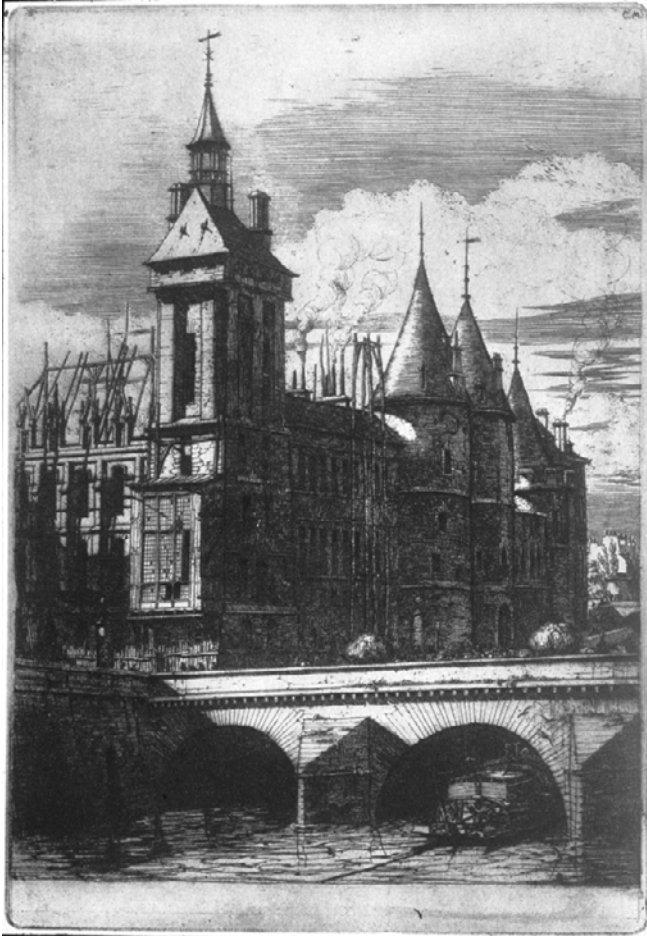


Fig. 4. Charles Méryon, *La Tour de l'Horloge*, 1852, etching. Geffroy, pl. opp. 70.

magique à force d'ingénuité!" ("Le Peintre" 797, original emphasis; "All the materials, stored higgledy piggledy by memory, are classified, ordered, harmonized, and undergo that deliberate idealization, which is the product of a *childlike* perceptiveness that is acute and magical by its very ingeniousness": "The Painter" 402; original emphasis). In this assessment of Guys's modernity, sketch like techniques and ephemeral transparency convey fleeting cognitive experiences and physical engagement with the myriad Parisian populace. While this description might equally apply to the urban venues rendered by

Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas (artists championed by modernist historians), it does not pertain to the etchings of Charles Méryon, whom Baudelaire championed in his “Salon of 1859.”

In the section on “Le Paysage,” Baudelaire problematized the absence of “un genre que j’appellerais volontiers le paysage des grandes villes” (“a genre which I can only call the landscape of great cities”) at the present Salon, but did so to recall “une série d’études à l’eau forte d’après les points de vue les plus pittoresques de Paris” rendered by “un homme puissant et singulier” (“Salon de 1859” 779; “a series of etched studies of the most picturesque views in Paris,” “a strange and stalwart man”: “Salon of 1859” 200). Here he praised Méryon (figs. 3–6), the former sea captain turned printmaker, as “un puissant artiste, et qui avait dit adieu aux solennelles aventures de l’Océan pour peindre la noire majesté de la plus inquiétante des capitales” (“Salon de 1859” 780; “a mighty artist, who bade farewell to the ocean’s solemn adventures in order to paint the gloomy majesty of this most disquieting of capitals”: “Salon of 1859” 201). Not only does Baudelaire extol the macabre interpretation of the Parisian landscape, but also the artist’s technical precision “la finesse et la certitude de son dessin” (“Salon de 1859” 779; “the sharpness, the refinement and the assurance of his drawing”: “Salon of 1859” 200) in capturing the bizarre intermingling of old and new. The slightly modified text, as it appeared in 1862 in “Peintres et Aquafortistes” (“Painters and Etchers”), best captures the paradoxical vision that Baudelaire attributed to Méryon:

Nous avons rarement vu, représentée avec plus poésie, la solennité naturelle d’une grande capitale. Les majestés de la pierre accumulée, les *clochers montrant du doigt le ciel*, les obélisques de l’industrie vomissant contre le firmament leurs coalitions de fumées, les prodigieux échafaudages des monuments en réparation, appliquant sur le corps solide de l’architecture leur architecture à jour d’une beauté arachnéenne et paradoxale, le ciel brumeux, chargé de colère et de rancune, la profondeur des perspectives augmentée par la pensée des drames qui y sont contenus, aucun des éléments complexes dont se compose le douloureux et glorieux décor de la civilisation n’y est oublié. (“Peintres et Aquafortistes” 824–25; original emphasis)

Seldom has the natural solemnity of a great city been depicted with more *poetic power*: the majesty of the piles of stone; those spires pointing their fingers at the sky; the obelisks of industry vomiting a legion of smoke against the heavens; the enormous scaffolds encircling monuments under repair, pressing the *paradoxical beauty* of their *spider web tracery* against the monuments’ solid bodies; the steamy sky, pregnant with rage and heavy with rancor; and the *wide vistas whose poetry resides in the dramas* that one imparts to them in *one’s imagination*—none of the complex elements that compose the *painful and glorious décor* of civilization has been forgotten.¹² (qtd. in Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire” 54; emphasis added)

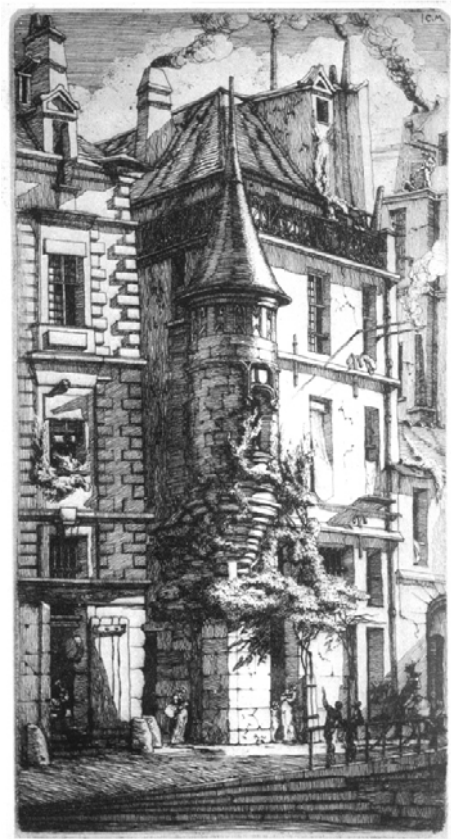


Fig. 5. Charles Méryon, *Tourelle de la rue Tixanderie*, 1852. Geffroy, pl. opp. 104.

Since the mid 1850s Méryon had been institutionalized for insanity, “un délire mystérieux” (“Salon de 1859” 780; “a mysterious madness”: “Salon of 1859” 201)¹³ that evinced, for Baudelaire, his genius for shock and surprise.

It is on the basis of this essay that Benjamin reveals Baudelaire’s “elective affinity” with Méryon. Given our conference theme, this description merits attention. For me, it provided an occasion to investigate how the conceptual meaning of the phrase functioned as a critical device for Benjamin’s interpretation of Baudelaire as a “lyric poet in the era of high capitalism.”¹⁴ In these essays, Benjamin only once used the words to describe the elective affinity between poet and engraver as a matter of their parallel life experiences.

The two men had an *elective affinity* to each other. They were born in the same year, and their deaths were only months apart. Both died lonely and deeply disturbed—Méryon as a deranged patient at Charenton, Baudelaire speechless in a private clinic. Both were late in achieving fame. (Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire” 53–54; emphasis added)

Benjamin goes on with a brief discussion of Paris’s Haussmannization. But in the succeeding passage, he suggests that this natural alliance extends to the social forces that bind the two, forces that define their modernity and, ostensibly, their shared ambition to modernize antiquity. Indeed, Benjamin considered Baudelaire’s “short piece on Méryon” among the best of his prose work and “an homage to modernity.” He continues, “For in Méryon, [as in Baudelaire] there is an interpenetration of classical antiquity and modernity, and in [Méryon], too, the form of this superimposition allegory appears unmistakably” (Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire” 54). Benjamin’s idea of Baudelaire’s modernity is obviously one-sided. Here and elsewhere, the critic faults the poet for failing to achieve a comparable synthesis in his poetry writing. Benjamin asserts that Baudelaire’s aim to fuse “the transitory” and “the immutable element” constitutes the “weakest” aspect of the poet’s “theory of modern art” (Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire” 50). Finally, Benjamin pays little attention to Constantin Guys and the celebratory tenor of Baudelaire’s essay in which Guys figures.

In this light, we can trace how Benjamin’s use of “elective affinities” is continuous with a more comprehensive project about the social efficacy of critical interpretation, first proposed in the introduction to his essay titled “Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*,” written in 1924–25. Here Benjamin distinguished between criticism and commentary (or description) and between truth content and material content (or subject matter). As he put it, “Critique seeks the truth content of a work of art; commentary, its material content” (“Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*” 297). However, the one process cannot obtain without the other, since “The truth content emerges as that of the material content” (300).¹⁵

Herein lies the difference between authentic criticism and mere commentary. Authentic criticism is achieved when the critic analyzes the novel’s characters’ actions as signifiers of societal conditions and moral standards, and thereby triggers social consciousness in his own readers. By extension, in Benjamin’s critique, critical activity and elective affinity define and oppose each other: critique is a decisive action (or praxis) compelled by social consciousness; conversely, elective affinity is an uncritical, instinctive choice compelled by natural and societal forces. As Benjamin stated, “Choice is natural and may even belong to the elemental; decision is transcendent” (“Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*” 246).¹⁶ Briefly, then, Benjamin *reveals* the novel’s truth content: in Goethe’s time marriage became a social myth, its ritual enacted without moral



Fig. 6. Charles Méryon, *Le Pont Neuf*, 1853, etching. Geffroy, pl. opp. 108.

decision. The truth content of *Elective Affinities* is not the subject of marriage, but marriage as a decaying social institution at the time of its writing.¹⁷ If Goethe's novel marks the inception of moral decline in modern times, it was in light of its continuation, evidenced by the rise of modern capitalism, that Benjamin framed his interpretation of Baudelaire and his urban poetry.

In fact, Benjamin does not actually champion Baudelaire's poetry per se: its importance lies in the material content through which he reveals the truth content: that is, the "decrepitude" and "the horrible social reality" of the age of high capitalism during the Second Empire in its capital city (Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire" 34, 50–51). I would even say that Benjamin projects his own antipathy toward modern Paris onto Baudelaire's occasional disaffection with the capital:

Baudelaire found nothing to like about the age he lived in. ... *Because he did not have any convictions*, he assumed ever *new forms himself*: Flâneur, apache, dandy, and ragpicker were so many roles to him. For the modern hero is no hero; he is a portrayer of heroes. *Heroic modernism turns out to be a Trauerspiel [tragedy] in which the hero's part is available.* (Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire" 60; emphasis added)

Thus, Benjamin extols Baudelaire's work as social record but condemns the man for lacking political insight and social conscience.

For Benjamin, Baudelaire is tragic only insofar as his heroism is feigned. "The hero is the true subject of *modernité*. In other words," Benjamin explains, "it takes a heroic constitution to live modernity" (Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" 44). Baudelaire's "hero of modern life" is driven by physical survival but without decisive moral action. Impervious to the material deprivation of the "multitudes malades" (ibid. 46)¹⁸ who people his poems, Baudelaire merely uses "the sickly population" as "the background which casts the outlines of the hero into bold relief" (ibid. 44), that is, the poet himself. Baudelaire was the first among modern poets who "find the refuse of society on their streets and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse. This means that a common type is ... superimposed upon their illustrious type" (ibid. 48).

Because Benjamin aimed to signal to his reader the incipient social ills that issued from the Second Empire Paris to his own time, Baudelaire's poem "Le Cygne" (from *Les Fleurs du mal*) provided an occasion to interpret an allegory of modern Paris and its "decrepitude." In this poem, Baudelaire bemoans "Le vieux Paris [qui] n'est plus" ("Old Paris [which] is no more") where the landscape is strewn with "ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts" ("the piles of rough hewn capitals and shafts"), and where, among "palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs, / ... tout pour moi devient allégorie, / Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs." (63; "new palaces, scaffolding, blocks, / ... everything becomes an allegory for me, / And my dear memories are heavier than rocks": *Flowers of Evil* 73-75). In this allegorical respect, Baudelaire's achievement is comparable to Méryon's, an elective affinity suggested by Benjamin's pictorial interpretation of the poem:

It is not an accident that it is allegorical. ... The condition of Paris is fragile; it is surrounded by symbols of fragility—living creatures ... and historical figures. ... What they share are mourning for what was and lack of hope for what is to come. ... When ever Paris occurs in the *Fleurs du mal*, it gives evidence of this *decrepitude*. (Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire" 50; emphasis added)

Benjamin attributes the enduring value of Baudelaire's Paris poems to this essential "decrepitude" and the poet's "reservation about the big city" (ibid. 50).

Conversely, Prendergast extols Baudelaire as “The supreme spokesman in the nineteenth century for the relation between the city and the new art [in both poetry and painting], ... notably in his emphasis on *modernité*, both social and artistic, as based on the exploration and cultivation of ‘le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent’ ” (Prendergast 6).¹⁹ While Benjamin considered the prose poems peripherally to the verse poems, as supporting evidence of modern decrepitude, Prendergast foregrounds Baudelaire’s own testimony that links the prose poem with the modern urban experience. As the poet stated in a letter to the publisher of these poems:

Quel est celui de nous qui n’a pas ... rêvé le miracle d’une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience? C’est surtout de la fréquentation des villes énormes, c’est du croisement de leurs innombrables rapports que naît cet idéal obsédant. (“À Arsène Houssaye,” *Œuvres complètes* 229, qtd. in a different order in Prendergast, 131)

Which of us has not ... dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, sufficiently supple and articulated to adapt to the lyric movements of the soul, to the undulations of reverie, to the sudden starts of consciousness. It is above all from the experience of great cities, from the intersection of their innumerable relations, that this obsessive ideal [of the prose poem] is born. (“À Arsène Houssaye,” trans. Prendergast 267)²⁰

Accordingly, Prendergast identifies ironic ruptures in Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris* prose poems: a denial of the rhythms and harmony of verse poetry. Read as narratives, the prose poems deny conventional closures; these ruptures, in turn, render a poetry of fragmentation and parodies of conventional literary and social forms.²¹

For our purposes, Prendergast’s interpretation of “Perte d’Auréole” (“A Lost Halo,” from *Le Spleen de Paris*) best shows how Baudelaire parodies the traditional role of the poet as societal muse, as well as his own identity as *flâneur* poet. Here, the poet’s halo, the symbol of the muse, falls in the street mire as the narrator stumbles in his effort to avoid the hurtling traffic:

Tout à l’heure, comme je traversais le boulevard, en grande hâte, et que je sautillais dans la boue, à travers ce chaos mouvant où la mort arrive au galop de tous les côtés à la fois, mon auréole, dans un mouvement brusque, a glissé de ma tête dans la fange du macadam. (Prendergast 132, qtd. from *Œuvres complètes* 299–300)

As I was crossing the road just now as fast as my legs would carry me, hopping through the mud and the chaos of traffic, with death hurtling at me from every direction at once some sharp movement of mine made my halo fall off my head and roll in the dirt on the road. (Prendergast 227)

To be sure the locus of this scene is a new Paris boulevard, any one of which was still under construction. Despite the formal and social order of this

network, the actual experience of its crossing is quite the opposite—a course of sudden, personal undoing, here presented in “the image of the stumbling poet *flâneur*” (Prendergast 132). As Prendergast explains, Baudelaire “plays havoc” with conventional *flânerie*—the urbane figure in control of his body, imagination, and gaze—and he does so “by bringing into the field of vision and representation objects and events generally screened off” (ibid. 132). The poem ends with the crest fallen poet (nonchalantly) handing over the halo to a passer by (himself an aspiring poet).

In the last analysis I want to return to the poem “*Le Cygne*,” in which Baudelaire described the making of Haussmann’s Paris as “le bric à brac confus” (63; “crowded bric à brac,” *Flowers of Evil* 75). Baudelaire was referring here to “the physical realities of demolition and rebuilding” (Prendergast 11). Yet, as Prendergast claims, the poem reveals the paradox of modern Paris writ large: while this is a poem about a city in fragments and ruins, it exonerates “Paris as another Troy to be, with its prefiguring of modernity as ambiguity (not in order to dignify the former with the aura of the latter, but rather to project a history as issuing in the city’s death)” (Prendergast 207–08).

If we accept Baudelaire’s view of Paris *vécu* and the historical ambiguities it spawned, then we should recover in Baudelaire’s description of Méryon’s Paris etchings a modernity that differs from Benjamin’s melancholic misgivings. Indeed, a closer reading reveals the ironic contrasts that gave contemporary shape to Baudelaire’s prose poems. Here he transforms spires into fingers, smoke into vomit, scaffolds into spider webs, closed vistas into open ones—transformations that evoke his elective affinity with Méryon. In this exchange, words and images historicize, in Baudelaire’s words, “des éléments complexes dont se compose le douloureux et glorieux décor de la civilisation” (“Peintres et Aquafortistes” 825; “the complex elements which go to make up the painful and glorious décor of civilization,” “Painters and Etchers” 221).

In closing, I can only suggest the possibilities for further inquiry into the ways in which some Baudelairean artists were competent literary readers of Baudelaire’s prose poems. They too inverted or parodied conventional expectations for narrative transparency, thereby translating ironic verbal structure and content into visual techniques and painted forms. Whereas Guys’s and Méryon’s compositions side with convention, Baudelairean artists rendered their subjects abstruse, their figures fragmented, their surfaces fractured, and their spaces oblique. For example, in Degas’s *Place de la Concorde* (1875, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg), Viscount Lepic and his two daughters stride in opposite directions, the father forming a diagonal connection between the two upright girls. Viewed together, the coarsely brushed, cropped figures are silhouetted against the yellowish stone pavement of the new boulevard, here tilted forward as a flat picture plane. More often than not, these Baudelairean

works resist traditional portraiture or narrative interpretation, and portray the artist's or his subjects' inward gaze, thus subverting the viewer's traditional "entry" into the picture space.²² Mirrors often function in this subversive way. In Gustave Caillebotte's *Dans un café* (1880, Musée des Beaux Arts, Rouen), a single male figure and the mirror against which he stands dominate the frontal plane. Here the mirror flattens pictorial space and creates a closed circuit of surface reflections. The figure gazes past the viewer to an outdoor scene framed by an interior window, a fragment of which is captured in the upper right corner of the mirror surface.

We can assume that such narrative and surface opacity, seen in Manet's early works *Olympia* (1863, Musée d'Orsay) and *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863, Musée d'Orsay), compelled Baudelaire to declare Manet "que le premier dans la décrépitude de votre art" ("À Édouard Manet, 11 Mai 1865," *Correspondance* 2:497; "only the first in the decline of your art": *Selected letters* 227). Decrepit or not, these painters followed Baudelaire's mandate for mirroring the transitoriness of a singular modern moment, a historical endeavor that persisted in twentieth century avant garde art and continues to inform our own ironic self reflections.

NOTES

- 1 The symposium was held at the University of Pittsburgh 4-6 November 2004. <http://www.mc.pitt.edu/> [accessed 17 October 2006]
- 2 See Weingarden. In these articles I examine visual parody in the paintings of Manet and Caillebotte and the photography of Charles Marville and Eugène Atget. Of course other Baudelairean artists of the 1860s-1880s would include progressive and more conservative artists, ranging from Edgar Degas to Jean Béraux.
- 3 The collection of forty-five prose poems was written between 1857-61. These were published piecemeal in different journals before his death in 1867, while a posthumous volume with five additional poems was published in 1869 (Scarfe 11-12).
- 4 I have borrowed the French phrase "lieu de mémoire" from Pierre Nora. For this study, I have extended Nora's phrase to "lieu d'expérience."
- 5 See, for example, Clark 3-78 and Pichois and Avicé 27-32. Clark also identifies "ambiguity" as a Parisian attitude towards modernity in general and, specifically, towards Haussmann's modernization of Paris (21).
- 6 "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" was written in the summer and fall of 1938 but remained unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. "Some Motifs in Baudelaire" was written in February and July 1939 and first appeared in the January 1940 issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.

- 7 Prendergast borrows the term “vécu” from nineteenth century phenomenology to reconstruct the “urban noise” of Paris by way of literary texts (17–19).
- 8 *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* was first published in *Le Figaro* in three parts: on 26 and 29 November and 3 December 1863.
- 9 Unless otherwise stated, all the quotations from Baudelaire in French are from *Baudelaire: Œuvres complètes*.
- 10 In the paragraph which follows this description of the shock effects of the new, Baudelaire states, “Le beau est toujours bizarre” (724; “The beautiful is always strange”: “The Exposition Universelle” 124).
- 11 Baudelaire used the term “se dédoubler” in “De l’essence du rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques” (1855; 694; *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* 154). The dictionary translation of *se dédoubler* is “to be divided into two,” and of “*dédoublement*” is “dividing [or splitting] into two” (*Cassell’s*). Mayne follows this dictionary definition in his translation. However, in translating Baudelaire’s use of *se dédoubler* as “rapid self doubling” (“la force de se dédoubler rapidement”) I am following Paul de Man’s interpretation of Baudelaire’s concept of irony. Furthermore, I borrow the term *dédoublement* from de Man, who uses it to explain the “reflective activity” connoted by Baudelaire’s use of the infinitive form *se dédoubler*, that being an activity of “self duplication or self multiplication” (de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality” 212–13).
- 12 Zorn’s English translation of the French quotation in Benjamin’s essay better conveys Baudelaire’s paradoxical interpretation of Méryon than Mayne’s translation of the passage in “Salon of 1859” (200–01).
- 13 Méryon was institutionalized shortly after he completed his series *Etchings of Paris* (1850–54). See Preston.
- 14 *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (*Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*) was the title of Benjamin’s 1937 book length study of Paris after 1848 organized around the figure of Baudelaire, which was never published in its entirety. “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire” was the second of three parts planned for the book. See Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” translator’s note, 66.
- 15 My general understanding of Benjamin’s critical theory, as developed in “Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*,” is based on Leacock. Spencer’s distinction between “Commentary vs. Critique,” a translation of the first paragraph of Benjamin’s essay, was also helpful in formulating a basic structure for interpreting his critique of Baudelaire.
- 16 For a detailed discussion of “a subtle but significant distinction between choice (the German *Wahl* of the novel’s title) and decision (the German *Entscheidung*),” see Leacock 282–83.
- 17 As Benjamin stated, “The subject of *Elective Affinities* is not marriage. Nowhere in the work are its ethical powers to be found. From the outset, they are in the

process of disappearing. ... Marriage here is not an ethical problem, yet neither is it a social problem. It is not a form of bourgeois conduct. In its dissolution, everything human turns into appearance, and the mythic alone remains as essence” (“Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*” 302).

- 18 Benjamin stated that Baudelaire inscribed *modernité* (ostensibly) beneath a description of “la multitude malade” which appeared in the writer’s critical essay “Pierre Dupont [I]” (1851; *Œuvres complètes* 451); Benjamin paraphrases Baudelaire using the phrase in the plural form. Benjamin connects Baudelaire’s early (1851) definition of *modernité* with his later definition of modernity that appeared under the heading “Of the Heroism of Modern Life” in his “Salon of 1846” (Benjamin 44–48).
- 19 Qtd. from *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, in *Œuvres complètes* 1163.
- 20 As Prendergast notes, this letter has served as the preface to Baudelaire’s collection of prose poems, published posthumously with the title *Le Spleen de Paris* in 1869 (131). The first twenty poems were published in 1862 in *La Presse* (*Œuvres complètes* 161). For further discussion of the collection’s title, and its positive meaning, see Scarfe 12–13.
- 21 Prendergast finds in Baudelaire’s prose poems many of the ironic structures that characterize the nineteenth century French novel (24–30, 126–33, 138–63). My own understanding of irony and parody, as manifested in nineteenth century French literature, concurs with Prendergast, and owes much to Hutcheon; see Weingarden, “The Place of Art Historiography in Word and Image Studies,” where I interpret parodic structures and ironic effects as analogous artistic strategies in Édouard Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies Bergère* (1882) and Émile Zola’s naturalist novels.
- 22 See Weingarden, “Baudelairean Modernity” and “The Mirror as a Metaphor.”

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Serial Künstler: Portrait of the Artist as a Malefactor

Valentin Nussbaum

An important part of literary works and films that deal with crime and criminals associates the scene of the crime and the *corpus delicti* with the artistic world (Majastre 43–52; Przybilka 132–38). Dan Brown for example set an inaugural murder under a painting by Caravaggio in the Louvre's Great Gallery (Brown 3); Patricia Cornwell identifies the serial killer Jack the Ripper with the English painter Walter Sickert (Cornwell); while Steve Hodel, retired detective chief of the LAPD, offers proof that his own father drew his inspiration from the works of Man Ray in his macabre *mise en scène* of the murder of Elizabeth Short, alias the Black Dahlia (Hodel, chapter 19, exhibits 35a and 35b).¹ Actually, behind these different associations there is a whole series of references or clichés, not to say myths. These authors are not the first (or the last) to combine the artistic arena with criminality. If it is still difficult to estimate the impact of these writings on the collective imagination – in spite of their large diffusion – they are nevertheless a representative counterpart of a trend already initiated in 1827 by Thomas de Quincey's *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*.

At the convergence of text and image, *32 Décembre*, the second part of Enki Bilal's last tetralogy,² constitutes an ideal appetizer for the way to prepare art and crime. Even though the date of 32 December appears hypothetical and prospective, the events related by Bilal exhale both a perfume of *déjà vu* and a visionary quality. This is particularly the case for the artistic character of Jefferson Holeraw and his happening based on the "All White Theme." We can look at it and read it as a trash version of the history of modern art, especially the story of the historic avant gardes, among them pop art, which was deeply influenced by the vocabulary of American comics. Here is the framework: the world is threatened by an obscurantist order, a small fundamentalist mafia, directed by a neo avant garde artist named Jefferson Holeraw. This artist is nothing but a clone amongst the eighteen self-generated others of the mad scientist Optus Warhole. His aim is to eradicate everything that concerns thought, science, culture, and memory, by eliminating or instrumentalizing the persons who are directly involved in these fields. One of his



Fig. 1. Enki Bilal (b. 1951), *Portrait of Jefferson Holeraw a.k.a. Optus Warhole* (detail of plate 28 in *32 décembre*), 2003. Geneva: Les Humanoïdes Associés.

victims is the thirty year old Nike Hatzfeld, whom Warhole has invited to the first performance of an “all in white” happening in Bangkok (Bilal 21–29). This performance, which is nothing but the gory murder of the spectators, establishes the basis of a second and much crueller happening. Designated as a “compression de mort éruptée” (Bilal 44; “compression of belched death”), this second happening generates a dark death cloud, which is meant to travel around the globe according to the fluctuating winds. It constitutes the prelude of a globalized “art brutal” (Bilal 44; “brutal art”).

Beyond the similarities to the modern myth of perverted creation, epitomized by the character of the mad scientist who becomes a criminal creator, the “Very Great Artist” designed by Enki Bilal (Bilal 27) not only follows the example of the popular memory of pulp fiction and thriller movies.³ It also borrows a number of features from the artistic imaginary of modernity. It is not fortuitous that the name and the barely hidden characteristics of Optus Warhole (with a final e) match the historic icon of pop art (figs. 1, 2). The excessive whiteness of the fictitious clone who is ravaged by the darkest destructive impulses has something to do with the real Andy Warhol’s obsessions. Warhol was indeed preoccupied with death and tried to exorcize his deepest fears by transforming himself into a timeless icon (Dillenberger

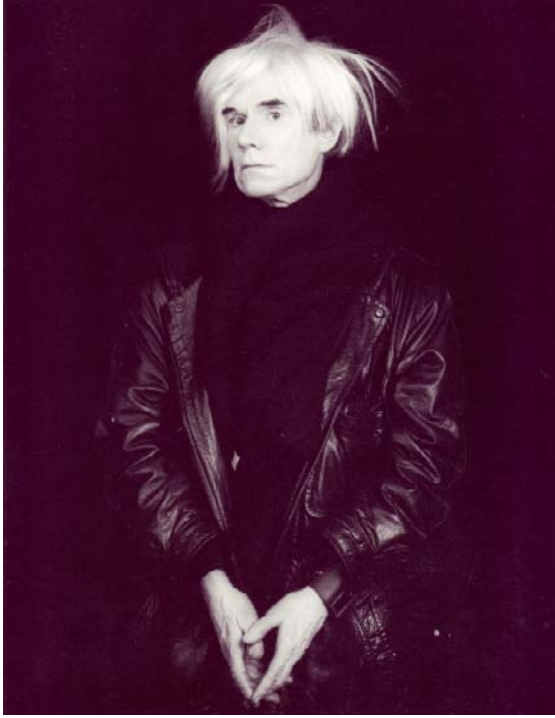


Fig. 2. Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–89), *Portrait of Andy Warhol*, 1986, 61 x 51 cm., Gelatin silver photograph. © The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation/Art and Commerce.

65–77), practicing capillary hyperoxidation, intensifying his chalk white complexion, and invariably wearing black clothes. This megalomaniac, who multiplied plastic surgeries in order to become somebody else, declared that he was a machine (Swenson 26),⁴ and produced all the ingredients of a fictitious character in a fictitious world, just like the comics superheroes who appear in his very first works. However, beyond the twin features of Warhol and Warhole, and even beyond the principles of cloning and seriality, Bilal's reference to Andy Warhol is not the only one that deserves mention. Warhol acts as the revealing go between in the real life thriller that is the history of the artistic avant-gardes. Eccentric figures, transgressive acts, as well as sensational formulas are plentiful, as in, for example, the definition of the surrealist act given by André Breton in 1929: "L'acte surréaliste le plus simple consiste, revolvers aux poings, à descendre dans la rue et à tirer au hasard, tant qu'on

peut, dans la foule” (Breton 108; “The simplest surrealist act consists in going into the street, revolver in hand, and shooting at random into the crowd”: qtd in Breton, 39).

Jefferson Holeraw’s happenings and their theoretical justification can be placed between this definition and the frightening statement of Karl Heinz Stockhausen after 11 September 2001. The German composer made this appalling statement about the destruction of the Twin Towers:

Das war das grösste Kunstwerk, das es je gegeben hat. Dass Geister in einem Akt etwas vollbringen, was wir in der Musik nicht träumen können, dass Leute zehn Jahre üben wie verrückt, total fanatisch für ein Konzert, und dann sterben. Das ist das grösste Kunstwerk, das es überhaupt gibt für den ganzen Kosmos. Das könnte ich nicht. Dagegen sind wir gar nichts als Komponisten.” (qtd. in Gillen, 119)⁵

It was the greatest work of art of all times. Minds achieving something in an act that we could only ever dream of in music; people rehearsing like mad for ten years, fanatically preparing for a concert and then dying. It was the greatest work of art in the entire cosmos. I could never do that. We composers are nothing in comparison.

As we shall see, the ambiguous figure of the artist as malefactor emerges from a sort of law of the series, by which fiction and reality, work of art and artist, simulacrum and truth are mingled. What Bilal also seems to evoke through the bloody signature of Warhole’s “all white happening” (Bilal 21) is Caravaggio’s example. This confirmed murderer, whose stylistic crudity and brutal iconography did not help in his trial, haunts the stained walls of the White Cube. The affirmation of his repentance, the only signature appearing in his entire work, which was written out with the painted blood of the *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* on 29 August 1608 (Stone 161–70), finds its counterpart on the sixty seventh floor of the Holeraw Building in Bangkok on 27 December 2026 (Bilal 56; fig. 3). If the guilt of the artist in Bilal’s fiction is obvious, how may we judge for real artists, when fiction is filtered by historical distance and art? How may we be sure, since, according to Theodor Adorno’s aphorism, “jedes Kunstwerk ist eine abgedungene Untat” (Adorno 123; “every work of art is a crime compensated”).

The answer to this is certainly not to be found in the investigation of the novelist Patricia Cornwell, who in 2001 tried to elucidate the true identity of Jack the Ripper. As related by her literary agent, Patricia Cornwell started her criminal proceedings against the painter Walter Sickert by simply observing his painting and his life (Cornwell 10). For her, a painter who drew his inspiration from the real murder of a prostitute in Camden Town, an artist who made pictures that were very close to the photographs showing Jack the Ripper’s victims (Cornwell 14), a theorist who recommended that all artists use photographic enlargements of undressed corpses (Cornwell 89), could only be highly suspect. An unstable personality becomes the damning evidence

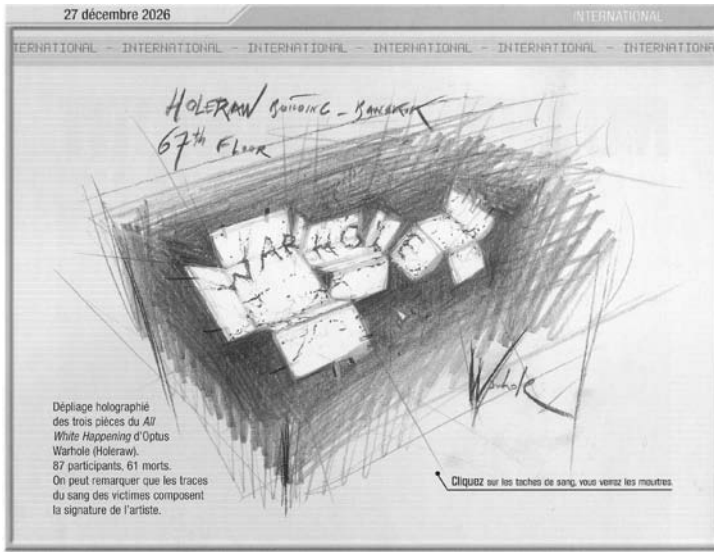


Fig. 3. Enki Bilal, *The Signature of the artist Optus Warhole* (detail of plate 56 in *32 décembre*), 2003. Geneva: Les Humanoïdes Associés.

of his culpability (Cornwell 61). Sickert, the innate comedian who used asumed names, who possessed several secret studios, and who liked to disguise himself (Cornwell 103), perfectly matched the portrait of a psychopath and serial killer. Jack the Ripper, alias Walter Sickert: the portrait of a killer. Case closed. Case closed? Not quite. We should call to the witness box the aspect of caricature contained in this portrait (Bartels). As we will see, this police sketch, just like the character of Enki Bilal's Holeraw Warhole, has something to do with a myth.

Let us reopen the file and investigate the suspicion harbored against the artistic world and its uncanniness. To justify the American novelist, we should first mention that artists did their best since the beginning of the avant gardes to sow discord and liken their profession to a criminal conspiracy. In this respect the portrait of the artist as a criminal has a long tradition although its history remains unclear. Horst Bredekamp demonstrated that, already in the sixteenth century, Benvenuto Cellini claimed and exaggerated his own crimes, in order to mold the image of an exceptional artist someone above the law whose work can atone for his violent and criminal behavior (Bredekamp 337 48). Since the end of the nineteenth century, this attitude has been regularly promoted by artists, but was also suggested by the critics,

as by Max Nordau in his essay entitled *Degeneracy* (*Entartung*, 1892–93): “Von Kriminellen unterscheidet sich der Künstler oft nur durch ein gewisses Mass an Muskelschmalz und Entschlusskraft, um den Raub, den Mord, die Blutschande, welche er in seinen Werken verherrlicht, auch in die Tat umzusetzen” (Nordau, qtd. in Gillen, 129; “The artist frequently differs from the criminal only in terms of muscle and resolve needed to actually turn the robbery, murder, and incest he glorifies in his work into reality”).

In anticipation of or in response to reactionary critics, many avant garde artists have ironically enriched the imaginary aspect of the creator as a male factor. Edgar Degas declared for instance that “un tableau est une chose qui exige autant de rouerie, de malice et de vice que la perpétration d’un crime” (qtd. in Lemoisne, 119; “a painting calls for as much cunning, roguishness, and wickedness as the committing of a crime”). An assertion that will be ambiguously echoed more than a hundred years later by the former FBI profiler John Douglas: “The successful serial killers plan their work as carefully as a painter plans a canvas. They consider what they do their ‘art,’ and they keep refining it as they go along” (Douglas and Olshaker 116).

Parallel to these assertions a wide range of artworks illustrates this paradoxical association. There are numerous self portraits of artists as criminals, as for example the *Self portrait as Christ and Criminal* by Oskar Kokoschka (in the first issue of *Der Sturm*, 1910)⁶; Marcel Duchamp appearing as a dangerous gangster with different pseudonyms in *Wanted \$2,000 Reward* (1922; fig. 4), or the surrealists gathered around the criminal anarchist Germaine Berton (in the first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 1 December 1924; Eggenberger 212–15). To complete this non exhaustive list, there is a need to document the semantic field of offences and violence used in performances and art works made by artists during the entire twentieth century and beyond. Two recent exhibitions tried to delineate some decisive features bound up with this imagery. The first was organized in Paris by Jérôme Sans at the Palais de Tokyo in 2003. It showed contemporary work under a transgressive and new radical activist aesthetic. For the curator the exhibited artists are “hackers of the real” (Sans 7). The second exhibition was organized in 2004 by Hans Winkler in Berlin. Titled *Legal/Illegal: Art Beyond Law*, it presented artistic actions, interventions, and performances that identified provocative artists as outlaws (Winkler 37). It painted the picture of the contemporary artist as a malefactor or as a saboteur (Hoffmann 201–16). Both these exhibitions show that such works seem to be the exact counterpart of the “news in brief” column or may, in turn, be inspired by it. Some examples serve to illustrate this.

F Space Gallery, Santa Ana California, 19 November 1971, 7:45 p.m.: Chris Burden asks a friend to shoot him with a .22 rifle (*Shoot*). The happy few who are present do not lift a finger to stop the crime. Luckily, Burden is only hit



Fig. 4. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), *Wanted \$2,000*, 1923. Rectified ready made, 49.5 x 35.5 cm. Collection Louise Hellstrom. © Pictoright Amsterdam 2008.

in the arm. It is, however, another story to explain the injury to doctors and policemen and to claim that the wound resulted from a marital quarrel or a domestic hunting accident – a vinegar bottle might have fallen onto the gun put on the table (Ward 124). 9 February 1972: Chris Burden hijacks his interviewer Phyllis Lutjeans in the studios of a local Californian TV station. With a knife at her throat, he threatens to kill her if the live broadcasting is stopped (*TV Hijack*; Noever 132). 5 January 1973, around 8 p.m.: Chris Burden once again shoots, this time repeatedly, at a Boeing 747 from a beach situated in the area of the Los Angeles International Airport (747; Cottom 119–22). Because his performances were often misunderstood, the American artist decided to return to sculpture in 1977 (Luc 53).

Another space, another period, and different means: the police station, Forlì, Italy, 22 March 1991, 8:25 a.m. Maurizio Cattelan reports a theft. According to the police statement, an invisible and non-existent work by the artist was stolen on the previous day. Cattelan, in fact, did not have the time

to prepare anything for an exhibition that was supposed to open the following day. Therefore, a police statement was displayed in the Milan Gallery taking the place of the absent work of art: *Untitled* (police report of a stolen invisible artwork), 1992 (Bonami 73). Maurizio Cattelan had for a long time been a fan of gangster movies and was dreaming of robbing a bank himself. Out of his “love for certain cops and robbers movies” he exhibited in the following year a real forced safe, from which 157 million lire had been stolen by unknown burglars (157.000.000, 1992. Installation. “Ottovolante”, Galleria d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Accademia Carrara, Bergamo; Spector 32). Some time later, or maybe some time earlier, the reports are not clear about that, Cattelan got away from Rivara Castle, the day before the opening of his exhibition, leaving traces of his escape – a rope of knotted sheets hanging out of the window (*Una domenica a Rivara*, 1992). The artist becomes as elusive as the mythic *Fantômas*, or Richard Kimble, the well known *Fugitive* popularized by the television series of the same name. That same year, he asked fifty people he knew well to submit their description of him to a police expert, in order to realize his own identikit picture (*Super noi*, 1992; fig. 5; Bonami 54). Amsterdam, 1996: Maurizio Cattelan once again has only two weeks to submit a work to the de Appel Gallery. The day before the deadline, he has nothing but an idea. During the night, he steals the entire contents of the gallery across the street, including the works exhibited, and puts them on display at de Appel. This expropriation was entitled *Another fucking ready made* (Bonami 73).⁷

In Stains, a Parisian suburb, during the year 2000, Pierre Huyghe hired John Wojtowicz, the media criminal, who, on 22 August 1972, had made an armed raid on a Brooklyn branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank, and taken the entire staff hostage in order to pay for his boyfriend’s sex change surgery. The hostage taking, which lasted fourteen hours, was followed live by television cameras. The media impact of the incident inspired a fictionalized story of the hold up in *Life Magazine* a month later, which in turn, three years later, inspired Sidney Lumet’s movie *Dog Day Afternoon*. Pierre Huyghe, whose work is concerned with the notions of both collective and individual memories but also with the connection between fiction and reality, could not have found a better subject. He invited Wojtowicz to give his own version of the events in a piece entitled *Third Memory* and in it tried to restore the reality of an event which had been altered by the filters of television, newspapers, and film. Huyghe also attempted to restore the identity of John Wojtowicz, who had become the fictitious character named Sonny Wortzik performed by Al Pacino. Through the reconstitution of a reconstitution, Huyghe questioned the mechanisms of seeing and showing. In multiplying perspectives and images projected on two screens showing the reconstitution of the movie, of



Fig. 5. Maurizio Cattelan (b. 1961), *Super Noi* (detail), 1992. Ink on acetate. Vienna: Thyssen Bornemisza Contemporary Art Collection.

the “making of” of the video reconstitution, of Wojtowicz’s comments, and of Sidney Lumet’s movie itself, he demonstrated that reality is but a screen, and that this reality is based on a succession of distorting filters.

At different levels, the essential ideas revealed in the crime, its media coverage, its fictionalization, and its artistic retranscription, are issues of identity and authenticity. Are then the broadcasting retransmission, the reports and the newspaper photographs, the Warner Brothers movie that “Hollywood izes” the whole lot, able to transmit the essence of the event by turning it into a show? What credence can be given to the incredible story of Ernest Aaron Wojtowicz’s companion anxious to change his sexual identity? The hold up itself which took place on 22 August 1972 what credence can be given to the authenticity of this act? Huyghe’s montage brings to light that the planning of the robbery had been aided by a spectacular ally. In his testimony, Wojtowicz criticized Sidney Lumet’s direction, declaring that: “Before we went to rob the bank, what you don’t know in the movie is that we went to see *The Godfather*, because that had just come out in New York for the first time and that was 22 August 1972, so it inspired Bobby and Sal and also myself. We watched Marlon Brando and Al Pacino, and that’s where I got the idea of the note” (Masséra 117). Fiction then became a sort of reappropriation of reality, and reality a reappropriation of fiction. Both appear real as well as artificial,

robbing and violating one another simultaneously. In its continual coming and going between reality and fiction, the artistic thriller repeatedly poses a riddle for the spectator. It involves him or her in an investigative process because images are never in themselves evidence.

The work of the “serial Künstler” and this is already the case for Walter Sickert in the *Camden Town Affair* (fig. 6) is not so far away from the effect of fragmentation and reappropriation of the real proposed by Pierre Huyghe. Sickert’s work, like Huyghe’s montage, can be placed in the contexts of modernity and contemporaneity, where crime scenes offer the possibility of questioning the more dramatic issues of visibility. Since the end of the nineteenth century, crime has become the new visual drama, the new media tragedy. Everyone looks at it with fascination. The growing media coverage by newspapers, detective novels, and later by movies and television serials has made of it a popular spectacle. Its global diffusion shows that the general fascination with crime has become a real societal phenomenon. As Walter Sickert already pointed out during a lecture delivered at the Thanet School of Art in 1934:

It is said that we are a great literary nation but we really don’t care about literature, we like films and we like a good murder. If there is not a murder about every day they put one in. They have put in every murder which has occurred during the past ten years again, even the Camden Town murder. Not that I am against that because I once painted a whole series about the Camden Town murder, and after all murder is as good a subject as any other. (Tickner 11)

Sickert’s *Camden Town Series* is in fact set in both artistic and media visual appropriation. It addresses the question of looking on different levels. Twenty years after Jack the Ripper’s case, the *Camden Town Affair*, like *Sonny Wojtowicz’s Affair*, was over exposed in the British media (Baron and Shone 206–13). On 12 September 1907, Emily Phyllis Dimmock had her throat cut while she was asleep. The investigation itself was presented as an exciting event. During three months, the *Daily Mirror* published a great number of photographs showing the face of the victim and of those related to the crime (Daniels 61). Thanks to the publication of a postcard found in Emily’s apartment three weeks after the murder, the commercial artist Robert Wood was arrested (Daniels 61–62). Wood, when transmitting to the *Weekly Dispatch* his own drawings of the court proceedings, became the first reporter of his own trial, and was later acquitted in December 1907 (Tickner 11–47). Sickert, who was much interested in this case and its principal media suspect, rented a bleak room in Camden Town in order to paint a reconstruction. He used the photographs and engravings published in the newspapers and, as Pierre Huyghe would, ninety years later, paid the principal suspect Robert Wood to pose for him (Daniels 68). It appears, however, that two different male models



Fig. 6. Walter Sickert (1860–1942), *The Camden Town Affair*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 61 x 40.6 cm. © Pictoright Amsterdam 2008.

were used for the series and that their identities were left unclear by the artist deliberately (Daniels 68). By depicting an action in suspense, very tense, and incomplete, without beginning or ending, without a clearly identifiable crime, the painter defied the spectator to solve the puzzle. For Rebecca Daniels, “Sickert’s interest in unsolved crimes seems to have caused him to dwell on the issue of ‘whodunit’ as the basis of the narrative” (Daniels 63).

As we have seen, the imagery of crime is ripe with connotations. The drama lies as much in the perception of the subject as in the way it is imagined. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to establish the difference

between reality and fiction, to distinguish the traps of images from those of the imagination, and to understand what images are really telling us, and what we, as spectators, are inferring from them. The artistic appropriation of crime, through its intrinsic ambiguities, tends to demonstrate that images are not evidence in themselves. What is shown cannot immediately be perceived, what is seen is not shown as it should be. The crime (and the criminal) are not automatically identifiable: the model in Walter Sickert's *Camden Town Affair* is as elusive as the personality of Maurizio Cattelan, and the Warholian character of Enki Bilal has as many aliases as Marcel Duchamp's in *\$2,000 Reward*. This unpredictability goes against a tradition of infallible identification initiated by the methods of police investigation and promoted by the positivistic imagery of detective novels and crime movies. Maybe the artist's crime relied on this never ending quest.

NOTES

- 1 The latest thesis on the Black Dahlia disputes Hodel's interpretation. See Wolfe (appendix B).
- 2 *Le Sommeil du Monstre* (1998), *32 décembre* (2003), *Rendez vous à Paris* (2006), *Quatre?* (2007). The first two were published by Les Humanoïdes Associés in Geneva. The publisher of the third and fourth volumes is Casterman in Tournai.
- 3 As for example Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse. The Player* (1922) and also the character of the Joker in Tim Burton's *Batman* (1998). For a survey of the figure of the mad scientist in films see Frayling.
- 4 Andy Warhol asserted in an interview on the essence of pop art that: "The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine like is what I want to do" (qtd. in Swenson, 26).
- 5 From an interview in *Die Welt*, 19 September 2001. On this topic and for a commentary on Stockhausen's statement see Gillen 119 30. **It seems that in his controversial comment, Stockhausen was speaking of the destructive activities of Lucifer. Apparently the report was maliciously filed, omitting the word Lucifer and thus altering the entire context of Stockhausen's sentence (Mitchell 19).**
- 6 See Jäger 219 20.
- 7 Cattelan's thefts belong to a much more generalized process of creation based on appropriation. For a survey of the art of appropriation during the twentieth century, see Rebbelmund.

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Hypnotic Performance and the Falsity of Appearances: The Aesthetics of Medical Spectatorship and Axel Munthe's Critique of Jean-Martin Charcot

Jonathan Marshall

THE ANTITHEATRICAL CRITIQUE

[Charcot] ne décrivait jamais un symptôme sans le faire, en même temps, constater *de visu*.

C'était une innovation. Il n'en fallait pas davantage pour qu'on traitât d'exhibitions théâtrales les séances qu'il consacra à l'étude des manifestations convulsives de la grande hystérie. Insinuation erronée. ... Charcot faisait comparaître à ses leçons cliniques indifféremment tous les malades qui en étaient l'objet. Paralytiques, vertigineux, myopathiques, basedowiens, myxoedémateux, trembleurs ou neurasthéniques, apparaissaient à tour de rôle pour les besoins de la démonstration. Fallait-il créer une loi d'exception concernant les hystériques? (Meige 493)

[Charcot] never described a symptom without making it possible, at the same time, to observe it *with one's own eyes*.

This was an innovation. This was all that was needed for his lessons devoted to the convulsive manifestations of the *grande hystérie* to be treated as theatrical exhibitions. An erroneous insinuation. ... Charcot indifferently brought to his clinical lessons all the patients whose illness was on the agenda. Paralytics, vertiginous, myopathics, Basedowians, myxoedemics, tremblers, or neurasthenics, [all] appeared in turn for the benefit of demonstration. Should he have created an exceptional rule for the hysterics? (original emphasis)

Professor Jean Martin Charcot occupied the first chair of neuropathology in France from 1882. Throughout his tenure at the Salpêtrière Women's Hospice, Paris (1862-93), Charcot lectured on many topics. He was most famous for his "theatrical exhibitions" of hysterical seizure and its associated symptoms, which included hypnotism and hysterical delusion (fig. 1). Under his direction, hysteria, hypnotism, and other conditions were extensively sketched and photographed at the Salpêtrière so as to aid in the analysis of those poses and stances associated with such dynamic disorders of neuromotor control (see Didi Huberman; Gilman). Slides, photographs, and lithographs featured prominently within Charcot's oral lectures and written publications. André



Fig. 1. André Brouillet (1857–1914), *Une leçon du docteur Charcot à la Salpêtrière* (*A lesson of Dr. Charcot at the Salpêtrière*), 1887. Lithographic copy of original. Vienna: Freud Museum. Image courtesy of the Freud Museum.

Brouillet's 1887 painting of one of the neuropathologist's lessons, for example, shows hanging on the left wall a sketch by Charcot's collaborator, Paul Richer, depicting one of the diagnostic poses of hysterical seizure (the *arc en cercle*; figs. 1, 2). As the neuropathologist's former student Sigmund Freud observed, for Charcot: "clinical work ... consists in seeing and ordering things" (Freud 3:12–13). The situation was the opposite in Freud's own practice of psychology. Freud explained that in neurological and "medical training" one is

accustomed to *see* things. You see an anatomical preparation, the precipitate of a chemical reaction, the shortening of a muscle as a result of the stimulation of its nerves. ... Thus a medical teacher plays ... the part of a leader ... who accompanies you through a museum, while you gain direct contact with the objects exhibited. (Freud 15:16–17; original emphasis)

Psychoanalysis, by contrast, was based predominantly upon *listening* (see Lyotard, esp. 91–110; de Marneffe 71–111). Charcot's more "direct" theatrical practice acted so as to take the spectator through physically present, material data, and behavior. Words here acted as a guide to the interpretation of the



Fig. 2. Paul Richer (1849–1933), *Arc de cercle*. In Richer 81. Image courtesy of Harvard Medical Library in the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine.

physically manifest images. Charcot's student Henry Meige contended that the neuropathologist did not shape his lecture style so as to be consistent with the equally sensational, performative signs of *la grande hystérie*. Charcot rather saw hysteria and its hypnotically induced manifestations as simply the most extrovert of the dynamic neuromotor disorders he categorized, all of which had definable, theatrical symptoms best seen in the performance of living patients. Within the Salpêtrière amphitheatre, patients enacted such diagnostic signs as tremors, fits, complications of gait, paralyses, and hypnotic reflexivity, which facilitated Charcot's pedagogic and clinical description of disease.

Despite Charcot's intentions, he was often criticized for being too theatrical in his use of visual and performative materials within the oral presentations of the amphitheatre. Under the pseudonym of "Ignotus," Felix Platel of *Le Figaro* compared Charcot to "Wagner, le grand cabotin musical" (Ignotus 1; "Wagner, the great musical 'ham'"), while another journalist noted that: "Les cours de la Salpêtrière ont été pour eux des exhibitions, presque des scandales" (X 12–13; "The Salpêtrière lectures were seen by them as exhibitions, almost scandals"). This critique of Charcot's theatrical visualization continued to be enunciated into the twentieth century, notably by Dr. Axel Munthe, whose semi-fictionalized account of his own life *The Story of San Michele* (1929) acted as a source for several English language histories of Charcot

(see Leroux Hugon; Ellenberger; Owen). Munthe's description of his former *patron* as one who "relied too much upon his eye" has become a cliché of the historiography, an insightful observation highlighting the role of the visual image for Charcot's diagnostic technique (Munthe 199).

Little else has been written on Munthe's text. The authors of the leading critical biography of Charcot, Christopher Goetz, Michel Bonduelle, and Toby Gelfand, largely dismiss *San Michele* as "a fiction" which "cannot be read for biographical accuracy" (Goetz, Bonduelle, and Gelfand 273). Although it was not a novel as such, Munthe confessed to altering certain events in his accounts to make them more "sensational" (Munthe 17). His version of the occurrences which precipitated his departure from the Salpêtrière seems likely to have been embellished in this way (Munthe 15–19; Munthe and Uexküll 29). Nevertheless, the fictionality of Munthe's writings does not render them analytically useless. On the contrary, Munthe's strategic use of fiction distinguishes him as a visiting medic at the Salpêtrière who was highly conscious of his own aesthetic project as an author. *San Michele* provides invaluable insight into how the theatrical visibility of Charcot's work was perceived by members of the medical community, illuminating the contradictions put in play by the neurologist's practice. It is these formal issues, as played out in the work of Munthe and Charcot, that are addressed below.

The Story of San Michele identifies the theatrical aspects of Charcot's discourse as a contaminant in the neuropathologist's practice which the onetime student would have preferred expunged from the neurologist's otherwise insightful observations. Charcot practiced a theatrical form of medical visualization in which word and image were hierarchized and deployed so as successfully to describe those illnesses of movement which were the subject of the new discipline of neurology. As Meige observed, Charcot never placed before the "eyes" of his audience performances of a disease without ordering and classifying these actions through verbal "description." Munthe however saw this dramaturgical mixture of word and image as being iatrogenic, contributing to disease rather than describing it. Munthe's primary objection to performative discourse revolved around questions of truth and falsehood. To trust externalized performance was to be deceived by appearances and so become complicit with hysterical pathology. Performance did not exist in dialogue with medicine, but was alien to diagnostic veracity. Munthe was not himself entirely free from such faults, his own melodramatic language highlighting the close proximity between French literary dramatic genres and medical practice at the time (see Rosario *passim*; Cryle 55–74; Reed 265–84; Carroy Thirard 299–317; Diamond 59–92). Munthe's account of a showdown with Charcot in his office, the latter "trembling with anger" as he threatened police action, was worthy of Zola or other authors for the naturalist stage (Munthe 216).

PHOTOGRAPHIC EMBODIMENT AND VISION

Il semble que l'hystérie épilepsie n'existe qu'en France ... comme si je l'avais forgée par la puissance de ma volonté. Ce serait chose vraiment merveilleuse que je puisse ainsi créer des maladies, au gré de mon caprice et de ma fantaisie. Mais à la vérité, je ne suis absolument là que le photographe; j'inscris ce que je vois, et il est trop facile de montrer que ce n'est pas à la Salpêtrière seulement. (Charcot OC 12[BC]:178)

It seems that hysterioepilepsy does not exist outside of France ... as if I had forged it by the power of my will. It would be a truly marvelous thing if I were able to create illnesses in this way, by the fancy of my caprice and my fantasy. But in truth, I am nothing but a photographer. I record what I see and it is too easy to show that it [hysteria] is not found only at the Salpêtrière.

Despite the advances in audio visual pedagogy which Charcot helped establish within French medicine, the neuropathologist typically downplayed his agency as a creative author and dramaturge. Charcot famously defended his presentation of hysteria within the amphitheatre by comparing himself to a photographer. The metaphor is significant, for Charcot did not liken himself to a *camera*, but rather its operator: one who focused the gaze, whilst also mechanistically and unreflectively recording “what I see.” As a writer from *Le progrès médical* observed, for Charcot and his supporters the camera was deemed “as crucial to the study of hysteria as the microscope to histology,” highly valued for its ability to fix in an objective manner the transitory movements of hysterical seizure, delusional performance, and hypnotic automatism for later analysis, display, and publication (qtd. in Showalter, 149). In Meige’s words, Charcot exhorted his students: “Regarder, regarder toujours: c’est ainsi seulement que l’on arrive à *voir*” (Meige 496; “Look, look always: it is only then that one manages to *see*”; original emphasis). This crafted yet objective form of visualization underpinned both Charcot’s methodology as a whole, and his depiction of hysteria in particular.

The critical visualization of performance was vital for those illnesses which Charcot found to be especially profligate or “Protean” in their physical manifestations, namely hysteria (or “hysterioepilepsy,” as Charcot termed it), Tourette’s syndrome (first described at the Salpêtrière), and chorea (Charcot OC 12:219, 369; Richer, esp. 527–73). Hysterical seizure was characterized as commencing with gymnastic, epileptoid poses (stages one and two of the fit), stertor and tetaniform opisthotonos (including the *arc en cercle*, in which muscular contraction of the spine was so pronounced that only the toes and head touched the ground; fig. 2). Alternating tonic and clonic poses were then replaced by the “attitudes passionnelles,” in which patients adopted static positions in accordance with emotive states and hallucinations (stage three). The final sequence was that of dynamically enacted delirium proper

(stage four). Hypnotism which was seen as itself symptomatic of hysteria traced a similarly curtailed pattern, progressing from plastic catalepsy (in which physical suggestion enabled one to pose the unmoving, anaesthetized patient like a mannequin), followed by the neuromuscular excitability of lethargy (rubbing of the tendons produced muscular contractions), and finally somnambulism, in which the patient unthinkingly reproduced or hallucinated scenes in response to more generalized sensory stimuli (green slides placed over the eyes produced visions of gardens, red slides those of violence, etc; see below; Richer *passim*; Bourneville and Régnaud vols. 1–3; X 12–13; Robertson 494–531; Delboeuf 259–275). Brouillet's painting (fig. 1), for example, depicts a hysteric exhibiting a paralytic contracture of the left arm, which was experimentally induced via physical lethargic stimulation, verbal suggestion, or other methods.

Art historian Georges Didi Huberman has built upon the surrealists' reading of the Salpêtrière photographs to argue that hysteria itself represented an aesthetic form or work of art (Didi Huberman *passim*; Aragon and Breton 20–22). Charcot and his associates contended that the pathological neuro-reflexivity of the hysterical body caused it to reproduce, independently of the will, those physical acts and symptoms which the subject was shown when in a state of pathological nervous excitement such as hypnotism, shock, and so on. Drawing on Aristotle's model of mimesis, Charcot's student and successor Fulgence Raymond argued that the hysterical body acted as a kind of "mirror" in which "the virtual image" of somatic symptoms visible in one individual then became imprinted in a second, diseased observer. This took the form of a physical "reflection" or "optical illusion" (Raymond 71), made manifest through the performance of the observer's body as fits, traumatic paralyzes and other symptoms (see Micale, "Charcot" 498–505). The hysterio-epileptic behaved in this sense like a defective camera, turning in upon her self, transforming optical deformations into simulacra of another's somatic actions and symptoms. As Charcot put it, hysterics had "le goût et l'aptitude à la simulation" (OC 9:225; "the taste and aptitude for simulation"). Despite Meige's protestations, there was a similitude between Charcot's spectacular dramaturgy and the subject of his lectures, both of which mimetically represented performative symptoms. As we will see below, Munthe identified this as a failing within the neuropathologist's corpus.

MUNTHE'S "GENEVIÈVE" AND THE FOLLY OF VISION

I have never taken any interest even in the photographs of my friends, I can at will reproduce their un retouched features on my retina with far more exactitude than can the best of photographers. For the student of psychology an ordinary photograph of a human face is besides of scant value. (Munthe 282)

Munthe was a successful, peripatetic physician of Swedish origin whose semi fictionalized biography is still in print today, having been translated into over fifty five languages (see Jangfeldt *Axel Munthe, En Osalig Ande*). Munthe repeatedly attended Charcot's lectures and visited the wards between approximately 1879 and 1883. He parted with Charcot on extremely bad terms. Munthe visited the neuropathologist's rival in Nancy, Hippolyte Bernheim, while still working at the Salpêtrière (Munthe 206). He soon jettisoned Charcot's contention that the hypnotic state was an experimental version of pathological nervous excitement and suggestibility, in favor of Bernheim's competing model of hypnotic suggestibility in the normal, healthy individual. Munthe's own treatment of nervous subjects combined Bernheim's construction of suggestion with Charcot's generally authoritarian approach to patients and his patrician insistence that they submit to his therapeutic discipline (Silverman 297 98; Charcot "De l'expectation," *La Foi qui guérit*).

Munthe's approach to medical visualization was opposed to that of Charcot. This was partly attributable to the Swede's own poor vision. Munthe was blind for twelve years from 1922 (surgical intervention restored partial vision in one eye in 1934) and it is to his ocular afflictions that we owe eight Braille editions of *San Michele* (Jangfeldt, *Axel* 10; Munthe and Uexküll 130 35). Munthe's biographers insisted that "though from a purely optical point of view his vision was always poor his mind's eye was exceptionally clear." It was indeed the Swede's "weak sight" which enabled him to "always ... find the essentials. It was as though he had discovered a direct access, a secret gate to the heart of things" (Munthe and Uexküll 130 31). In the quotation above, Munthe similarly claimed that his "dislike" of photography was based on well founded aesthetic principles, rather than his eyesight per se. He rejected the close parallel between the human retina and film which Charcot proposed, characterizing photographs as a degraded, "retouched" form of mimesis, at one remove from the world of superficial appearances which he could approach more accurately through words and thought even with his eyes closed and unseeing. The level of apparent reality was of "scant value" in diagnosing the essential human nature lying behind visible features. It was such essential, non visual qualities with which psychology, psychoanalysis, and his own practice were concerned. Munthe therefore identified Charcot's reliance upon the analysis of appearances within the clinical theatre as

flawed. The Swede was suitably impressed by Charcot's "almost uncanny," paradoxical ability to use his *gaze* to look *beyond* appearances and so identify "the root of the evil" or in Meige's words "les contours essentiels" of a disease and "les éléments nécessaires à son expression" (Meige 491; "the essential contours ... [and] elements necessary for its expression"). Munthe nevertheless concluded that Charcot came to rely "too much upon his eye," focusing only upon "superficial" details and thus being deceived regarding the essence of illness, of which appearances only offered an imperfect picture (Munthe 199).

Munthe only slightly overstated the case in claiming that during the 1880s "Charcot's famous *Leçons du mardi* in the Salpêtrière" were "devoted chiefly to his *grand hystérie* and to hypnotism" (Munthe 206). The Swede focused his narrative upon a particularly telling example of the falsely exaggerated, the atrical quality of hysteria at the Salpêtrière—an example which drew Munthe himself into the very histrionic melodramas that he so deplored in Charcot's practice. Munthe cited a patient called Geneviève, although this was not the famous hysteric who featured in the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1875–80) by Désiré Magloire Bourneville and Paul Régnaud. The Geneviève photographed by Régnaud was an orphan, aged thirty seven in 1880. The twenty year old subject cited by Munthe was still in intermittent contact with her parents, who believed that she worked in the hospice's kitchens. Munthe implied that—like many Salpêtrière interneess—she had initially been employed there before she became a patient (Micale, "Salpêtrière" 718). While it is possible that the young doctor was referring to a different subject than that described by Bourneville and others, Munthe's references to Geneviève's fame and to depictions of her in newspapers suggest that the individual represented in San Michele was more likely a fictional composite based upon the historic Geneviève and other patients from the *Iconographie*, such as the famous Augustine (see Aragon and Breton).

Munthe concluded that this "Geneviève's" status as one of the most celebrated subjects of the Tuesday lessons meant not only that she was unlikely to leave the hospital and return to the country of her own free will, but that Charcot would have been reluctant to allow her to do so even if she had been amenable to the idea. Munthe resolved therefore to overrule the will of both Charcot and Geneviève by verbally placing in her mind a post hypnotic suggestion that she should attempt to rejoin her parents.

Charcot soon discovered Munthe's betrayal. Munthe noted that his senior was already distrustful of him because it was rumored that the journalist "Ignotus" had "got his most damaging facts from me"—an understandable suspicion given that Munthe shared Platel's distrust of theatrical presentation (Munthe 210–11). Munthe claimed that these intrigues concluded with



Fig. 3. Loreau, *Hysterical hypnotic suggestibility*. In Bourneville and Régnaud 3: 182. Image courtesy of Harvard Medical Library.

Charcot calling the Swede to his office where, “[s]peaking very slowly, his deep voice trembling with rage,” Charcot asserted that Munthe’s unauthorized intervention constituted:

a criminal offence, he ought to hand me over to the police but for the honor of the profession ... he would ... turn me out of the hospital, he wished never to set his eyes on me again. (Munthe 216)

Although it is more likely that the acrimonious split between Munthe and Charcot had its origins in the former’s increasing interest in Bernheim’s theories (upon which Munthe’s purported treatment of Geneviève was based), Munthe’s own account was hardly any less melodramatic than the demonstrations which Charcot himself presented within the Tuesday lessons. The tone of Munthe’s story is (ironically) consistent with the events occurring at the Salpêtrière which he was at pains to critique. There was an apt symmetry in how the Swede’s response to Charcot’s increasingly stagy, dictatorial practice caused an irruption within his partially fictionalized account of a highly theatrical, intra professional medical debate worthy of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* or other comparable contemporary fictions. Charcot was not alone, it seems, in acting in a way consonant with the hysterical melodramas he treated.

EXHIBITIONSIM

Tout en elle, du reste, annonce l'hystérique. Les soins qu'elle apporte à sa toilette; l'arrangement de ses cheveux, les rubans dont elle aime à se parer. Ce besoin d'ornement est si vif que quand elle est en attaques, s'il se produit une rémission, elle en profite pour attacher un ruban à sa camisole; ceci la distrait, lui fait plaisir. (Bourneville and Régnaud 2:168)

Everything about her [Augustine], moreover, indicates the hysteric. The care which she brings to her toilette; the arrangement of her hair, the ribbons with which she loves to adorn herself. This need of ornamentation is so strong with her that when she has an attack [hysteroepileptic seizure or delusion], if she has a remission, she takes advantage of it to attach a ribbon to her straight jacket; it distracts her, gives her pleasure.

Munthe's text presents an aesthetic critique of how hysteroepilepsy was dealt with at the Salpêtrière. The Swede observed that audiences to Charcot's presentations on hysteria were offered such bizarre proofs as somnambulists who:

smelt with delight a bottle of ammonia when told it was rose water, others would eat a piece of charcoal when presented to them as chocolate. Another would ... lift her skirts with a shriek of terror when a glove was thrown at her feet with the suggestion of being a snake. Another would walk with a top hat in her arms rocking it to and fro and kissing it tenderly when she was told it was her baby. (Munthe 210; fig. 3)

Munthe was extremely uncomfortable regarding the melodramatic nature of these demonstrations, specifically identifying them as "stage performances" in order to distinguish these hypnotic displays from proper scientific pedagogy. The fact that the hysterics were enacting essentially fictional, delusional dramas rendered such performances, in Munthe's eyes, more suited to the world of the conventional stage than science. Where Charcot tried to establish a distinction between the image of pathological performance and his own presentation of these materials, Munthe found the lessons to be: "nothing but an absurd farce, a hopeless muddle of truth and cheating" (Munthe 209). The fictive, mimetic nature of hysteroepileptic hypnotic behavior reformulated Charcot's representation of these phenomena in hysteria's own "absurd" image.

Munthe characterized "Geneviève" herself in highly critical terms:

Geneviève was sitting dangling her silk stockinged legs from the long table in the middle of the ward with a copy of *Le Rire* in her lap with her own portrait on the title page. At her side sat Lisette, another of the leading stars of the company. Geneviève's coquettishly arranged hair was adorned with a blue silk ribbon, a row of false pearls hung around her neck, her pale face was made up with rouge, her lips painted. To all appearances she looked more like an enterprising mininette [working class girl with poor taste and lax morals] off to take a stroll on the Boulevards than the inmate of a hospital. Geneviève was the prima donna of the Tuesday stage performances, spoiled and petted by everybody, very pleased with herself and her surroundings. (Munthe 212)



Fig. 4. Paul Régnard, *État normal* (Augustine).
In Bourneville and Régnard. 2: plate XIV.
Image courtesy of Harvard Medical Library.

Munthe's description of Geneviève was not in itself markedly different from that which was proffered by Bourneville at the top of this section. Photographs of the patients in their "état normal" in between attacks presented the readers of his study with a gallery of well groomed, working class women dressed in their Sunday best (fig. 4; Bourneville and Régnard vol. 1, plate I; vol. 2, plates XI, XIV, XXIX, XXXI). The subjects differentiated their modest, undistinguished dark dresses (in many cases supplied by the hospice) with the few adornments they possessed—a string of pearls, teardrop earrings, a ribbon, a hair comb. A tendency towards extravagance was nevertheless apparent in such patients from the *Iconographie* as the would be aristocrat Suzanne N ... and the real Geneviève. The latter even adopted a veil and a melancholy demeanor after her hallucinatory visitations by nocturnal, phantom lovers (fig. 5).

Bourneville and others frequently noted the narcissistic tendencies of the hysteroepileptics at the Salpêtrière, recording hysterics' attention to dress and hairstyling, and conflicts between them over the possession of various



Fig. 5. Paul Régnaud, *Succube* (Geneviève). In Bourneville and Régnaud. 2: plate xxxix. Image courtesy of Harvard Medical Library.

adornments (Richer 140; Robertson 507; X 12). While Munthe agreed with his peers that the subjects' exhibitionistic costume was a diagnostic trait of hysteroepilepsy at the Salpêtrière, he implied that it was "the Tuesday stage performances" which were primarily responsible, and not any underlying disease. This was an iatrogenic symptom, not an objective sign. Rather than discouraging such behavior, Charcot and his assistants "spoiled and petted" Geneviève, lavishing attention on her exhibitionistic tendencies within the amphitheatre. It was not only the outward symptoms of Geneviève which caused her to resemble a "prima donna." She had effectively become one under Charcot's care; a tawdry performer complete with pancake make up and a costume who regularly appeared within the "gala performances in the

amphitheatre” of the Salpêtrière over which the neuropathologist presided (Munthe 210–12). For Munthe, the theatrical images of hysterioepileptic pathology rendered the diagnostic category itself misleading, being composed entirely of surfaces, and unconnected with the “essential contours” and traits which Meige observed defined true clinical illness.

THE THEATER OF MIRRORS

The huge amphitheatre was filled to the last place with a multicoloured audience drawn from tout Paris, authors, journalists, leading actors, actresses, fashionable demi-mondaines, all full of curiosity to witness the startling phenomena of hypnotism. (Munthe 206)

Munthe argued that hysterics manipulated their illness (consciously or subconsciously) so as to guarantee their elevated status within the Salpêtrière’s medical hierarchy. He claimed that when he brought Geneviève’s parents to see her in the ward:

she did not ... recognize them at first. Suddenly her face began to twitch and with a piercing scream she fell headlong on the floor in violent convulsions, to be followed immediately by Lisette in the classic arc en ciel [sic]. Obeying the law of imitation a couple of the other *hystériques* started to “piquer” [launch into] their attacks from their beds, one in convulsive laughter, one in a flood of tears. (Munthe 212)

Munthe confirmed the findings of Charcot and Raymond that hysterics had a tendency to reflect each other’s symptoms. Rather than locating such imitative signs within the performance of individual patient bodies though, Munthe found this quality to be highly active within the wards of the Salpêtrière itself, transforming the hospice into a community of depraved performance. Munthe’s description of what he called the “leading stars of the company” (Munthe 212) was in this sense sharply at variance with the relatively mild characterization of the effects of performative imitation proposed by the members of the Salpêtrière school. The vain “midinette” portrayed in Munthe’s text deceived her doctors and frightened away anyone like her parents who might have disturbed her pampered situation, her preferred environment being the theatres of the ward and of the lectures themselves.

Munthe conceded that: “Some of the subjects were no doubt real somnambulists faithfully carrying out in a waking state the various” physical and sensorial “suggestions made to them during” hypnotic “sleep,” or to put it in Bernheim’s terms (as Munthe did) verbal “post hypnotic suggestions.” Many of the other patients however were:

mere frauds, knowing quite well what they were expected to do, delighted to perform their various tricks in public, cheating both doctors and audience with the amazing cunning of the hystériques. They were always ready to piquer une attaque of Charcot's classical grande hystérie, arc en ciel and all, or exhibit his famous three stages of hypnotism: lethargy, catalepsy, somnambulism, all invented by the Master and hardly ever observed outside of the Salpêtrière. (Munthe 209 10)

Munthe therefore concurred with other commentators like the visiting Dr. Coulston, who “had a great distrust of ... Charcot's conclusions,” arguing that an essentially moral yet nevertheless “morbid craving for notoriety” was responsible for these performances, and not an objective nervous condition *per se* (qtd. in Yellowlees, 133). Such observers rejected Charcot's contention that the tendency to mimetic performance constituted an identifiable, pathological hysterical symptom. On the contrary, this was seen as an *impediment* or problem for medicine if not an actual moral *vice* which overlay hysterical pathology proper. The task of the physician was not therefore to analyze or reproduce performative exhibitionism within the clinic or the lecture theatre, as Charcot did, but to look beyond this so as to examine essential behavior and causality.

This contamination of medical practice at the Salpêtrière by performative falsehood was, for Munthe, partly due to the spatial coincidence and intermixing of different medical departments which Charcot promoted. The professor and his followers prided themselves on the creation of a mutually supportive “Institut de Neurologie,” composed of many, interpenetrating specialist departments at the hospice (Féré 414). Munthe however strove to drive a wedge between the sections of Charcot's institute: “While condemning these Tuesday gala performances in the amphitheatre as unscientific and unworthy of the Salpêtrière, it would be unfair not to admit that serious work was done in the wards” (Munthe 210). Existing largely beyond the gaze of the public of “tout Paris,” the wards were in Munthe's opinion the site where the “serious work” of the hospice occurred (Munthe 206). Here at least one might be able to “investigate many of the still obscure phenomena of hypnotism” and other neuropsychological matters (Munthe 210). Charcot's injudicious treatment of hysteroepilepsy, however, and the attention which he lavished upon its external, performative symptoms, had violated this delicate separation between: the space proper to medical pedagogy (the private lecture room), that proper to popular spectatorship (theatres devoted to fictional “stage performances”), and that of clinical study (the closed ward).

The large, open plan wards of the Salpêtrière (fig. 6) had indeed merged with Paris's wide “Boulevards,” upon which “enterprising” young girls flirted, or the equally degraded space of the amphitheatre, for which Geneviève and Lisette had learnt “their various tricks” (Munthe 212). Visitors to the wards were greeted with the same disorientating, exhibitionistic cacophony



Fig. 6. Interior of Salpêtrière wards (*salle Lavoisier*, bâtiment Parmentier/Saint Léon). In Guillaín and Mathieu 22. Photograph © AP HP/Photothèque.

which characterized the lectures. Moreover, as Munthe contended, Charcot's lessons tended to attract "authors, journalists," and "leading actors" (Munthe 206). These dubious social types cultivated the toilette of "fashionable demi mondaines," causing them to become virtually indistinguishable from the exhibitionistic patients whom they observed. Munthe's semi fictionalized account therefore eloquently reflected how the Salpêtrière itself was transformed into a massive theatre, complete with "leading stars," cunning girls, depraved spectators, medical intrigues and rivalries, dramatic confrontations between protagonists on and off stage (including those between Munthe and Charcot), and surprising *dénouements* a hyperbolic, performative environment contaminated by hysteria at every level (Munthe 206 12). Although Munthe felt that disengaged, critical spectatorship was possible, this could only be achieved in a more rigorous, non performative environment.

In the final analysis, Munthe found Charcot's pedagogy to be hopelessly contaminated by performative pathologies and exhibitionism. He concluded that the fact that "Charcot's theories" were "accepted without opposition by his blindfolded pupils and the public ... can only be explained as a sort of suggestion en masse" (Munthe 210). It was not only Charcot's hypnotized patients who engaged in performative excess, falsehood and confusion. It was also Charcot himself who, hypnotized by his own vision of performative illness, in turn hypnotized those who came to see his multi sensorial, theatrical

presentations. Where Charcot advocated a form of objective photographic vision within the amphitheatre, identifying and then verbally describing physical, performative images in the patient, Munthe was distrustful of all visual and performative phenomena. Munthe formulated true sight as an essentially metaphoric process, unrelated to the vagaries of literal eyesight or embodied performance. True perception was, for Munthe, disembodied and sightless. He preferred to express himself in words alone, blindly tapping out his text on the keys of his typewriter at San Michele.

NOTES

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- 1 I have written elsewhere on this characteristic of Charcot's construction of neurology. See Marshall "Nervous Dramaturgy;" "Performing Hysteria" 19–26; "Dynamic Medicine," and "Beyond the Theater of Desire."
- 2 Munthe studied in Uppsala, Montpellier, and Paris, between 1874 and 1880. He then practiced in Paris, from 1880 to 1883, before moving between Paris, Naples, Capri, Anacapri, Rome, London, Hildasholm, and Stockholm. Munthe represented himself as "a pupil of Charcot's" (Munthe 12) and claims to have had permission from an unnamed *chef de clinique* to conduct "experiments in post hypnotic suggestion and telepathy" upon one of Charcot's demonstration subjects (Munthe 210). The open door policy of the Faculté de Médecine lectures for guest physicians, students from the École des Beaux Arts, and others makes it difficult to date Munthe's time at the Salpêtrière. He did not occupy any formal medical position at the hospice, so there are no records of his stay. He was not an enrolled student of Charcot's in any official sense, but rather appears to have been a long term visitor and familiar of the hospice, like the Belgian man of letters Joseph Delboeuf (See Munthe esp. 12, 79, 169–70, 210; Leroux Hugon 103–12; Sissman, 1126–28; Bayliss; Oliv; Munthe and Uexküll 17–29, 183; Nye 290–92; Goetz et al. 247, 252, 266, 273; Jangfeldt, Axel 1–16, *passim*; McDonald).
- 3 On the Nancy/Salpêtrière conflict, see Hillman.
- 4 The Geneviève of the *Iconographie* was born 7 January 1843 (Munthe 211–16; Bourneville and Régnaud 1: 49–58).
- 5 Such phenomena were more a marked characteristic of the lectures presented at the Hospice de la Charité by Charcot's former student Jules Luys. Munthe was not alone in narrating such events from the Salpêtrière, though. Delboeuf and Robertson recorded similar performances, while sketches by the director of the Salpêtrière museum, Loreau, of similar actions may be found in the *Iconographie*

and elsewhere (Delboeuf 266–70; Robertson 494–531; Bourneville and Régnaud 3: 182–83, figs. 14, 15).

- 6 This was a major difference between nineteenth century French clinics and Anglo American ones. See Goetz “Charcot: Scientifique Bifrons.”

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EXPERIMENT

New Light and Old Shadows: Industrial Illumination and its *Imaginaire*

Susana Oliveira

In his last book, *La Flamme d'une chandelle* (*The Flame of a Candle*),¹ the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962) argued that the light of a flame was a prodigious generator of images for the pleasure of our gaze and dreamy imagination. As, at the present time, I work in a room uniformly lit by electricity and face the glow of my computer screen, some apparently simple questions arise: what kind of images are created by electric light? Were there new images to contemplate and dream about when the industrial illumination began?

While looking at screen images such as those of computers, cinema, and television, the answer might seem obvious, as these are technologies based on electric light. Light itself changed dramatically during the nineteenth century thanks to developments in chemistry, physics, and industrial production systems. And this also changed the ways in which the ordinary environment was experienced and perceived. Whereas candles and oil lamps produced an intimate, individualized, and limited illumination, with an ever changing flame, the new centralized illumination system could instantly fill a space with bright, homogeneous, and intense light. At some point in the nineteenth century, people who until then had carefully twisted wicks, watched candles, and filled oil lamps, could, with the turn of a small tap, control the illumination of a whole room.

We can get a sense of how substantial this change was if we reverse our standpoint. In his diary written in the trenches of the First World War, the art historian Wilhelm Hausenstein, as he was forced to use candles in the absence of electricity, describes the rediscovery of their light's quality: "Electric light imparts too much brightness and thus things lose body, outline, substance—in short, their essence. In candlelight objects cast much more significant shadows, shadows that have the power actually to create form" (qtd. in Schivelbusch, 178).

One of the most evident outcomes of artificial light developments is precisely the way shadows behave. The vulnerability and variation of the

light of a flame produces wavering shadows on the surrounding surfaces. Light and shadow's unsteadiness brought difficulties to painters and delayed a precise shadow perspective theory, sunlight changes fed sundials, and moonlight moving shadows guided astronomers' calculations. This was the restless nature of natural light and shadow, which early artificial lights did not overcome nor pacify. Generations that did not experience the constant intensity of electricity only knew these nervous cast shadows. They, who lived by the lights of wax, paraffin, and oil, walked along the corridors seeing little farther than their own steps, leaving behind dark and inconstant shadows. New lights generated new shadows. These new shadows were fixed and steady, clear cut against walls, and defining strict gaps in rooms and furniture. People could now see the end of illuminated corridors and walk along them leaving behind lights that could be switched off at the end.

The nineteenth century *imaginaire*² is crowded with shadows: hand shadow plays were fairground attractions and family's evening entertainments; it was the heyday of shadow theatres, such as the Parisian *Le Chat Noir*. The mysterious Master Abraham in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr* plays a "Schattenspiel" (shadow play) with his paper cut silhouettes (Hoffmann 66), and many other literary works of the period attest to the dream like experience achieved by candlelight, cast shadows, and magic lantern projections.

As light technology evolved and industrial illumination became dominant in most western urban areas, these forms of cast shadow plays faded away. It seems that new stable shadows appeared boring in comparison, but they nevertheless replaced the ancient, nervous, sneaky shadows.

Curiously, the eradication of shadows was one of the stated aims of Dondey Dupré's project presented to Napoleon in 1799. Like the Alexandria lighthouse, and with the architectonic grandiosity of Ledoux and Boullée designs, it was meant to overflow Paris with light "just like an artificial meteor ... so that *no* shadows will remain" (original emphasis; qtd. in Schivelbusch, 123). The plan consisted of a series of towers that reflected and cast light around a "mother tower" fed by an unknown fuel that only a future technology could supply.

For the 1889 Paris World Exhibition, the engineer Sébillot and the architect Bourdais presented their "*Colonne Soleil*."³ Today it seems obvious that such proposals would have produced a strange and weak urban illumination, but then it was the fear of a centralized blinding light that prevented its choice. Eventually, the Eiffel Tower was selected. In a time when most streets were still glimpsed by the flickering light of gas lamps and when one believed that electricity would be produced in an unlimited quantity and intensity, this project embodies the heyday of the rapid developments of the nineteenth century and is now a forgotten symbol of Paris as "ville lumière."

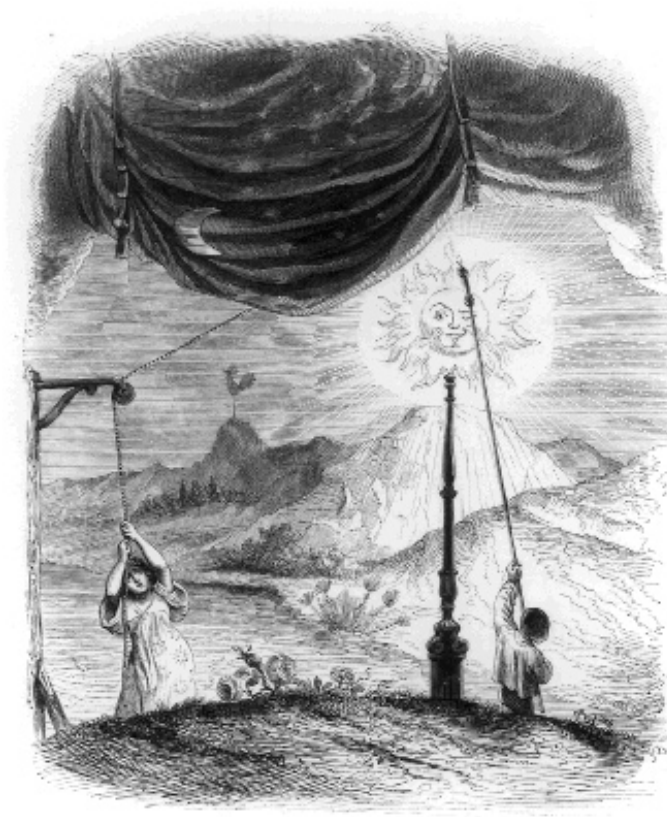


Fig. 1. Grandville (1803–47), *Le Jour et la Nuit*, 1844. Wood engraving after Grandville for *Un autre monde*. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Microfiche P34/1250.

Le Jour et la Nuit by J. J. Grandville (fig. 1) offers a subtle yet ironical comment on these sun towers. Accidentally, it could also offer an antinomical illustration for an excerpt of Julien Lemer's *Paris au gaz* (10) quoted by Walter Benjamin in his essay on the *flâneur*: “Je tire le rideau sur le soleil: il est bien et dûment couché: n’en parlons plus; je ne vois plus désormais d’autre lumière que celle du gaz” (“I draw the curtain on the sun: it is well and duly lying: let us not speak about it anymore; I see no light from now on but that of gas”: Benjamin 78). In the image, the sun is being lit by a lamplighter, as if it were a gas lamplight, while a curtain is drawn to reveal the show to the audience.

An artificially staged night is thus illuminated by an artificial sun. At a second glance, the weathercock suggests dawn and the sun appears to be standing on a mountaintop, overwhelming the light of the lamp and dismissing the possibility of such a thing as artificial days.

The light or sun towers, however, were mainly big electric arch lamps used during celebrations in the cities' main streets and, with some success, as military devices intended to identify and dazzle the enemy. The eighteenth century dream in which night could be as bright as day was soon replaced by the nightmare of an all pervading light from which there was no escape. In fact, this arch light that made gas lighting look gloomy in contrast, revealed itself to be too intense and expensive. Some years later it was abandoned and its towers of light sent off to the literary imaginary, to H. G. Wells's negative utopias, to Albert Robida's optimism and, of course, to Jules Verne's visions.⁴

In 1875, Verne enchanted his readers with Captain Nemo's demise. In Jules Férat's illustration for the Hetzel edition of *L'Île mystérieuse* (*The Mysterious Island*) we see the *Nautilus* disappear in dark waters while the cave's void is illuminated by its two huge electric luminous rays produced from seawater. In another scene, the *savant fou* in his library, surrounded by his natural history collections, his weird curiosities, and exquisite works of art, welcomes the heroes under a radiant ceiling. Hence fictional descriptions of the future used those ambitious light systems to represent the game between light and shadow, between the fear of the unknown and awareness.⁵

Those illumination projects, in a way, intended to replace the light sources with vantage points. The sun towers acted like gigantic watching Cyclops from whom the only possible escape were the shadowy areas out of their reach: *I light you so I see you*. Under this logic of light as sight, of the source of light as an eye, spectacular devices were created, with a positive or negative charge, which still inform literary descriptions, stage lighting, and cinematographic *mise en scène* of harassment nightmares, futuristic totalitarianism, prison vigilance, alien invasions, and police inquiries.

In spite of the mysterious silhouettes created by candle and gaslight in Gothic stories, it is electric light that watches and pursues. In *A Plea for Gas Lamps*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote about his dramatic experience of the electric arc lamps in Paris, as "a new sort of urban star [that] now shines out nightly, horrible, unearthly, obnoxious to the human eye, a lamp for a night mare! Such a light as this should shine only on murders and public crime, or along the corridors of lunatic asylums, a horror to heighten horror." The moralistic value that the nineteenth century attached to public lighting would be supplanted by the twentieth century's increasingly dominating and inexorable light.

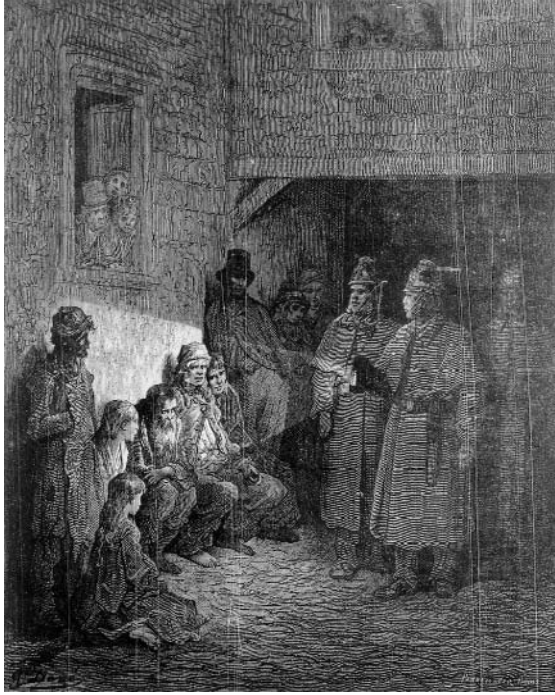


Fig. 2. Gustave Doré (1832–83), *The Bull's Eye*, 1872. Wood engraved full page illustration for *London; a Pilgrimage* (reproduced from the 1876 French edition). Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Cliché G144544.

It was precisely under the argument of security that light had become a powerful mean of surveillance. The progressive institutionalization of public lighting wiped away, little by little, the medieval regulations by which some one without a light was at once considered suspect, as it was more important to be seen and identified than to see. Bachelard tells us about the “psychology of intimate hostilities” that arises between two persons possessing their own light, and how these lights perform a dual function: a vigilance device and an identification mark, sustaining a fragile balance of reciprocal powers (Bachelard 102). However, a kind of subversive and independent pleasure was added to the obligatory use of individual lanterns, as R. L. Stevenson describes when he recalls his childhood walks with his “bull’s eye” in *The Lantern Bearers*:

The essence of this bliss was to walk by yourself in the black night, the slide shut, the top coat buttoned, not a ray escaping, whether to conduct your footsteps or to make your glory public: a mere pillar of darkness in the dark, and all the while, deep down in the privacy of your fool's heart, to know you had a bull's eye at your belt, and to exult and sing over the knowledge.⁶

The compulsory carrying of this sort of individual light by citizens and the responsibility for placing a lantern over their house entrance dates from the sixteenth century and was the first known legal attempt to install permanent public illumination (Schivelbusch 82). Later, due to the program of absolutist governments, the installation of street lights came under the jurisdiction of the police but their maintenance was still the residents' duty, at least until lamplighters appeared. Louis Sébastien Mercier considered that the police force was meant to keep order, and that its fundamental tools were precisely the street lamps, the *réverbères*,⁷ and the torch bearers, who lighted pedestrians' way home but were also often spies or denouncers among the citizen troops.⁸

A revealing scene is depicted in a print by Gustave Doré (fig. 2), where the policeman's hand held torchlight surprises a group of social outcasts, the "people of the abyss" as Jack London called them, for whom "urban lighting had by then become a torture ... in the capital of the world's most powerful Empire" (Virilio 116).

Illumination controlled by police authorities attracted hostility and led, in the mid eighteenth century, to a new popular urban movement: lantern smashing. This became punishable by law, almost all over Europe, but in Paris, where lanterns and public lamps were a symbol of absolutist monarchy, this offence was considered almost a crime of lese majesty. And what had been just a delinquent activity grew to be, during the Paris riots of July 1830, a communal and plebeian expression. Besides breaking street lamps, and thus creating darkness, people also used the *réverbères* as ghastly places for executions by hanging: in so doing the *ancien régime* symbolic light was inversely replaced by the corpses of its agents (Schivelbusch 98–110). This metaphor of political and social unrest, of light and darkness, is embodied by Victor Hugo's character Gavroche, the boy at war with street lamps.⁹

The industrialization of production methods was progressively transforming work into an integrated and collective process that, until then, was limited by light's natural cycle. With the Industrial Revolution, the growing need for more light to illuminate growing numbers of workers in larger spaces and for longer periods of time could not be sustained with traditional light sources. Public gas lighting, introduced in London in the first years of the nineteenth century, spread over the main European urban areas from the 1840s onwards and, in comparison with traditional light, indeed looked as

bright as daylight. This type of gas, obtained from coal or wood distillation, had been known for some time, but only after 1800 was it used for lighting. The theory of combustion developed by Lavoisier in the 1770s supplied what was missing: a new paradigm of chemistry based on the philosophical notion of combustion (Perkowitz 95–96). Because of its important consequences this new gaslight technology deserves particular attention.

Since time immemorial, fire was the center of the house, the heart of domestic life, combining three major functions: heat, light, and food preparation. Lighting was the first function to gain autonomy from this multipurpose fire because it could be carried from one place to another in sticks and logs. Later, with candles, a series of tiny and meticulous improvements were made so that the flame would burn and illuminate better. This refinement was significant, as the slow time of combustion and the hardly perceptible signs of destruction stressed the psychological perception of light as an aesthetic experience as well.

Small combined candle flames gave way to light producing machines with technical and decorative functions, such as oil lamps and the Argand lamp. This lamp is a hybrid, a strange flower divided into the mechanical body of the burner, reservoir, and cylinder and an aerial and artistic part, the luminous globe made of decorated glass.¹⁰ During the nineteenth century lampshades got darker, more opaque and unadorned. It was the strict taste of those gas times. Its flame was too harsh to be openly looked at. The feel for lampshades was extended to the manipulation of natural light, to soften the shadows and the architectonic lines of empty spaces. The same diaphanous fabrics, muslin and gauze, as those used in fashionable dresses, were hung from the windows. Daylight was veiled and at night the well illuminated domestic interiors were defended from the public gaze like modest ladies.

If the fruitful dualism between light and darkness was cancelled and shadows lost substance and clearness, so a diffuse, indistinct, and innocuous light was likewise desired. In a German compendium on illumination of the gas era, published in 1835, the author praises lampshades because “the objects in its vicinity can only cast short, imperceptible shadows” (qtd. in Schivelbusch, 169). One more step in the conquest of shadows by artificial light. But was it actually so?

By the same period, the luminous dissolution of interior domestic spaces found its equivalent in the visual arts and in the increasing value given to natural light in public architecture, born with the new iron and glass building technology. There was also a crucial change in the conception of natural light itself, regarded since Neoplatonism as a shaft of linear and direct rays. The Newtonian corpuscular theory of light was replaced by the wave particle duality theory that Christiaan Huygens had somewhat naively presented,

pulling down one of the arguments that had legitimated the optical truthfulness of linear perspective (Park 187ff.). These studies in the field of psychology of visual perception were crucial for a new conception of the subject as an active participant in the perception of reality, from his/her physical, sensorial, cognitive, and cultural vantage points. The development of physiological optics, a field that had benefited from the research on light by physical optics, is also accountable for the increasing interest in sight as an object of study. But light itself lost its ontological privilege the moment it began to be studied and produced within the sphere of other physical phenomena, like magnetism and electricity (Crary 88-91).

The benefits of illumination by gas and its impact on the culture of the period can be summed up in two words: intensity and distance. Yet this gas, celebrated for its purity and transparency, soon revealed its evil effects. Its poisonous and explosive nature spread silently, invisibly, and quickly through the pipes. In *The Philosophy of Furniture*, a snobbish view about American decorating preferences, Edgar Allan Poe criticizes gas illumination and praises traditional lights: "We are violently enamoured of gas and of glass. The former is totally inadmissible within doors. Its harsh and unsteady light offends. No one having both brains and eyes will use it. ... The light proceeding from one of these gaudy abominations is unequal, broken, and painful" (Poe 717).

According to the period's contemporary literature and images, and contrary to the American taste Poe condemns, in European bourgeois interiors gas lighting was usually excluded from drawing rooms. To a certain extent, although energy dependence was consolidated as a part of European material culture, people held to a domestic self-sufficiency in the production of heat and light and thus symbolically disconnected themselves from the central supply. Whether this was the result of a fearful reluctance to be connected to that dangerous gas or of an atavistic need for the visible light of a burning flame, it favored the feeling of family communion and "the spirit of the house" was kept untouched (Bachelard 8, 16, 34, 91).

Yet the increasing disintegration of the home as a private, whole, and self-contained place began and the domestic, private sphere became progressively part of an integrated system controlled from the distance and from the outside. Its inhabitants could no longer "dream the dreams the oil lamp flame ... conjured" as they now lived "in the time of administered light" (Bachelard 90).

If in bourgeois houses the explosive and poisonous nature of gas represented a hindrance to its full acceptance, electric illumination was immediately and enthusiastically adopted. The light emitted by a filament heated by electricity looked like a miracle in comparison to an open flame. The light arc

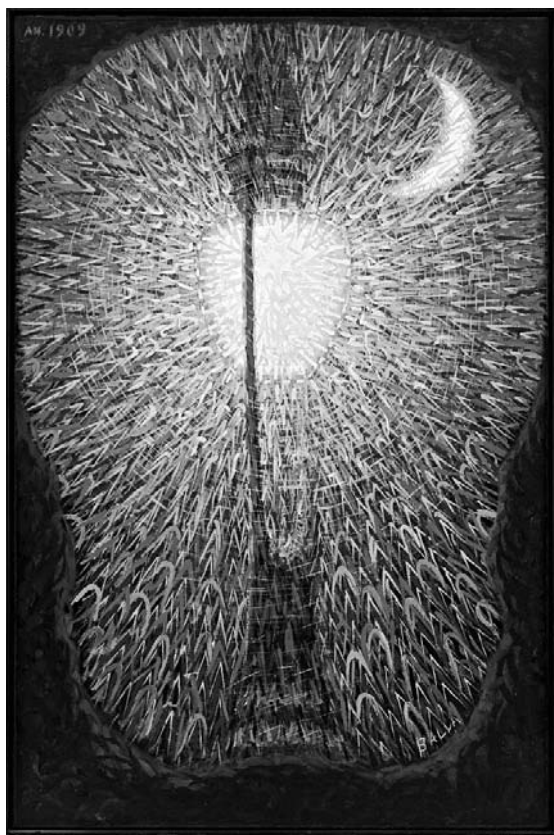


Fig. 4. Giacomo Balla (1871–1958), *Lamplight*, c. 1910–11. Oil on canvas, 174.7 x 114.7 cm. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, Digital Image ©, 2006, NY/Scala, Florence. © by SPA, 2007.

could cause death, it was also a synonym for life and, at the end of a century obsessed with fatigue, illness, and spleen, it held the promise of magical restoring energy.

In the pictorial arts, electric light provided an extraordinary resource for the representation of nocturnal scenes, especially urban and bohemian. By the end of the nineteenth century, Claude Monet (1840–1926) had already rendered different effects of illuminated night, from moonlight to lamplights, depicting its long phantasmagorical shadows. But an even more enthusiastic, although aggressive, view was soon put forward by the Italian

futurists. Against romanticism and natural forms, they chose instead artificial light, along with all electric modern devices, and figuratively they “killed the moonlight.” This was roughly the title, in the original *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna* (1911), of one of the hundred pamphlets in which Marinetti stated his vanguard ideas, and where he exalted the “divine electric light” (Fagiolo 56). Although the futurists rejected most of the preceding pictorial forms, they respected Georges Seurat’s approach to light and color phenomena. Seurat scrupulously observed light behavior and proposed a meta scientific system as an alternative to mere subjective and symbolic uses (Frontisi 144). He asked: “To see the night! And most of all how to represent it?” (Faure 104). The diversity of technical processes associated with the theory of color complementarity led him to paint night views in blue tones, punctuated by declinations of yellow, orange, and red emitted by light sources.

Giacomo Balla learned this lesson well. His *Lamplight* (fig. 4) is not only an embodiment of Seurat’s experiences but also a visual metaphor of the festivity and exhilaration produced by electricity (Frontisi 146). A timid moon in the foreground is almost hidden by the centripetal energy of light’s colored particles. According to Maurizio Fagiolo, Balla had been obsessed with light since he saw Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo’s *Rising Sun* (1904, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome), a solemn symbolic manifestation of the “sun of the future,” understood as a humanitarian ideal. Nocturnal themes, especially lamplights and light bulbs became the central subject in Balla’s work, and the artist was nicknamed the “night bird” by his friends (Fagiolo 16).

It might be stated that among futurism’s legacy was the call to infuse artistic expressions with technological content. This was to play a significant role as it placed physics in the cultural foreground while Einstein’s theories were radically changing spatial temporal concepts and establishing the omnipresence of light for the early twentieth century.

In July 1936, when the Compagnie Parisienne de Distribution d’Électricité commissioned Raoul Dufy to create a mural for the lobby of the Pavillon de l’Électricité et de la Lumière at the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques,¹¹ he was required to: “Mettre en valeur le rôle de l’électricité dans la vie nationale et dégager notamment le rôle social de premier plan joué par la lumière électrique” (“To emphasize the role of electricity in national life and in particular to highlight the forefront social role played by the electric light”: qtd. in Briend, 164). The outcome was one of the biggest mural paintings ever made (600 square meters) and it was entitled *La Fée Électricité. Une histoire de l’électricité* (*Electricity Fairy: A History of Electricity*; fig. 5).¹² It was completed in a short period of time, thanks to chemical improvements in paints and to the use of “clichés verre” (slides) that projected and magnified Dufy’s



Fig 5 Raoul Dufy (1877–1953), *La Fée Électricité. Histoire de l'électricité*, 1937–38 Oil on canvas sketch, 110 x 600 cm
Paris Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris Photo RMN - © Bulloz - © by SPA, 2007

sketches on the walls. Further, Raoul Dufy, already a successful painter trained in fresco, planned carefully each panel and studied in detail the history of electricity, including depictions of the specific scientific experiences, along with the principal protagonists, scientists, scholars, and entrepreneurs, each identified in the final work by a painted inscription (Lassaigne 74).

According to Briend, Dufy derived his composition from Raphael's *The Dispute of the Holy Sacrament*, dividing in two the group of 110 human figures by a central representation of the then ultra modern electric power plant at Vitry sur Seine, crowned by Olympian divinities (Briend 164). The result was an apologetic and idyllic vision of progress, a colorful celebration of the joys of electric light, without any evidence of the critical social and economic European context of the 1937 World Fair. Indeed, the architect Le Corbusier noticed how Dufy's *La Fée Électricité* captured the visitors' attention and eclipsed the tormented and sharp grayish light bulbs and flashes in Picasso's *Guernica*, also on display at the Spanish Pavilion (Perez Tibi 41).

The historical examples presented here only scratch the surface of the significance of electric light in the construction of a contemporary sensibility; however, they substantiate the idea that the developments of artificial light in the nineteenth and early twentieth century met assertive forms in the visual arts while they generated cynical and negative views in literature. In fact, the existence of new and diversified light sources empowered the sphere of visual arts in general, both as a theme and as a medium.

For instance, light as a matter generating space has been explored for some decades by the contemporary artist James Turrell, from the manipulation of sun and moonlight to the blue, airy glow of video screens. Behind their mere visibility, his ethereal installations make use of light's ability to convey a feeling of transcendence. But, as is implicit in Turrell's words in a recent interview, our gaze still craves something ancient: "I want to create an atmosphere that can be consciously plumbed with seeing, like the wordless thought that comes from looking in a fire."¹³ As Guy Barefoot noticed in his book *Gaslight Melodrama: From Victorian London to 1940s Hollywood*, there is a nostalgia for the old forms of lighting that is deeply linked to the spread and dominance of electric illumination (33). His considerations on cinema fit our present concerns.

In Christian Boltanski's 2005 installation at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (fig. 6),¹⁴ a shadow theatre that establishes a dialogue with the collection of black zinc silhouettes from the old *Le Chat Noir* theatre, a simple paradox appears. From the central hall, the viewer can see a ghostly shadow play, several macabre and naïve silhouettes wobbling delicately. But, peeping behind the huge famous clock, behind the glass panels, one discovers electric light projectors and electric fans. New technological means are therefore used to



Fig. 6. Christian Boltanski (b. 1944), Detail of installation *Correspondances: Christian Boltanski/Les Silhouettes du Chat Noir*. Paris: Musée d'Orsay. May 2005. Photograph by the author.

produce ancient shadow effects. Although in the interview published in the installation's catalogue, Boltanski relates his shadow works to his childhood, to memory, to the experience of death, and to the *danse macabre*, he also expresses a wistfulness for the use of early light sources, when he says, about a previous work: "I had this thing against *making*, so I moved towards the minimum: cutting out a bit of cardboard, taking a candle, going back to a kind of basic poverty" (Lemoine 22).

The fact is that shadows are secondary light by products that only become noticeable in exceptional conditions or by the exercise of our will, for example, while walking on a beach at sunset, in an unfamiliar and gloomy space, or looking at a painting by Giorgio de Chirico. Specific environmental conditions, heightened emotional or psychic states, or artistic emphasis, constitute situations where shadows become noticeable and discernible for our visual cognition. Psychology of visual perception, cognition, and mind sciences have only partially explained these conditions. We still aren't able to understand why the new steady, well defined shadows that began to inhabit

nineteenth century houses and towns could not produce the same level of surprise and delight as those autonomous and animated shadows presented, at that same time, through literary and visual representations whose creation only new lights and a new attention allowed.

NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.
- 2 The concept of *imaginaire* has multiple meanings that depend largely on the context of its use, on authors' points of view and theoretical purposes all too vast to analyze here. I have chosen to use this term in this essay, as there is no adequate English equivalent; it must be understood as a set of images, in a broad sense, by means of which a specific group represents and confers significance to the world that surrounds it.
- 3 The project's complete title was: *Colonne Soleil, Projet de Phare Électrique de 360 mètres de hauteur destiné à éclairer tout Paris. Construction monumentale* (Schivelbusch 128).
- 4 In fact, these authors presented a view of scientific and technologic progress, and, in particular, of electricity, that was enthusiastic and skeptical at the same time. Between 1869 and 1925, Albert Robida wrote and illustrated several visionary works, such as *La Vie électrique* (1892) in which he envisioned, for example, a forerunner of our walkman, the "phono opéragraphe." Similar visions and devices are presented in H. G. Wells's famous novels such as *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Invisible Man* (1897), where the protagonist's weird characteristics depend mostly on light behavior.
- 5 In 1863, Jules Verne wrote a negative view of the future in the novel *Paris XX^e siècle* (*Paris in the Twentieth Century*), unpublished until 1994, where he foresaw several modern electric devices, such as the electric chair and the Internet.
- 6 In works such as *Essays of Travel* and *A Child's Garden of Verses* (which contains the poems "My Shadow" and "The Lamplighter"), Stevenson offers us beautiful descriptions of public and private uses of light.
- 7 The *réverbère* was a special type of lantern introduced in Paris during the second half of the eighteenth century. Unlike common street lamps, it used a multi wick oil lantern, instead of a candle, and an internal reflector. It was substantially brighter than the former ones but also more expensive and thus used with a certain parsimony.
- 8 Louis Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814), a prolific author considered extravagant by his contemporaries, wrote, among other essays, the following works: *L'An 2440 Ou Rêve s'il en fut jamais*, Paris, 1771, and *Tableaux de Paris*, Paris, 1781–88.

- 9 “If light stands for order in ancient society, then darkness is the counter order of the revolution – this is the lesson taken from the Paris riots in *Les Misérables*” (Schivelbusch 109).
- 10 The analogies between natural forms, femininity, and light could offer an interesting topic for research. For instance, we can think of the “fée électricité,” an expression born in 1900 (Beltran 96), and of the memories of an ecstatic Paul Morand in 1900 claiming that “Women are flowers with light bulbs! Light bulb flowers are women!” (qtd. in Paquot, 202).
- 11 The pavilion was designed by the architect Robert Mallet Stevens. The exhibition took place in Paris in 1937.
- 12 Although painted in oil on plywood panels, it attempted to capture fresco painting’s immediacy.
- 13 Interview for *Art 21: Art in the Twenty First Century*.
- 14 *Correspondances: Christian Boltanski/Les Silhouettes du Chat Noir*. Paris: Musée d’Orsay, 12 April–10 July 2005.

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Illustrating the Shadow of Doubt: Henry James, Blindness, and “The Real Thing”

Jennifer A. Greenhill

Sometime in the 1880s, the illustrator George du Maurier (1834–96) told Henry James about the time a genteel but penniless couple came to him seeking employment as models. Good looking and impeccably put together—just the kind of figures who populated the drawing rooms of du Maurier’s *Punch* illustrations—the pair was, at the same time, “oldish, faded [and] ruined,” as James recounted in his notebooks. “The little tragedy,” as he put it, of such “gentlefolk, who had been all their life stupid and well dressed, living, on a fixed income, at country houses . . . and were now utterly unable to *do* anything . . . could only *show* themselves,” stuck in the novelist’s mind and served as the germ for his 1892 tale, “The Real Thing” (James, qtd. in Edel and Powers, 55–57). Bathed in the light of the writer’s vision, this small incident in du Maurier’s life achieved symbolic status, exemplifying nothing less than the contest between reality and representation.

Scholars have read the text from a wide range of perspectives—as an indictment of the idle British aristocracy, as a morality tale celebrating human empathy, or as a study in the sweetness of revenge, among others (Beaver, Labor, Tintner). Most focus, however, on the way “The Real Thing” treats mimeticism as an artistic approach, reading the story as a critique of literalism or as a commentary on the interpretive quandary presented by the new simulation strategies of the late nineteenth century (Bazargan, Grossman, Monteiro, Nadel, Rawlings). I, too, am interested in the aesthetic implications of the text, in what it has to say about the creative process and how the writer or illustrator drawing from reality converts what he sees and perceives into Art. But I will get at these issues in a way that is slightly different from previous treatments of the tale, by focusing on blindness as a theme that informs the narrative in surprising ways. For James surely had the idea of blindness on his mind when he wrote “The Real Thing,” not only because he had recently read Rudyard Kipling’s novel about a blinded illustrator, but also because the illustrator who served as his model—George du Maurier—was himself blind in one eye, and had been as long as James had known him.¹

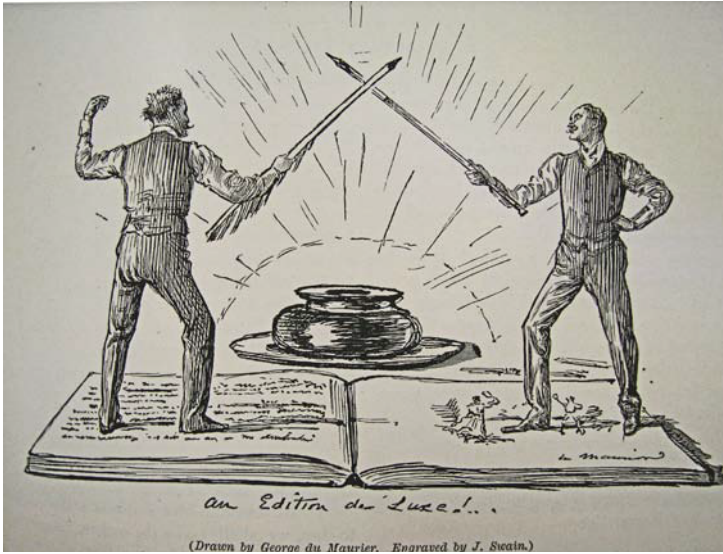


Fig. 1. George du Maurier (1834–96), *An Edition de Luxe!* (du Maurier, “The Illustrating of Books: From the Serious Artist’s Point of View,” *Magazine of Art* 13 (August–September 1890): 375.

Within James’s presentation of the contest between the real and the represented in “The Real Thing” is a meditation on the darkness that gives way to artistic illumination yet constantly threatens to stay put and make its presence (or, rather, the absence it marks out) felt. The story revises the punitive model of blindness presented in Kipling’s *The Light that Failed*, and provides a more nuanced and considered view of the productive potential of darkness, based, I believe, in part, on James’s conception of du Maurier as a kind of seer. Ultimately, the challenge facing the late nineteenth century artist was, as James saw it, to learn to see in the dark. Who could perform this feat better—the artist who put his pen to the literary or the visual image (fig. 1)—is what “The Real Thing” seeks in part to flesh out.²

I.

Nowhere does a literal blindness figure in James’s text, whose manifest content seems to be all about seeing, and seeing too much. Although the illustrator’s

inflexible models expect that as "the real thing" they should make his task of depicting the upper classes easier—all he has to do is copy them. Major and Mrs. Monarch are too present, too obstinately there in all their manifold, petty details for him to make anything of them in the realm of art. Mrs. Monarch is "the real thing, but always the same thing"; she will not or cannot give way to the artist's vision. As for her husband, the Major, "nothing ... would keep *him* down" (James, *Selected Tales* 214). The real thing before the artist, the detail that refuses to budge, takes over, pulling focus and energy away from all else: the Major's trousers, for example, or his wife's obdurate expression.³ Try as he might, James's illustrator cannot make his new models subservient to his eye and is himself paralyzed by their puzzlingly coincident semiotic plenitude and lack. If James is customarily all about surface—that is, against a search for meaning that would take one beyond surface to some supposed depth, as in, for example, "The Figure in the Carpet"—here surface does not reward; a different kind of looking is required to really see (and to really create).

Although the artist's studio in "The Real Thing" is described as the place where one "[learns] to see," what James describes in this cautionary tale is the danger of faulty or inaccurate perception (James, *Selected Tales* 221). When the Monarchs are announced at his door, the illustrator has an "immediate vision of sitters," of patrons wishing to commission a painted portrait, which the Monarchs, of course, turn out not to be (James, *Selected Tales* 204). A series of misunderstandings follows this first false impression until the illustrator's misperception of the Monarchs makes its way into his art.⁴ He unknowingly, and without being able to correct the impulse, makes the Monarchs "colossal" when he draws them, so that Mrs. Monarch comes out "seven feet high" and Mr. Monarch a "giant" (James, *Selected Tales* 214).⁵ More damaging is the way their presence corrupts his eye, so that he is unable even to perceive how bad his art has become because of them. He relies on his colleague, Jack Hawley—the "voice of warning" with the "fresh eye"—to alert him to the decline of his work (James, *Selected Tales* 219–20). Soon after we find that he is in danger of losing the commission for *Rutland Ramsay*, the volume for which the Monarchs had been posing, and other commissions that he imagined might follow.

II.

James's illustrator begins to feel, in the Monarchs' presence, a "sense of emptiness ... creeping into [his] life" (James, *Selected Tales* 219); they have emptied him of his artistic eye.⁶ This is the offense brought to bear on Rudyard

Kipling's illustrator in *The Light that Failed*, published two years before "The Real Thing." Kipling's protagonist, Dick Heldar, is a war correspondent in the British Sudan campaign who finds on his return to London that his sketches of battle and desert life have made him something of a celebrity. Seduced by the public's approval, he becomes unbearably arrogant and sets out to paint an ideal portrait of Melancholia to surpass all others. Once he begins working toward this lofty goal, however, he begins the slow descent into blindness. Unaware of his affliction, the model for the picture takes revenge on the artist for past wrongs by viciously rubbing turpentine over his canvas, obliterating his perfect picture. Believing that he now has nothing to live for, Dick returns to the desert in a suicidal campaign to meet his death in the heart of battle. Blindness, for the artist, is fatal.

Kipling foreshadows his protagonist's descent into blindness in heavy handed fashion: Maisie's black hair across his face puts him in the dark, "a darkness that stung"; the sun of the desert is "blinding"; the book which inspires Maisie's and, by extension, Dick's vision of Melancholia, is titled *The City of Dreadful Night* (Kipling 14, 23, 68). The overtly symbolic tone of the narrative may be one reason why so many critics described the book as having awakened them to the limitations of "this dazzling new talent" (Gosse 906). One critic thought that the novel "[rang] false," despite the fact that the illustrator's circumstances largely duplicate those of Kipling himself, who discovered, when he arrived in England in 1889, after writing in India, that he himself was something of a celebrity. The same reviewer used James as a foil to illuminate Kipling's inability to deal with "delicate shades" of sentiment (L. Johnson 320), seeming to echo the view of another critic that the young author, only twenty six, simply "did *not* know enough" (Scott 54). Where James subtly and sophisticatedly brought out the complicated emotions of a range of characters, the reviewer noted, Kipling could only sketch flat and unbelievable displays of emotion. The "task he set himself was to peer into humanity with a very bright lantern," but, as J. M. Barrie suggested, he did not penetrate beneath the surface. Kipling was, like his protagonist, "blind before he ever saw properly" (Barrie 628-29).

James, who had praised Kipling's precocity and "freshness" in his preface for the author's 1891 collection, *Mine Own People*, felt that the "talent ... sometimes failed" in *The Light that Failed* (James vii xxvi, qtd. in Edel, 411). In "The Real Thing," James does Kipling one better, casting the blindness of his illustrator in a more "delicate shade," one not based on darkness at all but on the encounter with something less definite and, at the same time, more palpable and therefore more problematic.

One of the strangest aspects of the illustrator's effete models is their lifelessness. Mrs. Monarch is not so much human as she is like "a lady in a

book," a "statue," or a "bad illustration" with a face like a "tinted oval mask" or a "'sunk' piece of painting," which her smile, "like a moist sponge," could only temporarily revive (James, *Selected Tales* 204–07). The pair together was like an advertisement, possessed of a "mysteriously permanent newness" (*Selected Tales* 219). "I could imagine 'We always use it' pinned on their bosoms," the illustrator muses, mentally pricking them as if to see whether or not blood courses through their veins (James, *Selected Tales* 207). Having been "photographed *immensely*" (James, *Selected Tales* 208; original emphasis), they are like a photograph, suspended in a kind of epistemological limbo, as Roland Barthes would say of the photographed subject, "neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object," a sort of living "specter," with the photograph as the record of both his life and his death (Barthes 14, 9).⁷

The Monarchs, I wish to suggest, are like Barthes's specter, oscillating between subjecthood and objecthood, between their competing claims to being impenetrably "real" and to being objects already—the figures of a photograph, an advertisement, or an illustration. They are social ruins, relics of a former moment of prestige and prosperity, but they are ruins in body as well, showing "waste" and "elimination," as the narrator says of Mrs. Monarch's face (James, *Selected Tales* 205). In spite of all her "real" presence, then, Mrs. Monarch somehow embodies absence, the eerie emptying out of human presence. In "Sir Edmund Orme," a story published in 1891, the year he began work on "The Real Thing," James explored this concept in a more literalist fashion (if indeed one can say such a thing about a ghost). Orme, the ghost who is repeatedly described as "the perfect presence" because he is, like the Monarchs, perfectly mannered and perfectly dressed, is palpably felt by the narrator as "an oppression," primarily because of his penetrating gaze. "He looked," the narrator recounts, "strangely hard at me, harder than any one in the world has ever looked before," just as the Monarchs look back at the illustrator, who, throughout the text, betrays uneasiness under the pressure of their scrutiny, as they look over his way of living and how he goes about his art (James, "Sir Edmund Orme" 1233, 1272).⁸ By looking back and making their sightlines coincide with his, the Monarchs unsettle the artist's position and lock him in a kind of psychic bond. If the artist's role, as Max Ernst described it, is to "project what is making itself seen within himself," his sense of self is fundamentally bound up in what he sees and produces (qtd. in G. Johnson, 124–25). In the Monarchs James's illustrator sees the absence within himself, whether it be an absence of talent, artistic vision, or something else entirely. He accordingly tries to sever the bond established by their responsive gaze, by hiding Mrs. Monarch's eyes, for example, showing her in "ladylike back views and *profils perdus*" or in positions where "the face was somewhat averted or blurred" (James, *Selected Tales* 215).⁹

III.

And yet despite this strategy, Mrs. Monarch still manages to “paralyze” James’s illustrator, gouge out his “eye” so that he ultimately finds himself on the verge of ruin. Therefore, although a literal blindness does not figure in James’s tale, it is a kind of blindness that he describes, based not on darkness but on seeing too much of the visual world and the detail, a too muchness of sight which ironically blinds, blocking out what Maurice Merleau Ponty called the “play of shadows and light” around the object, that alchemical matter that only the true seer will notice (qtd. in G. Johnson, 128).¹⁰

This more nuanced view of blindness, of what darkness may mean, has something to do, I think, with James’s friendship with the illustrator George du Maurier, who had managed an impressive career despite the fact that he was blind in his left eye. Entreating his viewers to be “a little blind” to his faults, du Maurier was acutely aware of his limitations (du Maurier, “Social Pictorial Satire” 513–14). Yet James wrote about him as a kind of seer:

His sight was beyond any other I had known, and whatever it had lost, what it had kept was surprising. He had been turned out originally with a wondrous apparatus, an organ worthy of one of those heroes whom he delighted to endow with superfine senses: this never ceased to strike me in all companionship. He had, in a word, not half, but double or quadruple the optical reach of other people. (James, “George du Maurier” 599)

When du Maurier wrote about music, as he did in *Trilby*, it seemed to James “that he almost *saw* the voice . . . quite as if this had been but one of the subtler secrets of his impaired vision.” Du Maurier’s blindness, James thought, had equipped him with a kind of superpowered vision (James, “George du Maurier” 595, 601).

Du Maurier’s series “The Browns,” published in *Punch* in the 1880s, is the perfect emblem of his ability to see more than most (fig. 2). Like the Martian of du Maurier’s 1897 novel of the same name, the Browns are a science fiction concoction that points to du Maurier’s ability to see beyond this world into some other, alternative universe. Bereft of conventional forms of lighting to guide their dance steps, the Browns make their own; covering their bodies and clothes in “luminous paint,” they make themselves into light, a kind of simulacrum of visibility itself.¹¹ Darkness here is not opaque or deadening but, rather, enlivening.

That du Maurier would imagine and draw a level of brightness that he would never have been able himself to witness because of his sensitivity to light makes this series into a kind of personal fantasy about what it would mean to see in such an intense way.¹² But “The Browns” also advances the notion that du Maurier already possesses this fantastic power to see and to



Fig. 2. George du Maurier, "A Brilliant Idea," *Punch*, 1881, 182.

make his viewers see with that same intensity. Such acute, otherworldly vision is always fragile, however, always on the brink of disappearing. Like a flash of artistic inspiration, transcendent vision cannot be sustained; it comes in unpredictable fits and starts if it comes at all.¹³ Significantly, du Maurier articulates each body through a limited number of thin black lines framing an overall expanse of white and not the kind of detailed cross hatching that defines so many of his figures, as we see in the figure of the musician to the far right. The white space, usually denoting absence in illustrations, is thus made here to signify presence. Like the Monarchs, the Browns are an eerie kind of presence, a presence which smacks visually of absence, which reads not as the dense material substance of the body but rather as the body emptied out, the body erased to show the blank surface of the paper beneath. They are, at once, the "overabundance and the failure of the visible, the too much and the much too little," seeming to contain within them the threat of invisibility that always, as Derrida says, "haunts the visible as its very possibility" (Derrida 29, 45).

IV.

That the illustrator in "The Real Thing" is, at least in part, based on du Maurier, who had provided the germ for the tale, is suggested by the way James's criticism of du Maurier comes through in the way he describes his fictional illustrator. Du Maurier exaggerated the height of his figures until they were, like the Monarchs, "colossal," and his figures—also drawing room types—were often "the same thing," James felt (James, *Partial Portraits*, 344; James, "Du Maurier and London Society" 56; James, "George du Maurier" 597). But these were minor problems, and, in his notebook entry for what would become "The Real Thing," James seems to fear that he might not measure up to the challenge the illustrator has posed by providing him with the raw material for a story. The tale "must be a picture," he wrote, "it must illustrate something. God knows that's enough—if the thing *does* illustrate." It seemed it might not. He had to take the incident told to him by du Maurier and, by looking at it "hard and straight and seriously," he wrote, "fix it," which, he admitted he was generally "so sadly lax and desultory about doing" (James, qtd. in Edel and Powers, 55). "Fixing," here, seems to have something to do with sketching in realistic contours and details. It is interestingly privileged above James's natural tendency to float somewhere on a higher plane or to be plunged, we might say, into something of deeper significance.

With this self-reflection in mind, James's assessment of du Maurier in his 1893 collection, *Picture and Text*, begins to make some sense. Here, du Maurier is presented as a "historian of his age and his civilization," while painter and illustrator Edwin A. Abbey is depicted as a seer with "remote" source material, the stuff one only finds in the eye of the mind. As a "historian," du Maurier was thus ineluctably bound to the real. But more than that, he provided "one of the conditions of seeing." This is why James has such difficulty "[putting] into words what [he thinks] of him": "What does a man think of the language he has learned to speak?" (James, *Picture and Text* 16, 36, 33). Du Maurier's peculiar way of seeing the world, dependent in part on his partial blindness, enlivened reality in a way that had infiltrated the writer's thinking, and made reality over into another language.

The illustrator as a class of artist—always an aspiring painter and, at the same time, always subject to the prescriptions of authors and editors—was the perfect model of the checked or restrained visionary, but James recognized that the illustrator could have a peculiar vision of his own, a vision that quite possibly could surpass his. In his preface for the New York edition of *The Golden Bowl* (1909), James betrays his uneasiness toward illustration's power to distract readers from his words. That the text "putting forward illustrative claims [should find] itself elbowed ... by another and a competitive process"



Fig. 3. Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966), “The Curiosity Shop,” in Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, 1909, frontispiece.

was troubling because it undermined the primacy of the author’s voice. He once admitted that, as a boy, George Cruikshank’s etchings illustrating Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* stuck in his mind long after the author’s words had vanished. He wanted to avoid such obliteration himself (James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl* x–xii). James even admitted that when reading du Maurier’s *Trilby*, he preferred to be “left alone with the text.” While it might seem odd to want the illustrator’s images out of sight, he feared, as he said, he could “solve the riddle only by some confession of general jealousy of any pictorial aid rendered to fiction from outside; jealousy on behalf of a form prized precisely because, so much more than any other, it can get on by itself” (James, “George du Maurier” 605).

When it came to supplying frontispieces for the texts of his New York edition, James therefore made sure to keep his illustrator—the photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn—firmly harnessed to his prescriptions. Despite the writer’s well-known ambivalence toward photography, which he considered a vulgarly literalist medium, Coburn’s work was more suitable to the writer than conventional illustration because, as he noted, it was as different a medium as he could get from his own. And because Coburn was a photographer and not a



Fig. 4. Rudolf Blind (1846–1916), illustration to “The Real Thing,” *Black and White* (16 April 1892): 506.

draftsman, James could tell him exactly where he should go to get his shots what part of London, which street, what kind of building and reasonably expect the resulting image to match the image he pictured in his mind. He thereby usurped the role of image maker for himself. The photographs that resulted from his collaboration with Coburn do not keep, or “pretend to keep, anything like dramatic step with their suggestive subject matter,” James wrote, but instead made their presence known with “some shyness, that of images always confessing themselves mere optical symbols or echoes.” *The Curiosity Shop* (fig. 3), for example, does not visualize a specific passage in *The Golden Bowl* but rather serves simply to suggest something of the novel’s “set” as James put it. It is an “optical echo” of the “shop of the mind,” an echo of the author’s word pictures (James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl* x xii).¹⁴

This uneasiness toward the art of illustration, and perhaps toward his friend du Maurier’s superior gifts, comes through in “The Real Thing,” which betrays an interest, as Kipling’s novel does, in punishing the illustrator who would reach beyond his station. Like Kipling’s Dick Heldar, James’s illustrator is struck down at precisely the moment he attempts to reach greater heights, while trying to secure the commission for a luxury edition, while trying to illustrate the words of “the rarest of novelists . . . one of the most independent representatives of English letters,” a characterization James would surely at this time have wished upon himself (James, *Selected Tales* 209).

When "The Real Thing" was published in the British newspaper *Black and White* on 16 April 1892, the writer's worst fears came true.¹⁵ Although dedicated primarily to current events, with features on music, sports, and a bulging advertisement section, the paper boasted of the quality of its engraved illustrations, which it offered for sale in the form of "carefully hand printed proofs" on Japanese paper (*Black and White* 486).¹⁶ *Black and White's* prized illustrators were accordingly given top billing in the first column on the contents page, with the writers of the texts listed in a separate and secondary column. James must have balked not only at his secondary status, but also, surely, at the notion that the illustrator—the suggestively named painter and illustrator Rudolf Blind—was entitled to the claim of authorship in a column of his own. On the story's title page, the illustrator is relegated to his proper place, beneath the author's name in smaller print, but his three illustrations, centered on half of the story's six pages, push James's words out to the edges, attracting the reader's attention away from the text. More than an 'optical echo' of James's words, all three images carry the passage they attempt to illustrate as explanatory captions. They, too, become the standard against which the reader must measure his mental picture of how James's illustrator must have rendered his figures.

In these illustrations, Blind seizes the text's "margin for interpretation" just as James's illustrator does when given the chance (James, *Selected Tales* 218). In the last image, which depicts Mrs. Monarch's encounter with her husband's counterpart, the servant model Oronte (fig. 4), he pushes beyond James's immediate prescriptions for the scene to nicely evoke some of the story's broader ideas. And this is where I disagree with Adam Sonstegard's assessment of Blind's illustrations as "blatant rather than latent . . . crude and conventionalized" (Sonstegard 185). For here Blind grasps a critical moment in the text to illustrate—the reversal of social roles—and conveys the tension of the moment with at least some measure of subtlety. He expresses Mrs. Monarch's ramrod stiffness by both comparing her form to the tall easel in the background and contrasting it with the bent figure of Oronte, who reaches over to take his tea. That Oronte is suited for the realm of pictures and Mrs. Monarch is not is suggested by the way his head cuts into the framed image on the back wall. As he raises himself up from his bent posture, he will simultaneously lift himself up into the privileged world of representation, leaving Mrs. Monarch with her tea tray and that barren easel.

The first illustration undercuts the text more conspicuously (fig. 5). James's narrator explicitly states that the Monarchs are without umbrellas when they arrive at the artist's studio; they wince on watching Miss Churm shake the water out of hers because they realize they will surely get wet on returning home. Yet the illustrator shows them with umbrellas in hand, Mrs. Monarch's



Fig. 5. Rudolf Blind, illustration to "The Real Thing," *Black and White* (16 April 1892), 503.

pointing accusatorily in the direction of her husband (Sonstegard 182). What is the meaning of this? The caption tells us that the image shows Mrs. Monarch going through her paces for the artist, but this cannot be right, for it is not she but, rather, Mr. Monarch who is depicted in a striding pose, his right leg bent as if in preparation to take the next step. There is a gap here between text and image, but not the kind of productive hermeneutic gap which spurs the reader on to greater imaginative heights, so important especially to the late James.¹⁷ This is something much more banal, more muddled as far as gaps go—no clear space or void for the reader to color in, but rather, a mess of incompatible messages.

Such is the kind of bristling between text and image I suspect James would lament.¹⁸ If life was, for James as a reviewer in *Black and White* suggested some pages after "The Real Thing" "one vast unfinished sentence a play without a fifth act" (that is, if his characters were "vague of purpose," "incoherent in motive," "inconclusive in modes of thought;"), Blind's illustrations "fix" James's words and figures, give them visual closure in ways that undermine the open ended subtlety of the writing (*Black and White* 498).¹⁹ But there is more. Take, for example, the robed, bald headed figure staring blankly out of the picture plane between Mrs. Monarch and the easel behind

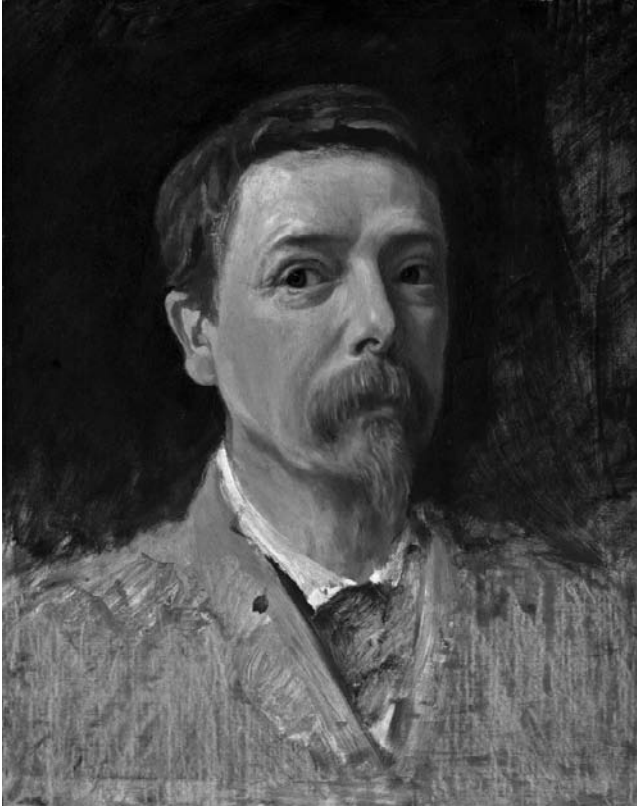


Fig. 6. George du Maurier, *Self Portrait*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 45.8 x 25.4 cm. London: National Portrait Gallery.

her. Is he, like the bust, the vase, and the sketches on the wall, meant to be an artist's prop, a lay figure maybe? Or should we read him as a living body, another model servant Blind employs as his own prop, as compositional filler? Because the image is a study in disconnected gazes—even the bust in the background averts its eyes—the fixed stare of this inexplicable presence is difficult to ignore. It confirms for me J. Hillis Miller's notion that illustrations "are always falsifying abstractions from the ungraspable idea they never adequately bring into the open." What they "bring to light they also hide," leaving the idea "still out of sight, grimly reposing in the dark" (Miller 150). And so it is with this wide eyed figure, who seems to signify sight—seems to raise questions about vision—yet illuminates nothing. The artist's signature

at the bottom right corner of two of the three illustrations brings blindness physically into the network of associations created between image and text, asserting unambiguously, in a sort of van Eyckian advertisement of artistic presence, that 'Blind' was indeed here. This figure manages, in some strange way, to do the same.

V.

Du Maurier depicts himself engaged in a more directed look out of the picture plane in a self portrait where he maps the kind of presence/absence duality we find in his "Browns" series onto the body of the artist himself (fig. 6). Veiling in shadow his from our perspective blind left eye, the illustrator protects it from the realm of spectatorial exchange and thus might be seen to admit to his fundamental lack: he sees himself as ruin, as half a figure with half a man's sight. And if we consider the possibility that this is a mirror reversal, the portrait becomes even more interesting.²⁰ It has often been said that the self portrait is itself a ruinous object, for as the artist looks away from his reflected image in the mirror to transfer it onto canvas or paper, the face passes out of sight, becomes incomplete, a mere memory (Derrida 68). Yet, as Derrida suggests, the potency of the artist's line or *trait* depends on the ruin, the blind spot that always exists between the subject and its representation. Its potency "always develops on the brink of blindness" (ibid. 3).

"The Real Thing" is also a kind of self portrait of the narrator who tells the story, a ruin, a memory of a past experience which the illustrator can only draw verbally because of the gap separating the moment of recollection from the moment when the event he remembers occurred. Throughout the story, James privileges the kind of vision that goes on in the mind and then, in art, over the kind of seeing one does with one's physical eyes. When faced with the Monarchs, James's illustrator is, so to speak, blinded, but when it comes to their past, to how they might have lived before coming to him, the illustrator is able to craft elaborate mental images, filled with suggestive detail. "I could see the sunny drawing rooms, sprinkled with periodicals she didn't read, in which Mrs. Monarch had continuously sat," he muses: "I could imagine their leggings and waterproofs, their knowing tweeds and rugs, their rolls of sticks and cases of tackle and neat umbrellas; and I could evoke the exact appearance of their servants and the compact variety of their luggage on the platforms of country stations" (James, *Selected Tales* 208). It is only through memory that the illustrator can make something of them, through the darkness that comes with distance from the event.²¹ This is an ideal condition based on the way the



Fig. 7. Title page of Henry James "The Real Thing."
In Henry James, *The Real Thing and Other Tales*, 1893.

literary artist works, not with the model directly in front of him but, rather, in the dark space of his mind, where he or she can be transformed into the words on a page.

When James canceled out the illustrator's ocular power by blinding him first in "The Real Thing" (although, ironically, the images appended to his text end up doing the same to him), he therefore ends the tale by affirming the writer's superior vision. Allowing for the illustrator's vision to be restored in the realm of memory, through the telling of the tale, James asserts the primacy of his own medium as the place where artistic vision happens. When he published the story without illustrations as part of the 1893 collection *The Real Thing and Other Tales*, James seemed to make this point—the unflinchingly austere title page says it all (fig. 7). The text was, as it were, luminous enough on its own: "If one wishes to get some luminous insight into the world of literary or artistic struggle," one reviewer advised, "he can have much of it here" (Anonymous 284).

NOTES

- 1 It happened in 1857, while du Maurier was drawing from a female model: "suddenly the girl's head seemed to me to dwindle to the size of a walnut. I clapped my hand over my left eye ... [It] had failed me" (Sherard 398). James and du Maurier had been friends since the late 1870s. They often went on long walks together, discussing ideas, future projects, and the peculiarities of one another's media. Long before du Maurier achieved fame in the 1890s with *Trilby*, James did what he could to hasten his friend's ascent through a series of texts celebrating his work.
- 2 That the text was produced in a moment when vision and visibility were undergoing a radical restructuring in both life and art is critical to keep in mind. My hope is that this essay will open onto studies giving further consideration to James's story in the context of such developments.
- 3 On the idea of the detail as a kind of "textual tumor," see Bal 97.
- 4 Ron mentions this "erroneous 'vision of sitters'" and the way the narrative turns on "the most elementary narrative device: the error and promise of its demystification the temporal deployment of a duplicitous sign" (193).
- 5 Henricksen 278 suggests that this distortion is politically motivated, that "he may be drawing them out of proportion because (in his politicized unconscious) he wants to get rid of them"
- 6 The narrator suggests as much when he says, in reference to Hawley's explicitly artistic "fresh eye," that he himself had not "got the eye," thus admitting to some kind of ocular lack (James, *Selected Tales* 219).
- 7 Clifton Fadiman first pointed to the lifeless quality of the Monarchs in *The Short Stories of Henry James*: "the real trouble with the Monarchs is that they are dead. They have not enough life in them to furnish a base on which the transforming power of art may work" (217).
- 8 Whitsitt has also suggested that the Monarchs "haunt" James's illustrator. The story was published in *Black and White's* 1891 Christmas issue, 8 15, with illustrations by J. H. Bacon.
- 9 See Whitsitt on the illustrator's identity crisis and inability to "master" his models, and de Man on the complications involved in interpretive looking.
- 10 James's narrator tells Mrs. Monarch that one "must allow for the alchemy of art" (James, *Selected Tales* 212).
- 11 Derrida discusses representations of the angel Raphael in similar terms, as a "simulacrum of sensible visibility" (29).
- 12 On du Maurier's sensitivity to light, see du Maurier "Social Pictorial Satire," 513 14.

- 13 More often than not, the artist was shrouded in darkness, waiting for inspiration to come, as James imagines him in "The Middle Years" (1893): "We work in the dark," says the novelist in the tale. "Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. This is the madness of art." See James 2001, 254.
- 14 This paragraph is strongly indebted to Miller 69–73. See also Grossman, Monteiro, Nadel, and Sonstegard.
- 15 This was the year as Sonstegard notes when "the practice of illustrating James's stories in the periodicals, which had begun with du Maurier's [illustrations] for the serialization of *Washington Square* for *Cornhill Magazine* in 1880, reached its peak" (175). See also Johanningsmeier and Nordloh.
- 16 No such claims of quality were made when the story appeared in the *New York Sunday Sun* (3 April 1892), sect. 3, p. 2; (10 April 1892): sect. 3, p. 2. The illustrations, by "F. C. Drake," including a portrait sketch of James, are stiff and amateurish, which is why I have chosen here not to subject them to further scrutiny.
- 17 See Kermode 95.
- 18 James, Preface to *The Golden Bowl*: "The essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images" (23).
- 19 The reviewer critiqued "the vagueness of purpose, the incoherence of motive exhibited by his human puppets, whose useless, inconclusive modes of thought and procedure would be ridiculous if they were not so pathetic" (498).
- 20 See Fried on the significance of mirror reversal in the self portraits of Henri Fantin Latour.
- 21 Sonstegard notes that James generally worked in this way; when crafting stories from "secondhand anecdotes" he felt that "an excess of knowledge about a seminal event inhibited him from transforming the event into fiction" (191). Indeed, in his notebook preparation for writing the tale, James describes the Monarchs' "failure, disappointment, disappearance going forth into the vague again" and confirms, "*Il y a bien quelque chose à tirer de ça*" something literary to pull from the vague, from the dark place of disappearance. See Edel and Powers 56.

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Picturing Paradise: Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage"

Eric T. Haskell

Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* irrevocably changed the physiognomy of French poetry. In fact, upon its publication in 1855, this "frisson nouveau" (Hugo 314; "novel sensation"), as Victor Hugo aptly called it, altered the course of modern poetry in such definitive ways that we can actually draw the line between pre- and post-*Fleurs du mal*. The most telling feature of the latter is, of course, the then novel notion of modernity.

Literature was dramatically affected by *Les Fleurs du mal*; so too were the other arts. In painting, Baudelaire's work inspired Matisse's series titled *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* (1904–1905) as well as Magritte's 1946 canvas, *Les Fleurs du mal*. In music, Duparc's vocal poems of the same name were composed in the 1870s and 80s, and a century later Léo Ferré and Mylène Farmer revived these poems in their songs. Even furniture design felt the influence of Baudelaire; Art Nouveau master Émile Gallé's florally inlaid side table of 1896 called "Les Fleurs du mal" is proof. And although the fine and decorative arts, along with music, are replete with examples of Baudelaire's lasting influence, the illustrated book is by far the domain that best demonstrates the prolific extent to which *Les Fleurs du mal* have impacted the arts.

Baudelaire did not live to see a single illustration for his poems. And yet, with well over a hundred illustrated editions of *Les Fleurs du mal*, it is one of the most pictured texts of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹ The inventory of artists contains such *monstres sacrés* as Rodin (1918), Rouault (1940), and Matisse (1947). But possibly the most astonishing interpretations of the poems have been created by lesser known book artists who have seen Baudelaire's text as a break with traditional literature and sought, via their visual vocabulary, to rupture conventional illustrative modes and bring new insight to the aesthetic universe of *Les Fleurs du mal*. The best of these illustrators have reflected in their imagery the critical shift from representation to abstraction so central to Baudelairean poetics.

Of all the *Fleurs du mal*, "L'Invitation au voyage" is possibly the best known and most frequently cited of the volume's poems. This text appeared in the 1 June 1855 edition of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* before being published in

the first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* as poem number XLIX. Belonging to the cycle of verse inspired by Marie Daubrun, this text's celebrated refrain is perhaps the *raison d'être* for its enduring popularity.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, clame et volupté. (*Œuvres complètes* 53)

There, there is nothing else but grace and measure,
Richness, quietness, and pleasure.²

But "L'Invitation au voyage" clearly presents an enigma in terms of how illustrators have received it. Whereas less familiar texts from *Les Fleurs du mal* such as "Parfum Exotique," "Les Bijoux," and "Bénédiction" have inspired dozens of artists to produce images that truly accomplish the illustrative task—that of shedding light on the interior contours of a given text—artists have generally shied away from picturing "L'Invitation au voyage." Or else, when they have chosen to illustrate it, their renditions have tended to remain on a superficial level that does little to actually illuminate, in the true sense of the term, Baudelaire's poem. The illustration of "L'Invitation au voyage" thus presents a puzzling situation which is the focus of this image text inquiry.

In terms of its textuality, "L'Invitation au voyage" is essentially narrative. An invitation is proposed to a companion, enticing images of exotic climes are presented, and then, along with the narrator, we await the companion's response at the close of the text. Whether this reply will be positive or negative is not the point of the poem. Rather, everything is focused on the appeal. In harmony with the text, the stylistic profile of this piece is simple. A triptych of persuasive stanzas, each followed by the mesmerizing refrain cited above, compose a tempting plea whose aesthetics are grounded in the notion of desire and in the promise of eternal bliss. In short, "L'Invitation au voyage" is a site of seduction.

Why, then, has this text been given short shrift by illustrators? At first glance, it seems that the highly descriptive language of the poem leaves little interpretive room for the artist. Secondly, if illustrators were attracted to *Les Fleurs du mal* by the promise of breaking with illustrative tradition, and no longer simply retelling the story in pictures, then choosing a less narrative text than "L'Invitation" might better suit their graphic quest. In other words, an illustrator of Dickens, whose function it is to replicate textual exactitude, would not be attracted to Baudelaire, whose poetry incites pictures that carry the reader beyond the page. Finally, perhaps this text simply demands new illustrative strategies in order for it to have a pictorial voice. And so, we embark on an examination of this poem's career in the illustrated book with the hope at once of shedding light on this specific enigma and of broaching often complex issues related to the fertile intersections of textual and graphic planes.



Fig. 1. Armand Rassenfosse (1862-1934), illustration for Charles Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage," 1899. Engraving, 15 x 15 cm. Private collection. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Armand Rassenfosse's in text engraving for "L'Invitation au voyage" (fig. 1) dating from 1899 is perhaps the poem's earliest illustration.³ Here, emphasis is placed on the object of the narrator's desire—the traveling companion to whom his "Invitation" is addressed. As she seems to rise from a bed, her nude bust, her uncoiffed hair streaming liberally, and her enticing attitude justify the narrator's passion for her that has prompted the poem. If her pose is provocative, so too is her sultry glance, which accentuates her eyes and brings them into line with the "traîtres yeux" ("treacherous eyes": l:11) of the text. Like the woman's hair, the image cascades freely over the poem's title, a daring touch on the part of the artist whose liberty here alludes perhaps to the subtle libertinage of the poem. A second, less important illustration, restricted to the woman's face, appears at the text's close. Now veiled, she still gazes in our direction, but with her face turned to the side. Other than to underscore its sensual contours, this pair of illustrations does little to enhance



Fig. 2. Émile Bernard (1868–1941), illustration for Charles Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage," 1916. Woodcut, 8 x 7.5 cm. Private collection. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

our reading of Baudelaire's poem. Rassenfosse does not attempt to narrate the storyline in figurative terms, but neither does he perform the task of illumination. Thus, the artist's contribution remains superficial, vastly eclipsed by the poet's vision.

This is by no means the case with Émile Bernard's pair of in-text woodcuts that were published in a luxurious, two-volume edition edited by the celebrated editor Ambroise Vollard in 1916.⁴ The first (fig. 2) is placed just above the poem's title. Here, the narrator and his companion occupy the foreground while the background is composed of the landscape of the poem's closing stanza. Linkage between foreground and background is made by the narrator's outstretched arm that indicates the direction in which his companion must look in order to comprehend the dynamics of his invitation. This gesture is symbolic of the narrator's control, for it is he who has created the illusion on which the seduction depends. His open hand appears to hold the setting sun. He is, after all, the instigator of the invitation, the holder of the landscape. If we consider him as simultaneously narrator and poet (note his resemblance to Baudelaire), then we conclude that this, too, is the hand that held the pen from which flowed the words of the textual invention.

Upon closer inspection, we note that the landscape of the setting sun and sailing ship appears to be framed like a painting. This framing device, composed of the window surround in the room where they are seated,

appropriately links the poetic gesture to the painterly mode. What Baudelaire has framed with words has been insinuated by Bernard in graphic terms. However, Bernard has transcended mere replication. By placing the couple at the window, he insinuates that they are in the exotic chamber of stanza two and that the revelation of the closing stanza depends upon intimate understanding of the "douce langue natale" ("sweet and secret native tongue": l:26) that is at the very core of Baudelairean "correspondences." The final tableau cannot come into focus until the threshold of intimacy, symbolized by the room, has been crossed. Appropriately, then, the narrator poet creates the sun drenched landscape by gazing into the eyes of his beloved. As muse, she inspires not only the closing tableau but also the entire "Invitation." And although her inspiration is the poem's guiding force, the narrator poet ultimately retains control. Bernard's clever use of the outstretched arm responds to the imperative in the text and constitutes the hyphen between foreground and background. Most importantly, it performs the gestural equivalent of revelation. The tableau thus comes into focus for the beloved's viewing. Furthermore, she has consented to be held within the narrator's arms. The seduction is complete; the invitation has been accepted.

Bernard accompanies the poem's close with a smaller image of boats. The reference to the vessels that, in the text, "viennent du bout du monde" ("ply hither through all the waters of the earth": l:34), is a final homage to the beloved. Although simple in its scope, the illustration serves to accentuate the notion of veneration that is central to the poet's plea.

"L'Invitation au voyage" is entirely dependent on only two verbs cast in the imperative mode: "songe" ("dream": l:2) of the first stanza and "vois" ("see": l:29) of the last. Both are conjugated within the parameters of intimacy offered by the second person singular. More importantly, they are inextricably linked. Baudelaire indicates that true seeing depends upon the capacity to dream. Without it, the act of seeing remains anchored in the reality of the quotidian existence, the absolute antithesis of what is proposed in the poem. With his framing techniques, his treatment of the outstretched arms, and his placement of glancing eyes, Bernard's opening illustration underscores the vast disparity between worldly and otherworldly seeing. In doing so, he moves beyond the decorative devices of Rassenfosse towards a more in depth reading of Baudelaire's masterpiece.

Published just four years after Émile Bernard's edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, André Domin's pochoir illustration for "L'Invitation au voyage" (fig. 3) dates from 1920.⁵ This *hors texte* image is thematically reminiscent of Bernard's work. As the couple enters the frame from the left, the male figure's outstretched leg is the equivalent of Bernard's outstretched arm. The companion is led into the landscape by the narrator and is thus taken on the voyage promised in

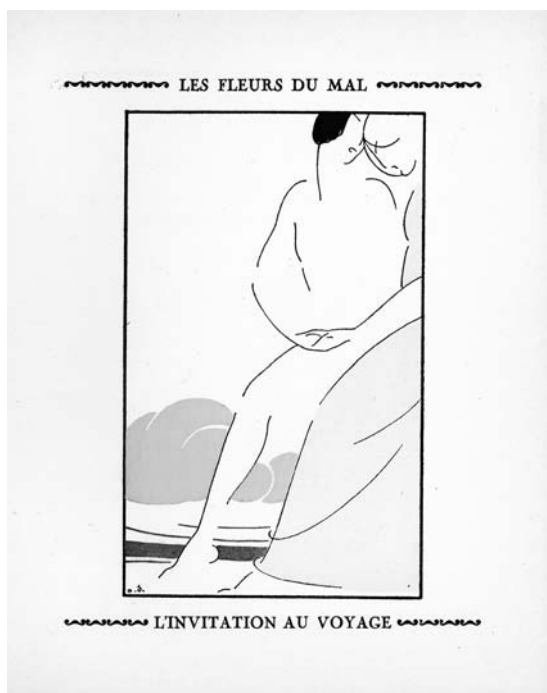


Fig. 3. André Domin (1883–1962), illustration for Charles Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage," 1920. Pochoir, 8 x 13 cm. Private collection.

the invitation. Appropriately, pink is the pochoir wash chosen by Domin to highlight this illustration. Like Baudelaire, he pictures the promised paradise as seen through rose-colored glasses. Still, the opulence of textual precisions and the lavishness that make of this poem a veritable "dreamatorium" are bypassed in favor of a sort of Art Deco minimalism that falls somewhat short of illuminating the text.

Darker than Domin in his graphic gesture, Édouard Goerg also appears to have modeled his lithographic illustration (fig. 4) on Bernard's. In the first of his three lithographic images from 1947,⁶ his couple gazes together at the setting sun. Referencing again the poem's final stanza, this illustration fails to match the vitality and depth of Bernard's opening image. The couple's gestures are marked by a timidity that is not in keeping with the dramatic *élan* of the poet's words. Equally transfixed by the landscape before them, the narrator pictured here is not the holder of illusion. Rather, like his companion,

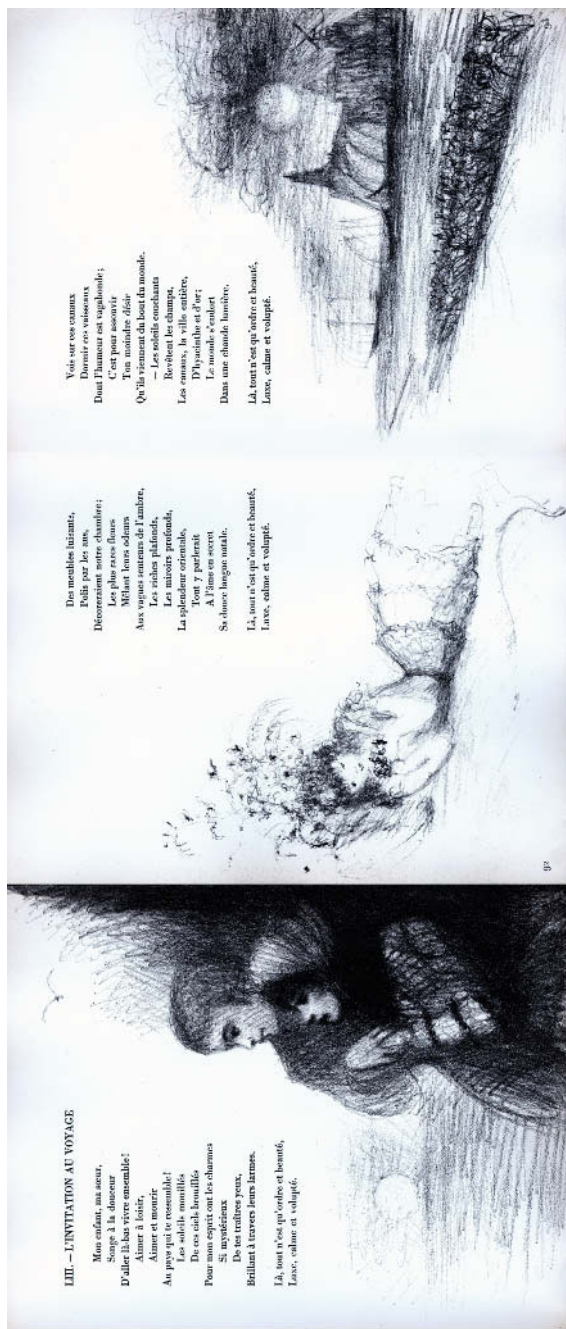


Fig 4 Édouard Goerg (1893–1969), illustration for Charles Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage," 1947 Lithograph, 25.5 x 31.5 cm Private collection

he is reduced to the state of a simple beholder. Such a misportrayal weakens this illustration's ability to shore up the realm of ideas proposed in the poetic fabric. Problematic, too, are the dark and brooding tonalities of this image, which are less seductive than they are menacing. Goerg's second image is even less effective simply due to the tenuous nature of its link to the text. On a page devoted to the poem's second stanza, an interpretation of the chamber's resplendent characteristics would seem to be in order. But here, a dainty female figure reclining under a bush is illustratively at odds with Baudelaire's vision of the chamber bathed in luxuriant sensuality. Furthermore, the delicacy of Goerg's treatment seems in disagreement with the ominous atmosphere of his first and third illustrations. In the latter, the sinister luminosity of the landscape has nothing to do with the tonalities "d'hyacinthe et d'or" ("in hyacinth and gold": l:38) which dominate the closing tableau of the poem. Fashioned with the dark markings of a thick, lithographic crayon, this image dispels dream and even invites nightmare. One might take this haunting interpretation of "L'Invitation au voyage" as the end of the world rather than the promise of new and eternal bliss. In short, Goerg's apocalyptic vision shares few aesthetic bonds with Baudelaire's idealized exoticism.

Roger Bezombes proposes a significant shift in the illustrated career of "L'Invitation au voyage" (fig. 5).⁷ Unlike the work of previously examined artists, his interpretation from 1985 privileges abstraction over representation. The illustration's folded format announces Bezombes's originality. Presented in an accordion style binding, the image unfolds over a three page spread that moves the reader viewer past the traditional single or double page format. Thus, "L'Invitation" unfurls in a successive fashion, much like the poem. But instead of using the succession to mirror the narrative in a series of mimetic images that would serve only to retell the text, Bezombes approaches the poem with a novel graphic strategy.

On his first page, traditional modes of separating words from pictures have been abandoned. Text and image intersect within the same plane in this experimental *mise en page*. Brightly colored strokes, reminiscent of Miró, invite the spectator to perform the task of reader viewer in a single activity. By virtue of this simultaneity, Bezombes's interpretation breaks new ground as it approaches abstraction. The green figure might suggest a compass whose function is to orient us at the outset of the text in the narrator's quest to evoke for his beloved the text's far away Eden. But it also may be taken simply as a graphic gesture that seeks to liberate us from our customary search for comprehension of the graphic entity vis à vis the poem. By upsetting our habitual approach to image text inquiry, Bezombes pushes forward to a novel frontier.

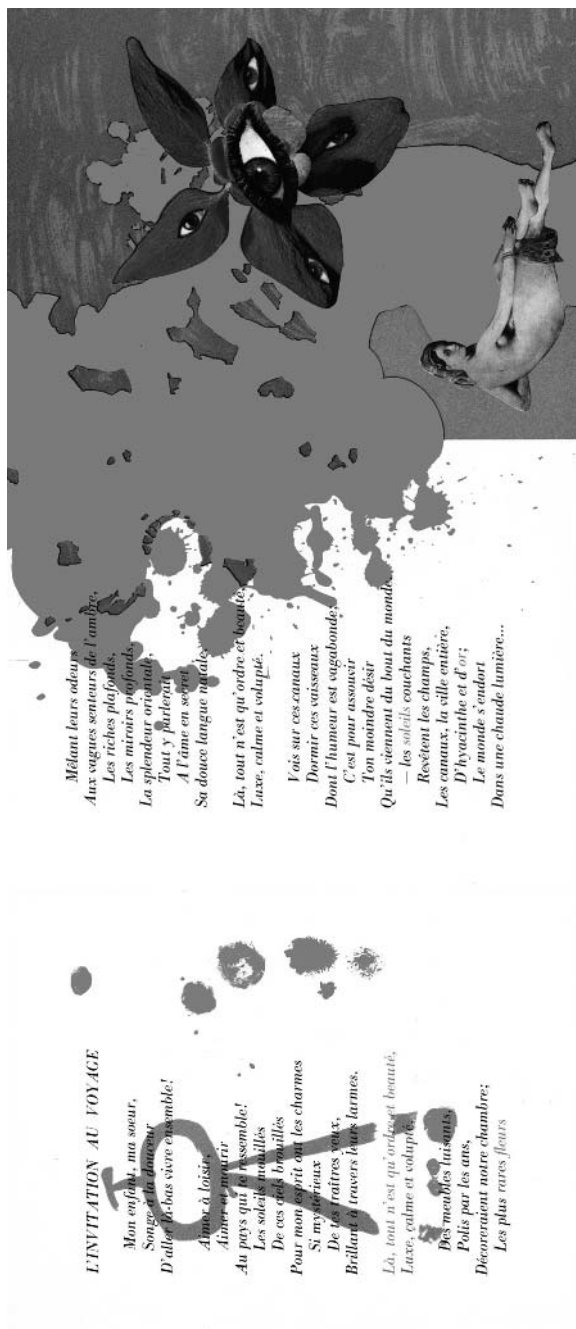


Fig 5 Roger Bezombes (1913–94), illustration for Charles Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage," 1985 Lithograph, 22.5 x 28.5 cm Private collection © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

The artist's activity is not limited to a simple overlay of abstract painterly gestures onto the typography as illustrated on this and the following page. Closer examination reveals that specific words and phrases have been printed in color. While the first line of the refrain (l. 13) as well as the words "fleurs" ("flowers": l:18) "soleils" ("suns": l:35) and "or" ("gold": l:38) appear in bright red, a rich blue is reserved for the poem's most memorable verbal triptych: "Luxe, calme et volupté" (l:14). By introducing color to the typography of the poem, Bezombes privileges terms that he sees as vital keys to textual understanding. The artist arrests the eye of the reader who may have grown accustomed to the poem, encouraging him to re read it from a renewed approach. Thus, typography is brought into the illustrative domain as color from the image seemingly rubs off onto the text. As the latter is fused with the former, text and image suddenly collapse into a single plane.

Another bold initiative on the part of the illustrator is to leave out the poem's third refrain. An ellipsis holds the reader in suspension requiring of us a participatory gesture to fill in the omission, but the renowned refrain fails to appear on schedule in typographical terms. Bezombes has replaced it with a graphic gesture that starts as a stream of red symbolic perhaps of the narrator's impassioned plea that spills with verve over the accordion fold and on to the final page of his interpretation. The small fragments of green that it encompasses may be the dreamed archipelago of paradise proposed by the narrator, disposed here as a sort of geographical overview mapping the promised land of the poem.

As the surge encounters the great mass of green to the right, its course flows downward suggesting the shape of a canal in the text. Sited along its course are two significant images that speak to key elements of the text: the female companion and the notion of "traîtres yeux" (l:11). The companion is presented as a direct quote from Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* of 1814⁸ applied here in collage form to the surface of Bezombes's image. Complex dialectics associated with how the viewer sees the odalisque and how she sees the viewer are thus played out on the illustrator's terrain, adding an unexpected dimension to this graphic interpretation. The gaze of the odalisque is considerably expanded by the découpaged flower that dominates the page with its eye encrusted petals that perform a privileged role amongst *Les Fleurs du mal*. If all seeing is metaphoric of all knowing, then this image portrays the poem as an omniscient force. Rassenfosse, as we have seen, insinuated the importance of the female gaze. Here, Bezombes underscores this notion in a surrealistic mode and carries it to a whole new level.

At this point, it is worth rethinking briefly the artist's typographic colorations. The only complete verses of the poem printed in color were those of the first refrain. Line one was rendered in red; line two in blue. This sort of coloristic highlighting is in keeping with the importance of the refrain within

the universe of the poem. When the artist drops this couplet from its place at the close of the poem and replaces it with his illustration, he is careful to employ the same colors that saturated the refrain. The typographical coloring is thus a prefiguration of the final refrain's omission. Is this omission a violation of the text? Perhaps for some. But for those willing to embrace the experimental, Bezombes's rendering proposes a refreshing image text strategy.

For just a moment, let us consider yet another possible reading of this image. If we consider the accordion format in its Asian context, then the reader viewer would approach the three pages not in the occidental left to right progression but rather from right to left. Starting then with the third page of Bezombes's interpretation, the red canal begins with the odalisque, widens to accommodate the five eyed flower and finally forms a sort of delta which spills onto the right hand side of the second page towards the typography of the text. Metaphorically, the odalisque is, after all, the source of the narrator's passionate inspiration. Further along, the flower, too, is associated with the very fabric of the journey proposed. Finally, at the "delta," splashes of paint interact with text in such a way that they seem almost to generate the words of the poem. In this unconventional reading, Bezombes would have subverted conventional illustrative patterns by having the image generate the text. The elasticity of such a scenario would then permit the omission of the final refrain and its replacement by the artist's own imagery in a sort of seamless verbal visual phrasing between word and image.

Shifting now back to our initial interpretation, if we consider the accordion format as a sort of virtual unfolding of the verbal visual poetic scenario, then the page facing his third leaf for "L'Invitation" cannot be ignored. After all, this page's illustration for "À une Malabaraise" inhabits the same green background as the Ingres odalisque and the many eyed flower. This shared pictorial site allows a subtle visual dialogue to occur. More importantly, by virtue of her placement here, the bejeweled and beflowered Malabaraise performs the role of exotic icon as she seems to sum up the textual aspiration of "L'Invitation au voyage." This borrowed view from "L'Invitation" to "À une Malabaraise" is facilitated by the accordion fold that turns this illustrated edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* into an exhibition. By borrowing the *en face* illustration to extend traditional paginal parameters, Bezombes at once enlarges the geography of his interpretation and fashions a unique option for reading the text in visual terms. Situated mid stream between the figurative and the abstract, his illustration incorporates modernist tonalities, simultaneity, typographical transformations, collage, and borrowed views to reach deep into the meanings of Baudelaire's poem. The outcome is impressive for mimesis has been transcended. There at the center of his composition reigns the all seeding flower of oneiric revelation whose mesmerizing power holds the passport to "L'Invitation au voyage."

A volume published in 1997 by the Bulfinch Press,⁹ perhaps the most recently illustrated edition of “L’Invitation au voyage,” serves as a final example of the breadth of approaches that have been used to illustrate the poem. This book is in a league of its own, quite distinct from the editions treated thus far, because the illustrations are photographs. This is by no means a traditional approach to Baudelaire’s text, especially given the poet’s disdain for photography.¹⁰ First, the volume is devoted in its entirety to the poem. The text is broken into verses that stretch out over nineteen of the tome’s thirty six pages. Each verse grouping appears in French with an English translation by Richard Wilbur below it. Second, the novel disposition of the text prefigures the uncommon nature of the illustrative entity, which is composed of nineteen duo tone photographs, plus three additional ones set at the end to illustrate Baudelaire’s poem in prose for “L’Invitation au voyage.” Although the number of verse breaks matches the number of in text photos, there is not a set *mise en page* distribution of text and image. Some photographs are single paged; some are double. Yet others cross over page gutters to occupy various portions of *en face* pages. At times, the text appears on blank pages; at others, it is printed directly onto the colored frames of the photographs, almost allowing verbal and visual planes to unite. Such a variety of dispositions, created here by designer Eric Baker, matches the diversity and range of experiences offered by the promises of the poem.

Like a photo album, this “Invitation au voyage” is intended to be perused in a leisurely manner. With a glance or two, we have been able to readily absorb the illustrations of artists presented previously. In all cases, the experience of reading the author’s text has been more time consuming than that of viewing the illustration accompanying it. The Bulfinch edition, however, requires the reader viewer to adopt a new time frame for experiencing the poem. A total of eighteen page turns are required to observe the totality of verbal visual information. This activity all but forces us to move through the volume at an unhurried tempo that, in turn, facilitates the paced transmission of ideas in a seamless fashion. Through this transmission, the poem and the pictures seep quietly into our consciousness setting a new mode of reader viewer reception with regard to Baudelaire’s masterpiece.

Who are the photographers, what is their time frame, and who assembled them here? Unlike editions already discussed, the Bulfinch edition does not depend on the work of a single artist but rather on a plethora of photographers, fourteen in all. Some, like Nadar and Atget, are *monstres sacrés* of the medium. Others are anonymous. Probably due to his seminal role in the history of photography and to his relation with Baudelaire, Nadar has been privileged. His *Seated Model, Partially Draped* (fig. 6) holds the place of honor on the Bulfinch edition’s cover and is reproduced a second time within the



Fig. 6. Nadar (Gaspard Félix Tournachon; 1820–1910), *Seated Model, Partially Draped*, c. 1856. Photograph (salted paper print from glass negative), 11.2 x 10.4 cm. Gilman Paper Company Collection.

volume. Furthermore, Nadar's iconic portrait of Baudelaire¹¹ figures prominently on the title page. The photographs chosen for this volume date from 1853 to 1910, with the bulk being from the 1850s, 60s and 70s; all post date the publication of "L'Invitation au voyage." If Baudelaire did not know of these specific photographs, he would have known ones similar to them that circulated freely throughout France and Europe during the latter part of his life. The choice of photographs for the Bulfinch edition was by Jane Handel in consultation with co editor Pamela Prince, who originated the idea of publishing this poem and is a writer and editor of numerous illustrated books. Handel selected the photographs from her own collection, from the private collections of friends and colleagues, and from public collections in the United States and abroad. Curator, writer, publisher, art dealer, archivist, and artist, Handel has brought a clever eye for visual materials and a keen understanding of the poem to her task of selection. Her role is a crucial one.

Although photographs illustrate this volume, they were not originally taken for the purpose of illustrating Baudelaire's text. Rather, Handel, as creative impresario, borrows these images to perform in the light of the poem, bringing to it unexpected effects not initially intended by the photographers. The cohabitation of this text and these images seems, however, to benefit both by infusing verbal visual planes with new energies.

The subjects of the photographs selected can be divided into four categories: bodyscapes (portraits of odalisques), roomscapes (including still lifes), landscapes, and seascapes. All four participate in the making of dreamscapes. These categories deftly illustrate the poem's three stanzas. In its first, the companion's portrait is fashioned, through association with the promised Eden, by the verse "au pays qui te ressemble" ("those scenes that image you": l:5). The second stanza details the chamber with the precision of a *nature morte* while the third enlarges to embrace the final landscape, which ultimately terminates in the crescendo of a dreamscape.

The actual places shown in these photographs range from the iconic—the Taj Mahal (no. 10), the Alhambra (no. 12), the Bridge of Sighs (no. 17), and Notre Dame de Paris (no. 18)—to the unspecific, such as *Cloud Study* (no. 4), which spreads across pages five and six. Like the landscapes, the roomscapes range from the specific—Atget's *Ambassade d'Autriche, 57, rue de Varenne* (no. 9)—to the non specific of his *Nymphéa* (no. 19). Neither the architectural icons nor the particular roomscapes of these photographs are present in the poem. In fact, such an inclusion as Notre Dame de Paris seems almost at odds with the textual intent to juxtapose the occidental "here" of the poem's present with the oriental "there" of the paradise proposed. This edition's intent is to privilege the evocative over the literal. Thus, selecting images that show scenes from at least nine countries fosters the sort of freedom necessitated by the notion of evocation. In this context, Henri Le Secq's Notre Dame is just as otherworldly as John Murray's Taj Mahal. Presented here as paper negatives, both photographs transcend the literal in order to evoke with verve the poem's "chaude lumière" ("sleepward under a sea of gentle fire": l:40) that bathes "L'Invitation au voyage" by the close of the final stanza. Literalness is not their goal.

At the center of the text is the object of the narrator's desire—"Mon enfant, ma soeur" ("My child, my sister": l:1). It is she, after all, who inspires the invitation and serves as the point of departure for the poetic project. The Bulfinch edition recognizes her importance by featuring Nadar's *Seated Model, Partially Draped* on its cover (fig. 6). Hand tipped into the cloth binding whose two tones prefigure the duo-toned photographs to come, this woman is at once odalisque and muse. She appears again in the edition, but only after the photograph by Lady Hawarden titled *Clementina, in fancy dress, reclining on draped*

divan (no. 3). This model, fully clothed, has her eyes closed as if to indicate that the narrator's dream can appear only once eyes have shut out reality. Stretched out before a paired panel of mirrors that subtly announce the text's "miroirs profonds" ("mirrors deep as the sea": l:23), she prefigures Nadar's *Seated Model* (cover and no. 5; fig. 6) who, five pages later, reappears. Partially nude, she evokes the sensuous realm inspired by the voyage. With a turn of the page and the arrival of the first refrain, she has suddenly been transfigured by the text into the very epitome of exoticism, Roger Fenton's *Odalisque* (no. 6). As her richly encrusted drum symbolizes music and incense burns near her elbow, she is the personification of Baudelairean "Correspondances." A third and final odalisque serves to illustrate the "douce langue natale" (l:26). *The Sudanese of Suakin* (no. 11), by an anonymous photographer, conjures up a primitive ideal of the noble savage and matches it to the notion of a primordial state of language, devoid of occidental sophistication, when words were stronger agents for igniting the imagination. The language of the poem is ultimately an attempt to create a text that has the power to seduce. These photographs, presented as an accompaniment to that language, are similarly intended to facilitate seduction.

Three of the Bulfinch edition's odalisques stare directly at the observer as if to say that their mesmerizing of the narrator is what has provoked the poetic discourse. In so doing, they forge links to Rassenfosse's nude and to Bezombes's all seeing flower. But by placing Baudelaire's portrait by Nadar on the title page, the Bulfinch edition takes yet another step further by wittily proposing the poet as would be odalisque whose stare now entices us to enter the universe of his poem.

As a way of summing up the meaning of this photographic suite in terms of its illustrative function, let us contemplate John Beasley Greene's photograph titled *The Nile* (no. 2). This first illustration of the volume is clearly intended to capture the poem's sense of "là bas" (l:3). With water below and sky above, a tableau of infinity unfolds within the mirror of the liquid surface before us. Far in the distance, like a mirage, appears the oasis. Representative of the promised paradise of the poem, this is the desired destination where the textual "luxe, calme et volupté" conjugates in a single image. The Bulfinch edition's success is due precisely to the fact that each of the photographs functions as oasis. Thus, a still life of fruit, a group of water lilies, a streetscape in Tunis, or a view of the San Francisco Bay (photographs nos. 14, 19, 15, and 22 respectively), all operate as sites of seduction. These oases, in turn, become visual holders of the poem's Promised Land. Each represents a talisman of poetic potential whose function is to draw us into the textual scenario in such a way that, like the narrator's would be companion, we too accept the invitation. Across the pages of the Bulfinch edition's photographic album,

evocation reigns supreme. This aesthetic assures the edition's success as an alternative to traditional methods of picturing texts and demonstrates the capacity of illustration to transcend mimesis in its pursuit of illumination.

In conclusion, "L'Invitation au voyage" presents an out of the ordinary case in word and image studies. Although its career in illustration has been uneven in comparison to other poems by Baudelaire, artists such as Bernard and Bezombes have found in this text a rich terrain for graphic experimentation. Furthermore, the Bulfinch edition—a whole volume devoted to a single *Fleur du mal*—prompts us to revisit the poem in an entirely new light. The illustrated book constitutes an impressive chapter in the history of verbal visual inquiry. To this lush terrain, Baudelaire's illustrators bring unexpected riches which help us understand the dialectics of picturing poems or—as is the case with "L'Invitation au voyage"—of picturing paradise.

NOTES

- 1 For further information on Baudelaire and illustration, see Haskell.
- 2 Translations of Baudelaire's text are by Richard Wilbur (Baudelaire, *L'Invitation au Voyage*).
- 3 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1899). This volume was printed in an edition of 100 copies.
- 4 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1916). This volume was printed in an edition of 250 numbered copies, each signed by Émile Bernard.
- 5 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1920). This volume was printed in a limited, numbered edition of 485 copies.
- 6 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1947). These volumes were printed in an edition of 200 numbered copies.
- 7 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1985). This volume, designed by Michel Kieffer, was produced in an edition of 150 numbered copies.
- 8 Musée du Louvre, Paris.
- 9 Baudelaire, *L'Invitation au voyage* (1997). This edition, co edited by Pamela Prince and Jane Handel, designed by Eric Baker, with the poem translation by Richard Wilbur and the prose translation by Carol Cosman, is illustrated with a selection of nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs.
- 10 See Lauren S. Weingarden's informative discussion of Baudelaire and photography.
- 11 *Portrait de Baudelaire au fauteuil*, salted paper print from collodion negative, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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The Writing-Drawing Continuum of Alexei Remizov

Julia Friedman

Alexei Remizov's ornamental prose revitalized early twentieth century Russian fiction, turning him into one of the key figures in literary modernism. In the words of the formalist critic Boris Eikhenbaum, by 1913 Remizov was a "one man literary school" (Eikhenbaum 550) whose textual palimpsests drew on the auditory interpretations of the Russian language. At the same time, scholars have been regarding Remizov's graphic work as a mere appendage to his writings; very few know that between 1932 and 1949, while living in France, Remizov made over two hundred handwritten illustrated albums which mix India ink and watercolor drawings with collages and texts. The initial inspiration for these single copy editions came from medieval Russian manuscripts, but their author's sensibility and method of production are entirely modernist. For the most part, the drawings from the "illustrated albums" do not illustrate the adjacent texts in any conventional sense. Remizov's images enter into more complex relationships with the text, even supplanting it as the vehicle of the narrative in the later albums. Praised by Pablo Picasso and André Breton during the thirties and forties,¹ by now, the albums have all but disappeared from view. This paper is an attempt to place Remizov's use of ornament in his illustrated albums within his larger modernist idiom.

In August 1921 Alexei Remizov and his wife Serafima Pavlovna Remizova Dovgello crossed the Soviet border into what turned out to be permanent exile. After a brief stay in the Estonian town of Reval (Tallinn), they first moved to Berlin, and then to Paris in 1923. Remizov saw this reluctant emigration from Russia as detrimental to his career as a writer, but he also linked it to the birth of his album making:

In the last years 1931–1949, when I had no hope left of seeing my works prepared for publication, and it turned out that there was "no place" for me in Russian periodicals ... I decided to use my calligraphy: I began to make hand written illustrated albums in a single copy. And in the course of eighteen years of work: four hundred and thirty albums; and in them about three thousand drawings. ... One hundred eighty five albums were dispersed, "this way or that." (Remizov, *Vstrechi* 225²)

Although Remizov never really believed that these albums could replace the conventional printing of his books, they allowed him to continue reaching and enchanting new audiences, albeit now much smaller ones. This album making practice that began in 1932 became more prominent in the late forties and throughout the fifties, when Remizov regularly began to draw his stories before writing their texts.

Remizov traced the lineage of the illustrated albums to the intricately designed final drafts of his literary texts (Remizov, “Rukopisi i risunki A. Remizova,” 192–93). These final drafts (most of them from 1907–10) are also the earliest evocations of the Russian medieval manuscripts that lie at the root of Remizov’s book art. Made in calligraphic cursive, *skoropis’*, like the medieval hand written books, they treated each page as a separate aesthetic composition, and not just a means to convey the semantic contents of the text (Gracheva, *Volshebnyi mir* 8). Remizov intended them as clean copies for submission to publishing houses.³ In the case of acceptance, their format would anyway be changed; and it was likely that they would never return to their author. Were these texts simply an exercise in futility or could it be that at this stage of his artistic development, Remizov refused to limit his mode of expression to the literary, already actively seeking a book art for fuller artistic effect? I would argue the latter. Remizov’s belief that manuscript art was a legitimate extension of his writing is crucial for understanding why a fiction author of considerable talent would devote almost two decades of his life to making hand written editions of his texts. And while this early practice might suggest graphomania to the cynical minded, I believe that it marks the start of Remizov’s fruitful experimentation in book art.

Remizov was ever conscious of his gift for handwriting, and throughout his life he often reflected on the progression from writing to calligraphy to drawing. In a 1933 essay, eccentrically written in the third person and published under the pseudonym Kukovnikov, Remizov discussed the importance of calligraphy in “Remizov’s” work. It was here that he first postulated the relationship between calligraphy and his drawings: “it is not the act of copying the original cursive, but the very sketchy and curvilinear nature of letters that inspires a calligrapher. And all the illustrations to handwritten books Remizov’s drawings are from calligraphy” (Remizov, “Rukopisi i risunki A. Remizova,” 191). For better or worse Remizov’s spontaneity in writing and drawing prevented him from fulfilling this early dream of becoming a draughtsman: his own penmanship teachers complained that Remizov’s drawings were too much “for himself and from himself” (Remizov, “Rukopisi i risunki A. Remizova,” 191). But what was detrimental for the calligrapher proved beneficial for a graphic artist: “nature claimed its own, I was drawn to dash the pen about the page in play, that is, [I was drawn] to the most genuine art” (Remizov, “Rukopisi i risunki A. Remizova,” 192).

In another short article, “Risunki pisatelei” (“Drawings by Writers”), Remizov returned to the connection between writing and drawing, identifying calligraphy as “the root of [my] drawing passion” and drawing as “the very process of writing” (Remizov, qtd. from the version published in *Novoe russkoe slovo*). While “‘thought wanders,’ the hand continues to draw out patterns mechanically.” This is why “writers’ drawings cannot be separated from writing: these drawings are a continuation of lines and present the outlines of unexpressed thoughts and unsaid words.”⁴ Remizov also proposed that “what is written and what is drawn are in essence the same,” and that “every scribe may become a draughtsman, a draughtsman is necessarily a scribe.” “A writer,” in his view, “is primarily a scribe: calligraphic or the devil himself could break his leg it does not matter; and every writer is just itching to draw.”⁵ Clearly, Remizov was speaking from experience. By his own admission, his desire to draw bordered on compulsion: “having made a flourish I cannot stop and begin to draw. Herein lie my joy and my woe: I want to write, while the flourish, catching my hand like a hook, compels it to draw thoughts scatter, writing ends, and beneath the unfinished lines appears a drawing.” Because Remizov’s calligraphy can be regarded as an “ornamental experiment” (Zavalishin 138), as such it serves as a link between his ornamental prose and his ornamental drawing. By regarding drawing as a metonymical continuation of writing, and identifying himself as a “writer draftsman,” Remizov found a precise way of expressing the liminal nature of his artistry, taking into consideration both the primacy of his writing and the importance of his draftsmanship.⁶

Remizov’s fondness for calligraphy is consistent with his attempts to portray himself as a liminal artist—a writer who draws. As he toiled at the illustrated albums of the thirties, Remizov must have felt the need to justify venturing out of the purely literary domain, as if this continuous stress on the “writer” at the expense of the “drawing” would have legitimized his graphic art. His excuses and explanations for why the writer devoted so much of his creative energy to drawing, form a coherent, if at times contrived, argument. Of course, Remizov’s statements on the subject are not just the recollections of an artist who attempts to define his creative evolution, but also an attempt of a fiction writer to create characters, particularly his own artistic persona. In compiling his excuses for drawing, excuses that range from formal to financial, he constructed for himself the persona of a “drawing writer.”

Possibly the very last book that Remizov prepared for publication, *Merlog* (*The Bear Lair of Memory*), contains the 260 item list of his illustrated albums.⁷ Together with over three dozen albums from the thirties I was fortunate to find and examine in various private and public collections, the *Merlog* list provides a fairly clear picture of the text to image dynamic from the earliest to the latest albums. It shows that in the first two years, 1932–33, the majority of



Fig. 1. Alexei Remizov (1877–1957), *Domozhil Domovoi* (*There Lived a House Spirit*), 1932. India ink and watercolor on paper and colored paper, 20 x 82 cm. Paris: private collection.

albums repeat the same simple format of one to three drawings accompanied by five to eight pages of calligraphically rendered text. Among these early works are the 1932 *Ziuži Morozzy* (*Ziuži Frosts*); *Domozhil Domovoi* (*There Lived a House Spirit*, fig. 1); *Kourinas*, and the 1933 *Lintye zveri* (*Wild Beasts*) and *Sudia* (*Judge*). In the early albums calligraphy predominates, and the narrative is carried out exclusively by way of text. The very linear and sign-like drawings almost always represent the actors in the story, and not the events that are taking place.

By the mid thirties Remizov began to increase the number of drawings, and to use them for the proper “illustration” of the text. Although he continued to make albums in this format through 1939, sometime in the mid thirties he started experimenting with the script of the text, often entirely replacing his famed cursive or *skoropis*’ with block lettering that becomes part of the image.



Fig. 2. Alexei Remizov, *Sorochinskaia iarmarka* (*The Sorochinsk Fair*), 1934. India ink and color ink on cardboard, 31 x 19 cm. Paris: Lempert collection.

The lettering derives from former inscriptions on the images, now set in white against the black India ink background. The 1934 album *The Sorochinsk Fair* (*Sorochinskaia iarmarka*; fig. 2) is a good example of this new cartoon like text. Unlike the laconic drawings of the early albums, the illustrations from *The Sorochinsk Fair* form a narrative of their own as they portray simultaneous action through highlighting different scenes from the story.

Remizov also used the script/image combination in the 1934 *Solomoniia* and the two 1935 albums by the same name – one in Russian (Guerra Collection) the other in French (Reznikoff Collection). To create the desired focus for each album, Remizov transformed this mesmerizing narrative of a young woman's phallic possession through variations in the albums' format. The 1934 album, now in the Center of Russian Culture at Amherst College, contains twenty seven pages of combined Russian text and pasted in drawings.

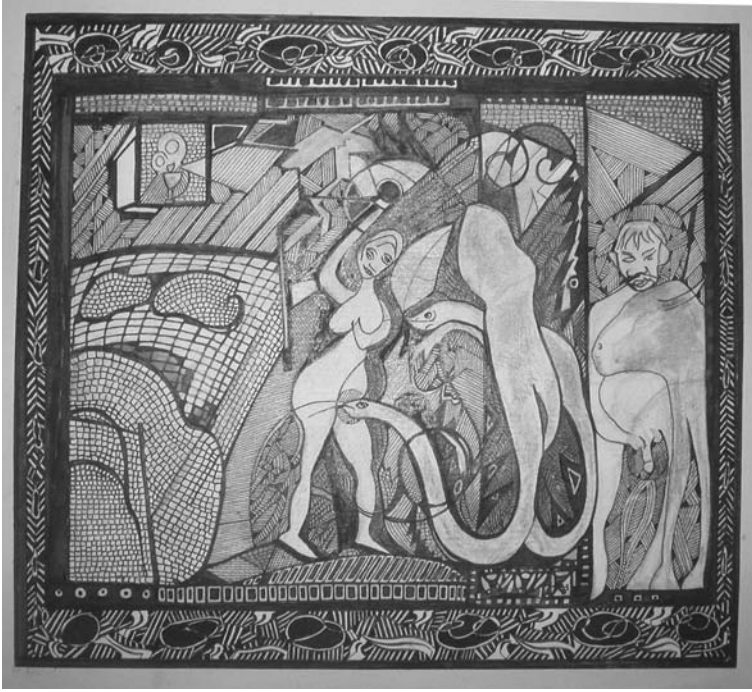


Fig. 3. Alexei Remizov, *Solomonie*, 1935. India ink and colored paper, 15 x 17 cm. Paris: Reznikoff collection.

Despite the superficial similarities between the illustrations from the Amherst and the Guerra albums the two are distinguished by their mode of production. Formal evidence suggests that while the drawings of the Amherst album originated as sketches in a manuscript draft of the tale (drawn in 1928, later cut out and pasted into the album), the drawings of the Guerra album must have been made specifically for it. Most likely, Remizov started the Guerra album as a series of illustrations in which the story was to be told through drawings, and where the text was, literally, relegated to the margins. This primacy of images over text is consistent with another variation between the albums – the Guerra album does not contain the full text, only the fragments immediately relevant to the drawings.

The album with the French translation (Reznikoff Collection) is visually very distinct from the two Russian versions. Its six lavish drawings are much larger, separate from the text and in color (fig. 3). The differences in

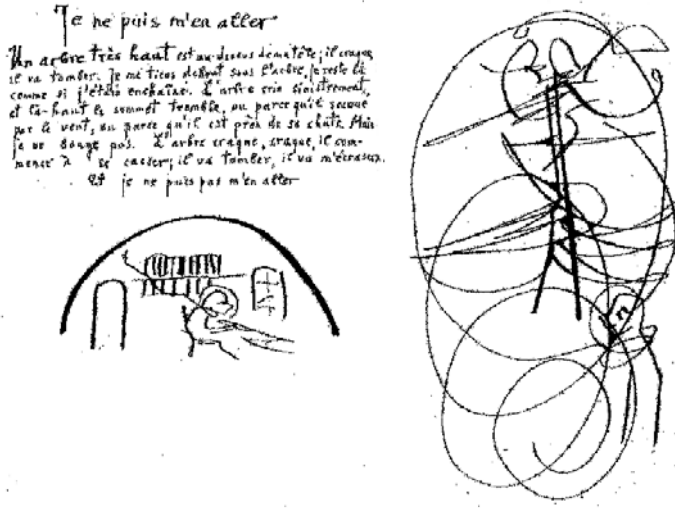


Fig. 4. Alexei Remizov, *Recits de la quatrième dimension* [sic] (*Tales from the Fourth Dimension*), 1937–38. India ink and watercolor on paper, 22 x 28 cm. Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Library, Harvard University.

the content of the Reznikoff album are as telling as the differences in its appearance: the obvious omission of all but the most sexually explicit images and the inclusion of the drawing done in India ink and watercolor which declares that “the universe is an act of pleasure” (*Solomonie* 16) endow the album with an erotic connotation. I link this alteration of the story’s content to Remizov’s interest in the author of the French translation used in the album, Gilbert Lély (1904–85) a poet with strong surrealist links, known for his erotic verses and his publications on Marquis de Sade.⁸ In his 1991 biography of Lély, Jean Louis Gabin writes that latent sadism, voyeurism, sexual libertinism, and devotion to erotic literature were already evident in Lély’s works of the early twenties (Gabin 37). During the mid- to late 1920s and 1930s these interests were absorbed into the larger surrealist output. If we review the statement about the universe as “an act of pleasure” against the background of Lély’s defense of the libertine philosophy of sexual gratification by all means, both the drawing and the album make much more sense. It is possible that the album was intended as a gift to Lély, who by the mid 1930s was not just a translator but also a friend of Remizov.⁹ Or, it could have been produced for sale to one of the surrealist artists or publishers, making the conformity to the audience’s interests especially relevant.¹⁰ As was

the case with many of Remizov's other illustrated texts that went through multiple editions (both printed and handwritten), every subsequent *Solomoniia* presented the story in a new light expanding the interpretational range from admiration of monastic abstinence to endorsement of sensual gratification at all means. While the Guerra album works in the familiar paradigm of images illustrating certain parts of the text (i.e., its narrative comes from the text), and the Amherst album relates the narrative through both text and images, only the arrangement and choice of drawings carry the story in the Reznikoff *Solomoniia*.

A look at the list of Remizov's illustrated albums from the second half of the thirties (part of his *Merlog* compilation) reveals that in many of the albums the number of pages devoted to images becomes equal to or greater than those containing text.¹¹ In 1937 Remizov produced one of his biggest and most lavish albums to that date, *Recits de la quatrième dimension* [sic] or *Rêves* (Houghton Library, Harvard University). The thirty two India ink and water color drawings of this album are pasted in facing the pages where the text is interspersed with illustrative sketches (fig. 4). The drawings represent narratives other than the stories told on the opposite page. Although it is hard to determine if the drawings offer parallel or substitute narratives, the subject of the album *dreams* is suitable for any sort of playful interaction between images and text.

The 1938 album *Maroun* (Houghton Library) also shows how Remizov takes advantage of this newly found facility of expression through drawing. *Maroun* should rightly be considered a seminal piece in Remizov's œuvre because the sequence of images in the album reflects the author's own progression from a textual to visual artist and because it exemplifies Remizov's success in creating a genuinely synthetic work.¹² The album is made of thick green paper onto which the pictures are glued. The French and Russian versions of the text are followed by six images: the first and the last are angular collages of colored paper with ink drawings, while the four intervening images are florid watercolor drawings outlined in India ink. In *Maroun*, through the effective combination of the textual and the pictorial, Remizov tempts his reader viewer into a complex world of artistic concerns. At the culminating point of the album he introduces sounds through the media of text and pictures, an invitation to hear through seeing. The images following the text make visible the sounds of the words just read. Remizov takes this principle to ever deeper levels as the images progress: the title character Maroun gradually emerges out of the chaos of colors and lines of the first two drawings, but when he finally appears in the third he is wholly concentrated in his effort to hear something

in the noise of the waves. The fourth and most challenging drawing of the album represents visually what Maroun hears — synaesthetic ideas bring about the metonymical relationship between text and images.

This seemingly fluid transition from writing to drawing establishes a symbiotic relationship between image and text and realizes a kind of synthesis that could not be inscribed into the unyielding hierarchy of symbolist art forms — already passé at the time (Bowl 167). Remizov shared neither Wagner's idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*,¹³ nor the poet's Viacheslav Ivanov's dream of Communal Theater (*Sobornyi Teatr*), a new syncretic form of art that was to incorporate music, poetry, word, painting, and stage art. Even its later incarnation in Wassily Kandinsky's 1920 Inkhuk program as the new "Monumental art" was too old-fashioned in its favoring of music as the core art.¹⁴ Not ignorant of modernist synthetic developments, in *Maroun* Remizov went beyond the standing symbolist conviction of the primacy of music. Although it may resound with a secret inner music of its own, *Maroun* was not orchestrated according to the laws of music.¹⁵ Conceptually, Remizov's understanding and application of an artistic synthesis probably came closest to that of his Symbolist friend and colleague the writer Andrei Bely, who believed that, although it is natural for the various arts to aspire to the transcendence of forms, the destruction of boundaries would essentially lead to the degeneration of art. According to Bely, artists are not able to master the various arts equally:

the modern artist is bound by form, so we cannot demand that he sing, dance and paint ... and therefore, we cannot demand that he strive toward synthesis — such a striving would express itself in a degradation, a return to the primitive forms of the distant past. But it was primitive creation, developing naturally, that led art to the current complexity of forms. (Bely 142)

Bely rejected the notion of a synthesis of the arts based on the "mechanical reconciliation" of different arts, for such an artificial synthesis must only lead to "dead eclecticism." As if consciously deflating attempts to attune different art forms to music, Bely warned against the allure of "the false penetration of the spirit of music" (Bely 142–43). He was similarly skeptical when it came to viewing synthesis as the way for the art of the future: "No, the roots of the art of the future do not lie in synthesis!" (Bely 142–43). What was Bely's solution, then? Believing that it is fundamentally wrong to try to envision the future art within or without the boundaries of different art forms, he called upon his contemporaries to abandon the concept of artistic form altogether. In his view, the artist should become "his own art form" (Bely 143), thus in vigorating the arts and making the question of synthesis moot, for future art was to annihilate — not merely transcend — form.¹⁶ Remizov presented similar ideas (albeit in a less lucid form) as he explained his own objections to "false synthesis" because of the incompatibility of expressive means:

Word music painting dance, this is “one and many,” and each one of them has its own rhythm. The word inspires a musician, but it is impossible to read it with musical accompaniment. The same with painting: a picture can conjure up a word, but to paint a word is a futile thing. Graphic arts ... because the thoughts and the words that express them are linear, they are of the same species. There is no merging of the arts. Only rhythmical contiguity. This is because the materials and the means of expression are peculiar and different in all the arts. How seldom is word music painting dance coherent; each goes its own way. “The one” is realized in the multifariousness of “nature.” ... But can a human being artificially unite the “many,” and how? (Remizov, *Plashushchii demon* 9)

In his well known essay “Without Divinity, without Inspiration” (“Bez bozhestva, bez vdokhnoven’ia”), written several months before his death in 1921, Remizov’s friend the poet Alexander Blok who served as a prototype for the main character Maroun, and to whose memory the album was dedicated, warned that “Russia is a young country, and its culture is synthetic. The Russian artist should not and must not be a ‘specialist’” (Blok 6: 175). Of great interest is the fact that Blok, in this essay, named Remizov as one of Russia’s leading synthetic artists. The kind of synthesis to which Blok referred implies the transgression of media boundaries, the refusal of arts to be confined and function only “for art’s sake” (Blok 6: 175–76). Blok urged artists not to limit themselves to their art form of choice if a change of medium is required for the sake of the ideal expression of Russia’s national culture. And this was exactly what Remizov did in *Maroun*. While abhorring contrived syntheses of what was really unsynthesizable, if not antithetical, Remizov was nonetheless eager to realize Blok’s dying behest to advance the national culture by “despecialization” (Blok 6: 177) of the arts. In order to do this, Remizov chose as his medium the naturally synthetic graphic art, where “thoughts and the words that express them are linear,” and where word and image exist in such “rhythmical contiguity” (Remizov, *Plashushchii demon* 9) that their convergence and divergence establish a kind of natural resonance. *Maroun* exemplifies how writing, drawing, and sound can coexist rhythmically¹⁷ in a single work of art and contribute to its totality, thus forming a synthetic creation.

Remizov ends his *Merlog* list with seven albums from 1940. His album *Sibirskii Skaz* (*The Siberian Tale*; fig. 5), contains no text at all as it relies exclusively on images to convey the narrative. The absence of text in this particular album may be explained by its shamanistic content—text in *kamlanie*, a shamanistic ritual, which the album stands for, would be superfluous. But the fact that the remaining albums from 1940 lack any writing as well, suggests that by then Remizov did not need textual support for his drawing and could finally shed the albums’ text.

The 1940 cut off date for the *Merlog* list, which excludes his drawing notebooks of the late forties from the album count, supports the idea that



Fig. 5. Alexei Remizov, *Sibirskii Skaz* (*The Siberian Tale*), 1940. India ink and gouache on paper, 17 x 11 cm. Paris: Reznikoff collection.

Remizov's illustrated albums of the thirties were a training ground for the writer who wanted to be an artist as well.¹⁸ Partly because of the embarrassments of his early formal artistic training, partly because he knew that the public tends to resist any changes in one's creative medium, Remizov was reluctant to declare himself a draughtsman. But he had a strong urge to draw, and already by the late twenties, Remizov would initiate his creative process by drawing. This gave rise to his album art—at first he simply pasted the already existing drawings into the handmade books (the Amherst *Solomoniia* contains the very first set of such drawings). In a way, with his first albums from the early thirties Remizov entered the world of artists through the back door of manuscript books, his "native" art form. For the next eighteen years he walked the line between two media, which allowed him to develop his draftsmanship



Fig. 6, Alexei Remizov, *Skazki III* (*Fairy Tales III*), 1951. India ink on paper, 31 x 24 cm. Paris: Reznikoff collection.

without the inherent risks of venturing out of his perceived specialization. As a writer, Remizov had nothing to lose—at the very least the sale of his albums provided him and his wife with badly needed money. Pasting his drawings of the twenties into albums, then making new ones during the thirties, Remizov gained confidence in the legitimacy of his talent as a draughtsman.¹⁹ The albums turned out to be the metaphorical threshold that he had to cross in order to become an artist, but once Remizov felt that he—I quote his own words—“had reached the circle of Lermontov and Baudelaire, writer draftsmen,”²⁰ the albums’ purpose in his artistic career was fulfilled.

Remizov’s later (from the end of the forties onward) buoyant attitude towards drawing is summed up in his words: “above all, draw with boldness and strength,”²¹ a phrase that aptly describes his subsequent drawing practice. After the last “textless” albums of the early forties, Remizov, for the most part, abandoned his painterly games with color, texture, and composition.

From now on, he would draw in a concise but utterly expressive manner. The Reznikoff collection has several of these remarkable albums from the late forties and early fifties. Most of them are not hand made in the sense the albums produced in the thirties were: Remizov either used ready made drawing notebooks as support, or sent stacks of numbered drawings to a bindery. His late albums are no longer modernist reconstructions of medieval manuscripts like the albums of the thirties. These albums are just about drawing. Remizov devoted 175 pages of his 1951 *Tristan and Izol'da* album to portraying the book's characters, sometimes without any inscriptions, at other times with simple identifications, or with additional explanations concerning the persons depicted or the actions in which they are involved. He did the same in the series of albums generically named *Skazki* (*Fairy Tales*) from the same period (fig. 6).

Although it is hard to determine with absolute certainty when exactly Remizov's drawing style changed, the earliest linear drawings I have located are in his 1943 album *Zhivye mne mertvye tsvety* (*Live to Me, Dead Flowers*). This album consists of eight dried flower and colored paper collages. The flowers belonged to Remizov's wife, Serafima Pavlovna, and the album itself is dated 13 May 1943, the day of her death. There is only one drawn image on the second page of the album's commentary; it shows a stylized self portrait of a pitiful looking Remizov next to what could be the cross on Serafima Pavlovna's grave or a cross shaped window frame. A cat like creature, which we see from behind, sits to the left of the cross. *Live to Me, Dead Flowers* seems to be the only album Remizov made between the "textless" works of 1940 (such as *Sibirskii Skaz*) and his later "novels in pictures" (such as *Tristan i Izol'da*). We can hypothesize about whether it was his personal loss that produced this poignant image of an almost shorthand nature, an image which contrasts starkly with his earlier ornamental compositions. In any case, his wife's passing was followed by a break that lasted almost five years, and when Remizov resumed drawing and writing in 1948, his graphic style had changed. What began with the ink outlines of his writing and developed in the colorist bravura of the albums from the thirties came to a conclusion in the meaningful linearity of Remizov's late images. Remizov pursued drawing for as long as he could see: through the early fifties when he gradually went blind. He lamented his inability to draw²² but the wish to draw persisted to the very end. In 1957, he shared his most fervent desire on the occasion of his eightieth birthday: to draw again (Kodrianskaia, *Alexei Remizov* 56). Then, only days before his death, he dictated for his diary: "Wanted to draw myself I caught and drew myself. This before every chapter, this is forever ... forever ..." (Kodrianskaia, *Alexei Remizov* 329). The hook of the flourish had never released him.

The shift from the textual to the visual in Remizov's illustrated albums reflects his broader artistic progression from ornamental prose to virtually hieroglyphic drawing. Having begun by extending calligraphy into drawing, thus translating his ornamental prose into ornamental writing and then into ornamental drawing, Remizov ended his graphic career with drawings that stand at the opposite of the ornamental. If his early calligraphy was an elaboration on the medieval Russian models (just as his ornamental prose was an elaboration on the Old Russian language), then his late drawings were the equivalent of texts done in graphic shorthand. These drawings were signifiers that synecdochically replaced his early ornamental texts. Accepting that from the early thirties onward Remizov worked on the interface of word and image allows us to revise his role within Russian modernism. Remizov emerges not as an eccentric wordsmith who passed on the intricacies of a colloquial narrative to a generation of young Soviet writers, but as a successful heir of the Russian attempts to synthesize the verbal and the visual, attempts that link medieval traditions with futurism.

NOTES

- 1 See Marcadé 126, Kodrianskaia, *Alexei Remizov* 98, and Remizov's diary entry from 1 October 1955, qtd. in Kodrianskaia, *Alexei Remizov* 288. Here Remizov is particularly speaking about his illustrated albums.
- 2 Originally published in *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* 15429 (25 July 1954). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.
- 3 Alla Gracheva cites Remizov's *Polunosobnoe solntse* (*Midnight Sun*) as an example of this kind of manuscript (Gracheva, *Krug schast'ia* 226, note 5). Another such text is Remizov's manuscript of his novel *Chasy* (*The Clock*) which he submitted to the newspaper *Delo Naroda* in 1905. O. E. Chernova Kolbasina tells its story in her recently published recollections about Remizov (Reznikoff archive).
- 4 By regarding drawing as a metonymical continuation of writing, and identifying himself as a "writer draftsman," Remizov found a precise way of expressing the liminal nature of his artistry, taking into consideration both the primacy of his writing and the importance of his draftsmanship.
- 5 This and the following citations concerning calligraphy and painting are from the earlier version of "Risunki pisatelei" ("Drawings by Writers") a typescript dated 1937/38. Center of Russian Culture, Amherst College, Alexei Remizov Albums and Supplementary Materials, Box 11, Folder 8.
- 6 Remizov's contemporary, the artist Yuri Annenkov, noticed the connection between Remizov's drawings and calligraphy: "Remizov's graphic art crosses over into handwriting, and his handwriting, which originated in old Russian texts, be

came a calligraphic symphony of corners, hooks, and flourishes, which one may admire without attending to his contents” (Annenkov 228).

- 7 For the dating of *Merlog* see D’Amelia, “Neizdannaiia kniga” 141. The *Merlog* list is published on pp. 161–66. Another, shorter list of 157 albums was originally published in *Nov’*, 1935 (8) and reprinted in Gracheva, *Volshebnyi mir* 43–44. In the bibliography, the *Merlog* list numbers (that Remizov put in the upper left corner of the albums’ covers) follow the entry.
- 8 Among Lély’s best known erotic verses are *Arden* (1933) and *La Sylphide ou l’Étoile carnivore* (1938) and *L’Épouse infidèle* (1966). Lély not only wrote the first scholarly biography of Sade and published much of his papers and correspondence, but he was also the editor of the standard eight volume collection of de Sade’s work. See, for example Lély, *Lettres choisies; Morceaux choisis; Vie du marquis de Sade*. The *Hip pocrate* translation is signed by S. and Gilbert Lély. Lély described this adaptation as a “poème en prose adapté du russe d’après une traduction mot à mot” (Lély, *Vie du Marquis* vol. 1: 2).
- 9 The translating relationship between Remizov and Lély was reciprocal—in 1938 Remizov translated some of Lély’s poetry into Russian. See Amherst College Center of Russian Culture, Remizov Materials. Series 3; Box 27, Folder 9: Gilbert Lély’s manuscript of *Je ne veux pas qu’on tue cette femme* dedicated to Remizov: “À mon cher et grand ami Alexei Remizov auteur de tant de merveilleux romans et poèmes et qui m’a fait le rare honneur de traduire en russe ces poèmes, maintenant plus beaux ... /avec mon affectueuse admiration/Gilbert Lély” (dated 23 January 1936). Lély was also an admirer of Remizov’s drawings and was instrumental in introducing them to his surrealist colleagues: it was he who arranged for Remizov to exhibit in the 1939 surrealist exhibition *The Dream in Art and Literature* at the Galerie Contemporaine, and it was he who put Remizov’s images into *Le Courrier Graphique*. It was probably because of Lély that Remizov’s drawings were included in the 1938 issue dedicated to dreams, *Trajectoire du rêve*, that André Breton was editing for the series *Cabiers G.L.M* (Lély’s contribution on Sade was also printed there). In any case, *Solomonie* remained in Remizov’s hands and was passed to Natalia Reznikova in 1950. Since the dedication page is left blank it is impossible to say with certainty for whom it was made, but it would be in line with Remizov’s habits to prepare such a gift as a token of gratitude for the job of translating the tale. The Amherst album, for example, was dedicated to the person who was eventually in charge of distributing the 1951 *Solomoniiia* edition.
- 10 In an unpublished letter addressed to Remizov his friend, the poet René Char, promises to show the album to Valentine Hugo, one of the artists who illustrated Pierre Louÿs’s erotic text *Trois filles et leur mère* published by Paul (and Gala) Eluard. Amherst College, Center of Russian Culture, Remizov Materials. Series 1, Sub series 1, Box. 6, Folder 6, no. 217.
- 11 See Gracheva, *Krug schast’ia*’ 205, who observed a similar reliance on images as much as on words in what she called “the graphic variants” of Remizov’s books from the forties.

- 12 For a detailed analysis of this album and for illustrations, see Friedman.
- 13 When writing his late interpretation of the tale of Tristan and Isolde, Remizov found that his text “coincides with Wagner’s music” and immediately changed it. From the letter to Kodrianskaia on 6 August 1952 (Kodrianskaia, *Remizov* 286). For a different opinion, see Marcadé 122.
- 14 “Program for the Institute of Artistic Culture,” Kandinsky 455–72. Paradoxically (yet characteristically), Kandinsky declared that the initiative for producing such monumental art must come from “composer musicians,” thus recapitulating music’s leading role in a composition consisting of equally important art forms (Kandinsky 466).
- 15 For a discussion of Remizov’s later writings modeled on music see D’Amelia, *Autobiographical Space* xxii.
- 16 “In me everything sounds and draws, what is said I translate into drawing.” Letter to Kodrianskaia, 7 June 1952 (Kodrianskaia, *Remizov* 275).
- 17 For more on Remizov’s ideas of “rhythmical coexistence” see Tribl’s recent article.
- 18 There is an additional, biographical explanation for the seemingly abrupt end of Remizov’s album making: in early June of 1940, a German bomb hit his rue Boileau apartment building triggering Serafima Pavlovna’s sickness from which she never recovered. See Remizov, *Olia* 297.
- 19 According to Yurii Annenkov, during this time Remizov produced two or three drawings a day (Annenkov 228).
- 20 This assertion appeared in the version of “Risunki pisatelei” (“Drawings by Writers,” 1934), which was revised around 1949 (Zemirov, *Vstrechi* 226).
- 21 Unpublished statement by Remizov, 1947, Reznikoff collection. Cited in Bowlt 166.
- 22 See his letter from 5 December 1954 Kodrianskaia, *Remizov* 374.

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Aby Warburg as Reader of Gottfried Semper: Reflections on the Cosmic Character of Ornament

Spyros Papapetros

Among Aby Warburg's ornamented "Zettelkästen," the collection of over one hundred cardboard boxes containing the scholar's "scientific notes," number forty one is labeled "Aesthetik." The first file in the box contains Warburg's notes from the works of Gottfried Semper: four index cards with notes from Semper's *Prolegomena to Style*, as well as fourteen index cards from Semper's 1856 essay "Concerning the formal Principles of Ornament and its Significance as Artistic Symbol" (fig. 1).¹ Most of the cards are filled with transcriptions, followed occasionally by Warburg's own comments.²

The German term used by Semper in the title of his 1856 essay is in fact not *Ornament* but *Schmuck*, that is, an accessory artifact pertaining mainly to bodily decoration, such as a piece of jewelry, a belt, or a headdress—most of them related to the adornment of the female body. Semper's essay is essentially an attack against the idealist aesthetics of "pure beauty" and paves the way for the practical aesthetics fully articulated in the architect's later work on *Style*. Every system of aesthetics, according to Semper, should have a "material foundation in dynamics and statics" (Semper, "Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit" 117), and Warburg transcribes this phrase (Warburg, "Aesthetik" 021148) and understands that it means that aesthetics should be grounded in physics and science in general.

Semper begins his essay with an etymological definition of the Greek word *Kosmos*, pointing out the twofold signification of both "decoration" and "world order" (Semper, "Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit" 101).³ For Semper, ornament is not an abstract ideal pattern but a concrete artifact that has weight, physical dimensions, and movement. By its adherence or resistance to gravity, the decorated artifact aligns itself with cosmic laws—the interplay, conflict, and equilibrium of physical forces. By doing so, the object of adornment becomes a micrograph of the visible world, as well as a "dynamogram" of the invisible forces of the universe. Semper distinguishes three categories of such ornamental artifacts according to the form of cosmic movement they portray. These are the "pendant," the "ring," and an ornament that formerly had no

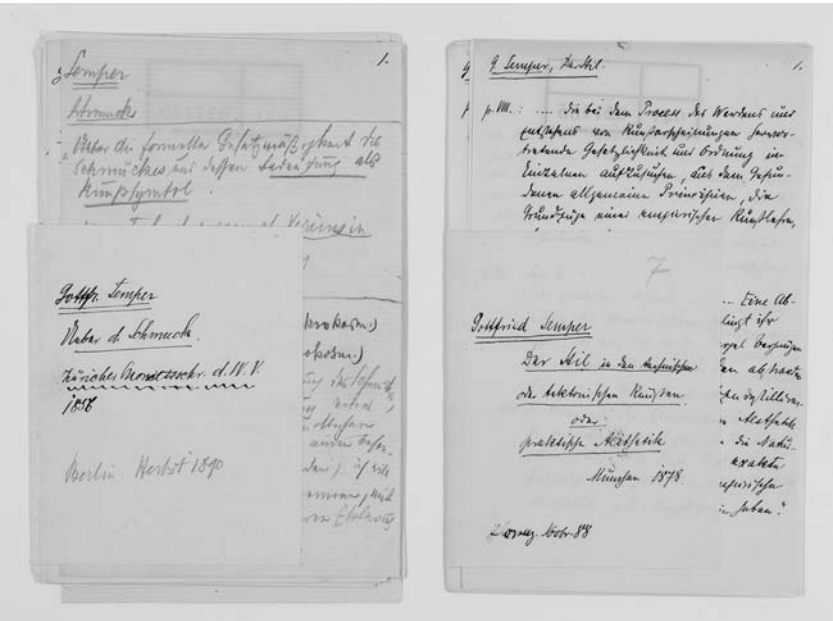


Fig. 1. Aby Warburg (1866 1929), Notes from Gottfried Semper's essay on ornament (Schmuck) and *Style*. WIA, ZK 041/021140 and 155. London: Warburg Institute Archive.

name, and which Semper calls “directional ornament.” Warburg transcribes all three of these decorative types and comments on them (Warburg, “Aesthetik” 021140, 43–46). The pendant (“Behang”) is an apparatus with an oscillating movement such as an earring or a nosering. By hanging down it accentuates the force of gravity. Because it represents the equilibrium and movement of masses, Semper calls it a “macrocosmic ornament” since it connects “the particular with the universal” (Semper, “Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit” 106). Under “pendant,” in addition to jewelry, Semper also classifies drapery folds because they are earthbound and hang down symmetrically. Hair, such as the hanging braids of the Greek men and women or the beards of the Assyrians, is also classified as pendant ornament.

The ring or annular ornaments such as garlands, necklaces, belts, and arm bands emphasize proportional relations between the different body parts (Semper, “Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit” 109). If the pendant connected the body with the macrocosm, the ring has a microcosmic character because it points to the body itself by highlighting its individual parts. The ring always accentuates the significance and power of the body part it encircles in

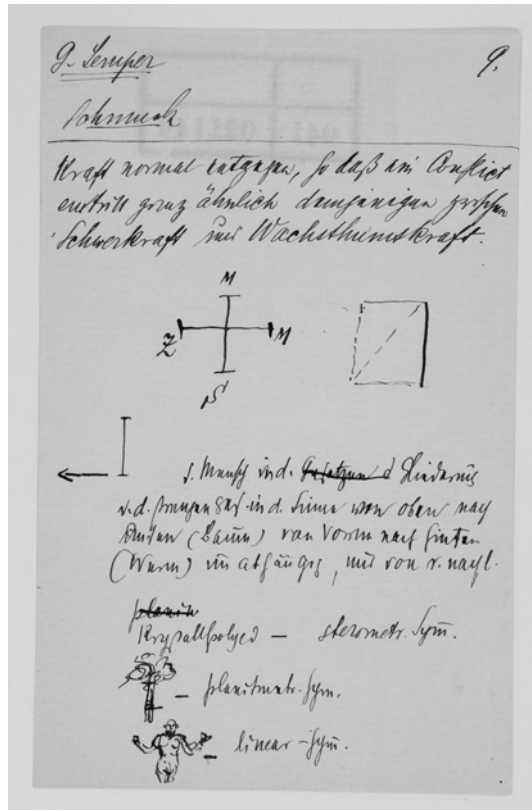


Fig. 2. Aby Warburg, notes on Gottfried Semper's "Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit" and *Styl*. "Aesthetik" 021149, detail. London: Warburg Institute Archive.

a centripetal arrangement; therefore the most prominent annular ornaments are the ones enveloping the head such as headbands, tiaras, and crowns. Like a circular antenna, the ring collects the forces of the universe and confers them on the individual body it adorns.

Therefore, the ring always appears in a radial, peripheral, and regular arrangement connected with the laws of eurhythm. The ring harmonizes the object with the outer world; it creates a cluster of concentric circles of energy that expand the bodily circumference of an individual person. While the pendant had a dynamic swinging movement, the ring's movement is circumscribed inside the ornament itself and therefore remains static.

Movement is the main characteristic of Semper's third category of ornamentation, the so called "directional" ornament, which is perhaps his most intriguing type of ornament. This decorative device emphasizes the direction of movement in the body of the carrier, such as the feathers affixed on top of a hat. Although neither rhythmic nor symmetrical, Semper considers it the most spiritual ("das geistigere") of the ornaments, perhaps because it is the most active in terms of agency, containing "the movement, expressions and character of the figure" (Semper, "Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit" 113).

There are two forms of directional ornament: flying, such as the helmet crests of the Greeks, and static, such as the serpent on the brow of the Egyptian deities and pharaohs. Fabrics and garments, when they are not heavy and allowed to fly, could also be considered directional ornaments. Fluttering strings and ribbons hanging from architectural elements such as columns have a mobile directional character, too. Finally, human hair flying free also belongs to this category of dynamic ornament. Warburg transcribed the entire passage on the twofold character, static or dynamic, of fabrics and hair.

The second part of Semper's essay is mainly an exposition of his general theory of growth and formal regularity in nature. When the architect's description of these formal laws becomes too abstract and hard to follow, Warburg makes his own sketches, including a pair of vertical and horizontal axes that represent gravity and life force versus movement and resistance (Warburg, "Aesthetik" 021149; fig. 2). The art historian also draws two small figures: first, a tree that according to Semper has a "planimetric" form of symmetry and second a human figure that has a "linear" form of symmetry. At the origin of this scheme are the "crystal polyhedra," not illustrated but mentioned among Warburg's notes, that have a "stereometric" form of symmetry, since crystals appear equally proportioned in all three spatial directions (Semper, "Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit" 119). Ornamentation is conceived by Semper as an evolutionary process that, while verging on crystallization, also remains agile and flexible as it subscribes to the same laws and forces that constantly transform the natural world. This is a highly dynamic conception of style, which is defined by Semper as the "embodiment" ("Verkörperung": Semper, "Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit" 129).

Warburg's illustrated page then represents a miniature model of the world and the laws of cosmic transformation. While reading Semper's reflections about ornament, Warburg creates his own ornament by transcribing the architect's abstract theoretical principles and embellishing them with his own miniature drawings. And yet Warburg's transcription is not simply "ornamental," for he reinscribes Semper's dynamic principles from the domain of physics into the areas of art and cultural history and converts the architect's cosmic ornaments into ideograms of social and cultural transition.

RENAISSANCE ACCESSORIES

The last four pages of Warburg's notes transcribe passages from Semper's *Prolegomena to Style* that also refer to similar principles of practical aesthetics and its relationship to "Naturphilosophie" (Warburg, "Aesthetik" 021155 58; "philosophy of nature"). These last notes are dated "Florence, November 1888," the period when Warburg was studying in Florence under August Schmarsow. Combining an expertise in Renaissance art with a strong interest in architectural theory, Schmarsow could have been the one who suggested to Warburg to study Semper in the first place. Warburg's notes from Semper's 1856 essay on ornament are dated "Fall 1890" and certain aphorisms written down by Warburg in October 1890 explicitly mention the reading of Semper's essay on "Schmuck."⁴

It was precisely during the years 1888 90 that the young Aby Warburg was formulating the ideas that underlie his doctoral dissertation on the depiction of accessories in movement in Renaissance painting, specifically in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*, completed in 1892 (Warburg, *Sandro Botticellis Geburt der Venus*).⁵ Looking through the early drafts of Warburg's dissertation in the archive of the Warburg Institute, one realizes that initially the young student was constructing a much larger thesis about the appearance of these animated accessories in Renaissance culture by looking at a variety of artists.⁶ Many pages are covered with large tables documenting the use of the animated motifs of flying hair and billowing garments by artists such as Agostino di Duccio, Filippino Lippi, Ghirlandaio, and others. The assumption that Warburg was initially working on a larger project is reinforced by one of his letters written in 1907 to his former teacher August Schmarsow. There, Warburg reminds his former professor that it was on a winter evening in Florence when

ich Ihnen das große Geheimnis anvertraute, daß ich über Filippino Lippis flatternde Gewandung und die Antike schreiben wollte. Sie hatten damals Recht, darüber zu lächeln. Jetzt nach 18 schweren Dienstjahren versuche ich es von neuem (Letter to Schmarsow 1907)⁷

I confided to you my great secret that I wanted to write about Filippino Lippi's fluttering fabrics and the antique. You were right at that time, to smile about that. Now after eighteen hard years of service I research this anew.

Schmarsow's "smile" (whether ironic or benevolent) might be an indication of the originality or subtle eccentricity of Warburg's argument, which at the time when his dissertation was published was not generally understood.

Instead of focusing his attention to the main characters of the iconography, Warburg concentrated on the peripheral pieces of fabric and hair whirling around Venus what the historian called "bewegtes Beiwerk" (Warburg

1932, 5) translated by Ernst Gombrich as “accessories in motion” (Gombrich 58).⁸ Warburg argued that following the demands of their humanist patrons, Renaissance painters and authors copied such lively ornaments from ancient works of art. The use of these lively accessories signaled the “reanimation” of antique visual culture and heralded the renewal of ancient paganism as integral to the origin of early modern culture.

The consideration of the main theme of Warburg’s dissertation reveals the similarities with and differences from Semper’s essay on ornament. Written approximately thirty five years after Semper’s lecture on adornment and its cosmic symbolism, Warburg’s dissertation is a reaction to an art world that was becoming increasingly “ornamental” but not ornamented in Semper’s sense of order.⁹ Warburg attempted to trace a possible origin of that modern phenomenon by looking back to the art of the Renaissance. Botticelli’s windswept fabrics and hair seem to conform to “cosmic laws” by appearing to fly in the wind, similar to Semper’s “directional” ornaments, yet they exhibit no formal regularity or order. On the contrary, the mobile accessory is the eidetic sign of a generalized irrationality and disorder. While looking at Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, one might even argue that the entire canvas is essentially an ornament: the painting represents an annular ornament or ring, the way that fabrics and hair appear to circulate around the Venus, orbiting around the axis of her marmoreal body like satellites. While immobile, Venus stands at the very center of this commotion of accessories.

A primary quality of the “accessory in motion” as theorized by Warburg is the relative autonomy of its movement from the body of the person who wears it. Warburg reflects on the proximity or distance between body and fabric in a series of aphorisms from his unfinished project on aesthetics titled “Foundational fragments for a monistic psychology of art,” in which he cites his reading of Semper. In aphorism number 100, dated 6 October 1890 he notes:

Beim Schmuck steht der dargestellte Ausdruck in keinem organischen Verhältnis zum Träger, insofern als die Oberfläche nicht der natürliche Erfolg der augenblicklichen Kraft u.[nd] des Willensverhältnisses des Trägers ist. (Warburg, *Grundlegende Bruchstücke* WIA, III.43.1.3, 43)

In the case of the ornamented object, the represented expression stands in no organic relation to the wearer as long as the external aspects are not the natural result of the carrier’s momentary power and the relations occasioned by his or her will.

Here, Warburg emphasizes the relative independence of the fabric from the body, as if the painted piece of clothing has a life and will of its own. As Warburg observes, in paintings of the early Renaissance ornamented accessories move while the bodies underneath them do not. Only later human bodies begin to conform to the movement of the drapery.¹⁰ If that is correct for the

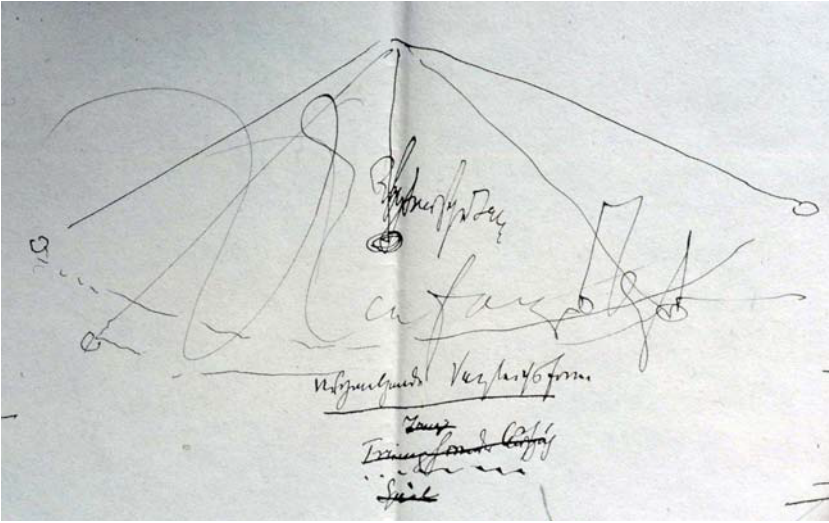


Fig. 3. Aby Warburg, Drawing of a pendulum as “Umfangsbestimmung,” WIA, ZK Ae Aphorismen, Nr. 399 (13 April 1900). London: Warburg Institute Archive.

art of the time, it can be said that the body moves *because* of the clothing accessory and not the other way around. The human body proves to be the true accessory of the painted ensemble while the fabric has a power of agency that surpasses human individuality. Accessories in motion then act as “pendants” that oscillate between two different mentalities: first, the subjective psychology of empathy that relates the fabric to the body or the human psyche and second, animism, a state in which the object has an agency of its own and can trigger effects that are entirely unanticipated by the spectator.¹¹ Accessories in motion portray precisely this transition from empathy to animation. While pointing to archaic tendencies within the Renaissance, these animated fabrics also herald a novel epistemology of the object in turn of the century culture; they are not only “directional” in Semper’s sense, but also “multi directional” in terms of the manifold conceptual links and associations that they describe within their shifting contours.

Such links show that for Warburg the ornament functions not only as a diagram of movement, as it was conceived by Semper, but also as the ideogram of an epistemological transition. In a number of his aesthetic aphorisms, Warburg uses the figure of the seesaw and of the pendulum that is related to Semper’s “pendant,” to indicate the oscillations caused by certain conceptual opposites or modes of perception, such as realism and idealism

(fig. 3).¹² In that framework, one could also understand Botticelli's highly ornamental picture as the ideogram of a pendant—a painted seesaw oscillating not only between immobility and agitation, but also between Renaissance and antiquity, science and magic.

One could indeed employ Semper's twofold understanding of *Kosmos* as both ornament and the world to construct an alternative interpretation of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. One of Warburg's main areas of interest throughout his later career was cosmology and its relation to astrology in both Renaissance and antiquity.¹³ However, apart from a reference to "cosmogonic allegories" in relation to Poliziano's description of two doors in the "House of Venus" decorated with mythological representations (Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* 7) and an addendum on the possible connections of Botticelli's pictures with "the sphere of Platonic magical practices" via the philosophical works of Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino (ibid. 327), it would seem that Warburg's dissertation does not expand on the cosmological associations surrounding the iconographic theme of the Birth of Venus and her decoration ("Schmückung").¹⁴ But it was one of Warburg's more philosophically driven art historical disciples, Edgar Wind, who, in his groundbreaking iconographic interpretation of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, made these cosmological associations overt. Wind argued that what initially seems only to be a beautiful picture is in fact a representation of the original fragmentation—*diakosmisis* (διακοσμησις)—the primary fracture of the world following the castration of Uranus from which Venus was born—a myth described by Hesiod and then by Plato in the *Republic* (Wind 133).¹⁵ *Diakosmisis* means both splintering and decoration. If that is correct, then the disparate accessories gyrating in Botticelli's picture are part of this original fragmentation of cosmic matter—the division of the original *Thing* into *things*, a universal splintering that marks the origin of decoration. But Wind also states that according to Plato one day all the disparate pieces of the world will "return to" and "be swallowed" by the original *One* in an act of universal conflagration—"διακοσμησις" turns into "εκπυρωσις" ("cataclysmic fire"), a union in destruction.¹⁶ This is the alternative "cosmic" trajectory of ornament in Botticelli's picture, turning Semper's earthbound physics of the pendant into an unstable eschatological predicament describing the end of the world.

PUEBLO ACCESSORIES

Warburg returned to the subject of the cosmic significance of ornament in the aphorisms he wrote during his visit to the Pueblos of the southern United States in 1895 and 1896.¹⁷ Looking at the archival material from Warburg's

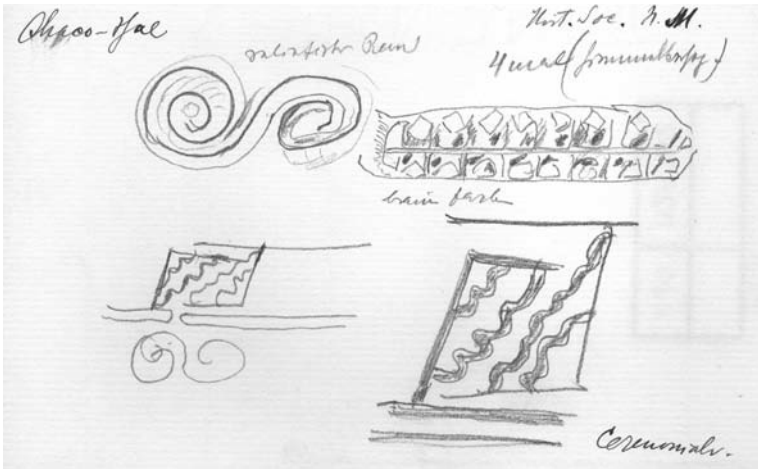


Fig. 4. Aby Warburg, Sketch of Pueblo spiral ornaments. "Americana" 020762. London: Warburg Institute Archive.

trip, it seems that what later became the well known lecture on serpent ritual was initially a study of ornament.¹⁸ In a letter written in New York in November 1895, Warburg announces to his future wife Mary Hertz another "secret idea" perhaps equally or more important than the one of his dissertation:

Ich habe so eine Idee: die ganze Frage (der Genesis) der Ornamentik auf eine ganz breite Basis zu stellen mit Einbeziehung des ethnographischen Materials. Deshalb gehe ich wahrscheinlich Anfang nächste Woche westwärts, um dort die Pueblo Indianer in New Mexico zu besuchen. Aber das ist alles noch im Nebel.

I have an idea: to put the entire question of (the genesis of) ornamentation on an entirely broad basis in relation to ethnographic material. For that reason, probably at the beginning of next week, I am going west to visit the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico. But all this is still in a fog.

To find his orientation through this "fog," Warburg employed scholarship. The research material collected from his two visits to the American Southwest contains notes both on Pueblo language and ornamentation; apparently, like Semper, he considered linguistic and ornamental patterns interconnected. The Warburg archive contains dozens of pages with notes and sketches done *in situ* from Warburg's visits to Arizona and New Mexico and describing ornamental symbols used by the Pueblo natives.¹⁹ Even the Pueblo snake rain god carries a feather on his head, which in Semper's terms is a "directional ornament." Warburg made elaborate sketches of all vegetal and animal accessories worn

by Native Americans and commented on the cosmological significance of their use. The single spirals we see in his drawings indicate the wind, especially the male whirlwind. Then, there are the double spiral and undulating zigzag linear motifs imitating a staircase, both of them widely used in Pueblo pottery (fig.4; WIA, ZK 040/020762).

But there are also other forms of ornament that have specific cosmological meanings. Warburg's notes include some miniature drawings depicting the symbols for lightning, represented by a snake with an arrow head, a stair, representing a part of the earth house, clouds and a comb like shape represent ing rain. At the bottom of the same pages we can see the combination of all previous motifs in the well known Pueblo symbol of the "world house."²⁰

The same figures moon, stars, whirlwind, rainbow, lightning, and clouds also appear in Adolph Bandelier's ethnographic studies of Tehua and Zuni symbols (Bandelier 117 and pl. II). In these symbols, the form or shape of the ornament represents natural forces, as it did in Semper's ornamental artifacts. Some of the Zuni symbols are rather abstract, such as spirals or zigzags, while others are figurative, such as fish, insects, and frogs, while others are in between, such as the snake lightning.²¹ In Pueblo culture, physical forces are not only represented as abstract diagrams (in a manner that is similar to Semper's "directional ornament") but also as concrete objects or animal bodies even the rainbow is represented by a curvilinear segment with a small head and two miniscule feet at its edges (Bandelier *ibid.*). In this case, the animal body also embodies the "dynamogram." Among all these symbols, Warburg seemed to be most interested in the symbol of the "world house" a cosmological motif showing the enclosure of the firmament containing the clouds, several versions of which, many of them in color, figure among Warburg's sketches (fig. 5).²²

In some of these sketches, the world house is represented by undulating angular outlines and in others by a semicircular motif with scrolls, flanked by totemic animals on each side. In Semperian terms, the semicircular enclosure encompassing the world is a "peripheral" annular ornament. But in Warburgian terms, the same line could also represent one of his main epistemological concepts, the term "Umfangsbestimmung" ("determination of area"), the speculative definition of a periphery, connoting not so much the closed expansion of physical space but the infinitely expanding radius of a mental idea.²³ The "Umfangsbestimmung" defined by the Pueblo rainbow or the world house symbol is an area that is simultaneously limited and open; it is a semicircular enclosure connoting the heavens, therefore it has infinite extensions. In spite of its demarcating space, this provisional perimeter fails to define anything.²⁴ One cannot draw a limiting line on the sky but can create an ornament out of that impossible border. The Pueblo "world house"

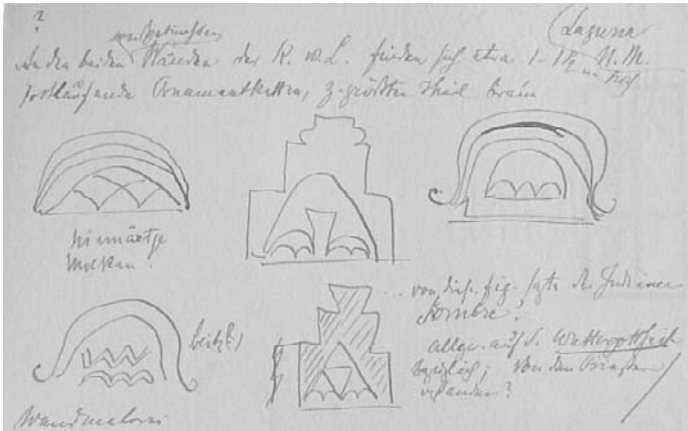


Fig. 5. Aby Warburg, Sketch of Pueblo “step ornament” and “world house” symbols. “Americana” 020697. London: Warburg Institute Archive.

shows precisely how a cosmic symbol can become an allegory by exhibiting its inability to circumscribe its meaning inside the limits of a contour.²⁵ This is perhaps the closest that Warburg came to understanding Pueblo ornament in Semper’s terms, as the symbolic ideogram of cosmic order; but it was an order that was becoming increasingly allegorical and, like Warburg’s project of rediscovering the “genesis of ornamentation,” hopelessly open ended. The infinite horizon of the Pueblo world house became the ornamented graph of Warburg’s largely incomplete (yet “cosmic” in scale) research projects.²⁶

Yet if this cosmological connection is too elusive or abstract, there is another more palpable link between Pueblo ornaments and the Semperian theories of adornment present in Warburg’s sketches. Even more than surface ornaments in pottery and walls, Warburg was interested in physical implements or tools (“Geräte”), such as the hunting apparatus, axes, and knives used by the Pueblo natives. Similar terms such as “Tracht” (“costume”) and “Schmuck” (“bodily adornment”) describe Pueblo clothing and a large number of accessories, such as head bands, arm bands, and knee bands (reminiscent of Semper’s “microcosmic” proportional ring ornaments). In the Pueblos, however, most of these annular artifacts are made from natural materials, such as sticks or turtle shells. Warburg meticulously sketched each of these accessory objects and recorded their names in the local language, perhaps in hope of discovering some hidden linguistic significance in their etymologies.²⁷ In many of Warburg’s drawings, the bodies of native dancers are covered from head to toe. As Warburg notes in some of his aesthetic

fragments written during that period, the human body compensates for its organic weakness by being supplemented by the inorganic strength of the *Gerät*. An aphorism dated 21 August 1896 reads:

Wodurch verliert der primitive Mensch das Gefühl der Einheit (Identität) zwischen seinem lebendigen Ich aus [und?] seinem jeweiligen thatsächlichen räumlichen körperlichen Umfang: durch das Geräth, den Schmuck, die Tracht schmerzlose Körpertheile durch den Besitz, Eigenthum, Schenkung.

How does primitive man lose the feeling of unity (identity) between his living self and the particular prevailing spatial periphery of his body? Through the implement, the ornament, the clothing body parts that are insensitive to pain through acquisition, property, and gift bestowal.²⁸

The person characterized by Warburg as the “primitive man” “gleicht an” (“adapts”) his organic body to the inorganic condition of his clothing and implements. In so doing he loses his unity with nature but expands his bodily periphery through the extension offered by the inanimate “Gerät.” While the human subject loses his organic identity, his or her personality is expanded by the “gift” (“Schenkung”) of power bestowed by adornment (“Schmuck”) and costume (“Tracht”). With these prosthetic organs, the subject creates a new “Umfangsbestimmung” or peripheral outline for his or her own body which is corporeal and fictional at the same time. Here, Warburg’s “primitive man” appears exceedingly modern.

Many of the ornaments worn by the Pueblo conform to the categories defined by Semper such as pendants and annular ornaments or rings. Warburg sketches in detail the several forms of ceremonial headdresses and masks worn during rituals, many of which have a circular form. Some of the ceremonial masks are shaped in the undulating form of the “world house” and are embellished by ceremonial feathers (“bahos”) a directional ornament indicating a symbolic connection to the sky.

Transitioning finally from the primitive “world house” to the modern picture of the world and its technological *Weltanschauung*, Warburg made a reference to another clothing accessory: I am referring to the stovepipe hat of “Uncle Sam” walking down Market Street in San Francisco (Warburg, Images 53), who, as shown in the often reproduced photograph taken by Warburg, is crowned by the rotunda of a neo Renaissance building in the background.²⁹ In Warburg’s ingenious camera framing, the skewed symmetry axis of the cupola coincides with the center of the stovepipe hat, turning the building into a peripheral extension of the headgear and Uncle Sam into a (neo) Renaissance man, his powers enhanced by the monumental architecture.

In the finale of his 1923 lecture on the snake ritual, where Uncle Sam is transformed into a modern snake god, Warburg showed how new technical inventions, the steam locomotive, telephone, and telegram, represent the new,

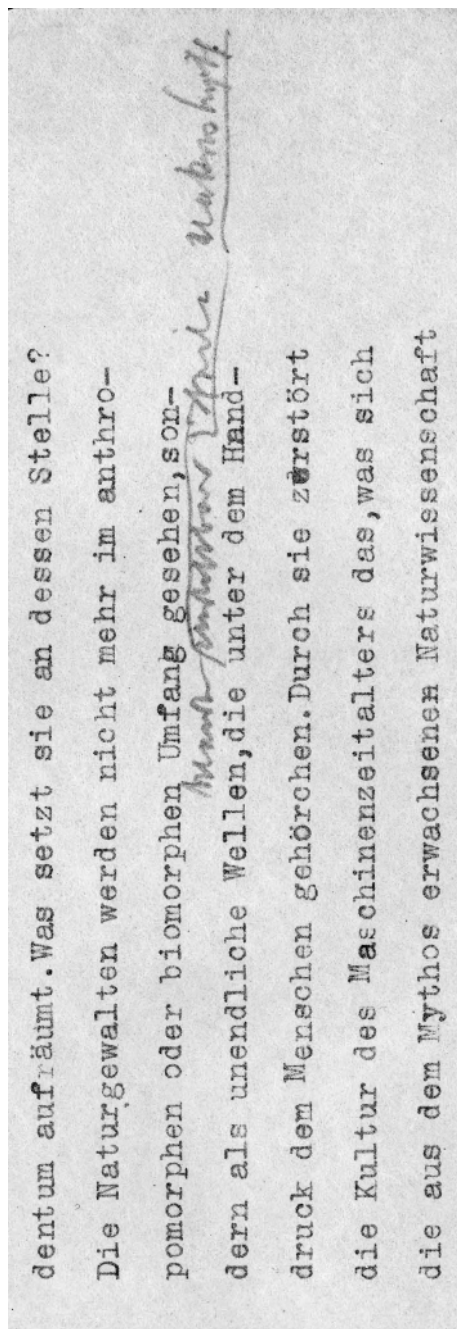


Fig 6 Aby Warburg, Manuscript addenda “als unendliche Wellen, die (kleinsten/Theile/microscopisch/vorstellbar)” (“as endless waves, the [smallest/conceivable/particles]”) Warburg, Typescript 79 London Warburg Institute Archive

more immediate, and less symbolic connections conquering the world with the “infinite waves” of wireless communication. “Natural forces are no longer seen in anthropomorphic or biomorphic guise, but rather as infinite waves obedient to the human touch” (Warburg, *Images* 54). In the original typescript of the lecture, above the phrase “unendliche Wellen” (“endless waves”) that transmission of the forces of modern technology, there is an almost illegible manuscript annotation by Warburg (fig. 6). The few words written between the lines look almost like miniscule ornamental scrolls or scribbles. With effort, one may read “die kleinsten/vorstellbar/Theile” (“the smallest/conceivable/particles”). Apparently the meaning of these words is in empathy with Warburg’s handwriting, and they are obviously referring to the material composition of the “infinite waves.” In the margin of the same page, there is another word that again seems illegible. The first syllables initially read as “macro” although “micro scopisch” would be more appropriate considering the content of the previous annotation. Perhaps the unconscious juxtaposition traced in this almost illegible scribble is a dynamic polarity between a microscopic detail and macroscopic world view.³⁰

Let us attempt a hypothetical reconstruction: from the macrocosmic nature of Semper’s pendant, to the microscopic characters of Warburg’s annotations, we witness the undulating trajectory of modern ornament oscillating between natural order and technological disorder. The orderly Newtonian *Kosmos* present in Semper’s “regelmäßig” (“ordered”) understanding of bodily adornment no longer exists. It is replaced by the dynamic world of the accessory in motion that transgresses both the laws of gravity and historical time as it appears periodically reanimated from antiquity to the Renaissance and Warburg’s own fin de siècle. Finally, the scattered “invisible particles” mentioned in Warburg’s annotation announce the origin of a new *diakosmisis* – the ornamental “fragmentation” of the world by the “invisible” forces of modern technological production. The “unity” of the ancient *Kosmos* analyzed by Semper has dissolved into the proliferating multitude of little things, jewelry, accessories, and other seemingly “peripheral” artifacts whose circulation circumscribes the perimeter of the Western “Umfang” (“perimeter”) and its vacillating “Bestimmung” (“definition”). What initially appeared as a marginal art historical preoccupation with fabrics, and windswept strands of hair, is in fact an incisive commentary about the laws under which the modern economy of things operates.

From Semper to Warburg, ornaments and the texts that accompany them function essentially as “dynamograms,” tracing not only physical forces, but also temporal movements and transhistorical relations. Semper’s “cosmic” ornament and its recycling by Warburg show that in its very absence from artistic practice, ornamentation remains implicitly central in modernist discourse,

generating textual representations that continue orbiting like satellites on the periphery of ornament's ostensible eclipse announced a few years later by another reader of Semper, the architect Adolf Loos.³¹

NOTES

- 1 Gottfried Semper's "Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit des Schmuckes und des sen Bedeutung als Kunstsymbol" was based on a lecture given in front of a mixed audience in Zurich in 1856. The published essay was reprinted in Semper's *Kleine Schriften* in 1884; however Warburg is quoting from the original publication in the *Monatsschrift des wissenschaftlichen Vereins in Zürich*. In part, Semper's essay was published in English translation (see "Concerning the Formal Principles of Ornament"). I am using my own translation here, based on Semper's 1856 original article.
- 2 For Warburg's notes on Semper's 1856 lecture, see "Aesthetik" 021140 154; for his notes on Semper's *Style*, see "Aesthetik" 021155 158. All archival material is reproduced with the permission of the Warburg Institute. The author is grateful to the archivist, Claudia Wedepohl, for her generous help and advice.
- 3 Warburg transcribes that phrase again in his notes: "Aesthetik" 01155 141.
- 4 See aphorisms no. 99 and 100 from Warburg's manuscript "Grundlegende Bruchstücke zu einer monistischen Kunstpsychologie" ("Fragments for a Monistic Psychology of Art") with the side note "Lektüre v. G. Semper ueber d. Schmuck" ("reading of Semper on ornament") dated 6 October 1890.
- 5 The dissertation was reprinted with numerous later addenda in Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1.1 59 and 307 28. For the English translation, see *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity* 88 156 and 405 31. In one of the addenda to the "Four theses" appended to his dissertation in 1896, Warburg again mentions Semper's essay on ornament by quoting the phrase, "Die Aesthetik des Rein Schönen hat ihre materielle Grundlage in der Dynamik und Statik." The same page contains further explications of the "four theses" concerning the relation between "Richtungsbestimmung" ("directional definition") and "barocke Beweglichkeit" ("baroque mobility") in the work of Botticelli. None of these important additions were included in the addenda of the 1932 edition; see WIA, III.40.1.1.2, 10. Warburg also mentions Semper's "Richtungsschmuck" ("directional ornament") and his lecture on ornament in his *Costumi Teatrali* written in 1893 when describing ornaments designed to be seen in profile during festive or theatrical processions (Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* 292, n. 1).
- 6 For early and discarded parts of Warburg's dissertation, see WIA, III.38 and 39.
- 7 The letter was written on the occasion of Warburg's contribution to a Festschrift for Schmarsow.

- 8 For the difficulty of translating the adjective “bewegt” into English and the relation of Warburg’s term “bewegtes Beiwerk” to “bewegtes Leben” (“life in motion”), see Gombrich 16–17. “Bewegt” can also be translated as “turbulent.”
- 9 For Warburg’s concern over the increasingly “ornamental” character of the art of his time, see Gombrich’s description of the scholar’s correspondence with his future wife Mary Hertz during the period when Warburg was working on his dissertation (Gombrich 80–81). Gombrich also mentions Warburg’s reading of Semper’s 1856 essay on adornment in the same context (Gombrich, *ibid.*).
- 10 See Gombrich’s excerpts from Warburg’s aesthetic fragments written in 1889 that discuss these issues (Gombrich 50–51).
- 11 Warburg has several references to the philosophy of “Einfühlung” (“empathy”) in the notes and addenda to his dissertation, such as the works of Friedrich Theodor Vischer and his son Robert Vischer, as well as Theobald Ziegler: see Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* 5 and 307.
- 12 See drawing in WIA, ZK Ae Aphorismen, Nr. 399 (13 April 1900). For the figure of the seesaw, see my “The Eternal Seesaw; Oscillations in Warburg’s Revival.”
- 13 See Warburg’s notes on cosmology in various sections of his *Zettelkästen*, especially in no. 24 “Kosmologie, Systematisch.”
- 14 We can trace Warburg’s original notes on Poliziano’s description in a page from his early dissertation drafts. The manuscript page includes a table in which Warburg maps the appearance of the mythological figures of Zephyr and the Hours in the Homeric hymn, in Poliziano, and in Botticelli, as well as another table that lists the themes included in Poliziano’s description of “two doors in the Palace of Venus” decorated with mythological representations such as “the castration of Saturn,” “the birth of giants, furies and nymphs,” “the birth of Venus,” and “her reception and adornment.” At the very bottom of the page, Warburg writes “Kosmogonische Allegorie” (“cosmogonic allegory”), which indicates that he was aware of the cosmological associations related to the iconographic theme of the Birth of Venus and her “decoration,” yet at this point did not expand on that link in relation to Botticelli’s paintings (Notes 38.2, 10).
- 15 In his *Pagan Mysteries*, Wind presents Hesiod’s myth of the castration of Uranus as a source for the iconography of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*. Wind argued that Poliziano’s “fusto genitale” (depicted by Botticelli underneath the goddess’s shell) is a representation of “the barbarous legend” quoted by Pico according to which “Venus could not be born if the testicles of Uranus did not fall into the waters of the sea.” Thus, Venus represents the fertilization of the earth by the heavens following the celestial “dismemberment” of universal matter (Wind 133).
- 16 “Since dispersal through death is conceived here as an act of creation, it follows logically that resurrection from death must appear as a destructive force. The end of the world, when all things return to the One, is pictured as a supreme conflagration, διακοσμησις being reversed in ἐκπύρωσις, the god ‘sets fire to all nature and reduces all things to one likeness.’ By the same logic the myth of Saturn eating

his children was greeted as a promise of redemption: the Many returning to the One, a reversal of primeval dismemberment,' where *καταποσις* [swallowing] is a symbol of *επιστροφή* [return]. The Neoplatonic artifice of lifting the primitive impulses of cannibalism and castration to the level of philosophical mysteries is a remarkable instance of *évolution régressive*. An illustration of Saturn in Les *Échecs amoureux* stresses the symmetry between 'divine swallowing' and 'divine dismemberment' by showing them as pendants" (Wind 135, n.22).

- 17 For a reconstructed version of the text on which Warburg's 1923 lecture was based, see Warburg, *Images*.
- 18 Salvatore Settis also mentions that Warburg's initial point of interest was ornament. For a reconstruction of Warburg's American trip, see also Naber.
- 19 See files in the Zettelkasten labeled "Americana." WIA, ZK No. 40. For Warburg's ethnographic collection of Pueblo artifacts and drawings donated to the Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg, see Cestelli Guidi.
- 20 See notes on "Pueblo Ornamentik" ("Americana" 020692 and 020697).
- 21 See the color drawing with Zuni symbols dated 1885 in Bandelier pl. II. For a description of the symbols, see Bandelier 117.
- 22 See Warburg's sketches in "Americana" 020728, 740, 742, 746.
- 23 For a different interpretation of the term "Umfangsbestimmung" as well as Warburg's use of the term in the preparatory notes for his 1923 Kreuzlingen lecture see Gombrich 77–78 and 218–19.
- 24 In a preliminary drawing of a pendulum in movement from his aesthetic aphorisms (reproduced in fig. 3 of this text), Warburg has overwritten his sketch with the word "Umfang[sbest.]." The preliminary diagram corresponds to aphorism no. 399, dated 13 April 1900 (Florence), which includes both the terms "Umfangsbest.[immung]" and "Umfang," either as "Spiel Umfang" or "Klarer Umfang" (play perimeter or distinct perimeter) as well as the terms "Schmuck" and "sym.[bolisches] Objekt." These two drafts present a rare case in which the figure of the pendulum and Warburg's notion of "Umfangsbestimmung" appear not only textually juxtaposed but graphically superimposed. This double coincidence of the two terms might further reinforce the argument that Warburg's idea of "Umfangsbestimmung" is a dynamically oscillating category—never closed or fixed but always in movement—that is both graphically and conceptually superimposed with the Semperian "Behang" or pendant (Warburg, "Grundlegende Bruchstücke" 2.1, ZK Ae Aphorismen, Nr. 399).
- 25 For the interdependence between allegorical and symbolic modes of thinking and their relation to cosmological images in the Western literary and iconographic tradition, see the chapter "The Cosmic Image" in Angus Fletcher's classic study (Fletcher 70–146).
- 26 The relation between ornament, symbolism, and the idea of "Umfangsbestimmung" is analyzed in Warburg's unpublished text "Symbolismus als Umfangsbestimmung"

that was first sketched while Warburg was in California in 1896 but has numerous later additions. In this small aesthetic fragment, Warburg draws considerably from his reading of Semper, especially the terms used in Semper's 1856 lecture on "Schmuck." For example, next to the term "Umfangsbestimmung" described here as "Umschreibung" ("peripheral definition"), Warburg employs the terms "Richtungsbestimmung" ("directional definition") and "Längsrichtungsbestimmung" ("longitudinal directional definition": page 15 in the original pagination, see also note 5 in this essay). Warburg also uses the pair of opposite terms "differenzierende Dynamik" ("differential dynamics") versus "schematisierende Statik" (32; "schematizing statics") which he represents as two arrows moving in opposite directions; as we saw in Warburg's notes and dissertation addenda, "Dynamics and Statics" were the two natural sciences that according to Semper formed the basis of the science of aesthetics. In what appears to be the explicatory appendix to a conceptual diagram, Warburg states that the letter *Z* connotes the "differenzierte Zeichen" ("differentiating sign") and the letter *M* the "apperzipierende Masse" ("perceiving mass"): Warburg had used the letters *M* and *Z* in his small sketch of the cardinal axes of growth in one of the pages that contain his reading notes from Semper's 1856 essay (fig. 2). Yet it is remarkable how the art historian converts the scientific terms used by the architect into personal ideograms to construct his own symbolic system.

- 27 See Warburg's drawings of American Indian costumes and clothing accessories ("Americana" 020434).
- 28 Warburg, "Grundlegende Bruchstücke" 1.1.133. A more diagrammatic version of the same aphorism appears in Warburg's unpublished fragment "Symbolismus" 17.
- 29 For a reproduction of Warburg's photograph see Cestelli Guidi and Mann.
- 30 See the manuscript annotation in the typescript of the lecture (Typescript 79). Warburg was not the only art historian of his time thinking about microphysics. Both Alois Riegl in the conclusion of his *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901) and later Erwin Panofsky in his essay "Perspective as Symbolic Form" (1927, first presented as a lecture in the Warburg Library in Hamburg in 1924–25) had attributed changes between the ancient, medieval, and modern *Weltanschauung* to the corresponding conception of matter in contemporary physics, with a special reference to recent advances in atom and cellular theory. I have recently proposed a different interpretation of the same manuscript annotation by Warburg (Papapetros, "ohne Füße" 217–66). On the relation between wireless media and technological imagery, see Hensel.
- 31 I refer to the well known essay by Adolf Loos "Ornament und Verbrechen Ornament and Crime" written in 1908 and delivered as a lecture in Berlin in 1910 (Loos 276–88). For Loos as reader of Semper, see Loos's 1898 article "Das Prinzip der Bekleidung" ("The Principle of Cladding": Loos 105–12).

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John Heartfield's Insects and the "Idea" of Natural History

Cristina Cuevas Wolf

The twentieth century belief in a predetermined evolutionary progression towards a better life was based on the assumption that scientific and technological advancement would lead the way towards Social Democracy. That this belief prevailed in guiding the Weimar Republic's political development was the consequent catastrophe that both John Heartfield and Walter Benjamin identified as the state of German society in the early thirties. This coincident focus on catastrophe in both Benjamin's critical theoretical writings of the early thirties and Heartfield's montage *German Natural History* of 1934 provides the opportunity to read Heartfield's montage through Benjamin's critical, dialectical "idea" of natural history.

Benjamin and Heartfield knew that the "idea" of natural history relied on the belief that human artifice can dominate nature and recreate the world in its own image. They were also aware of how new techniques, such as photographic enlargement and montage, could invert this cognitive experience of transformation to visualize instead the metamorphosis of an active, rebellious nature. It is this inversion of cognitive experience that interrelates Heartfield's montage *German Natural History* with Benjamin's "axiom of the way to avoid mythic thinking" (Buck Morss 62). Heartfield's montage transposes natural evolution with mythical metamorphosis in order to produce a new cognitive experience within the representational space of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (*The Worker Illustrated Newspaper*, *AIZ*), the site of its publication in 1934.¹ This new image of reality presents the paradox of progress, the German Left's failure to create a social democratic republic and the farce in the picture of Nazism, as tragicomedy (Marx and Engels 40).²

For Heartfield, photomontage exposed the paradox of ideology by revealing the contradictions inherent in the juxtapositions of photographs (März *John Heartfield* 27). He therefore conceived of himself as a publicist (März *John Heartfield* 23), who corrected the inverted image of ideology inside the black box of the camera by exposing the "imperceptible montage" in the modern camera image (Ash 302).³ For Benjamin, literary montage exhibited the material and construed the detail as a commentary to demonstrate

historical understanding as a new reality produced out of what had been understood. Both graphic artist and literary critic grasped the construction of history out of what Benjamin called “the smallest, precisely fashioned structural elements” (Benjamin, “N” 48) to carry the montage principle over into history.

This essay therefore centers upon Heartfield’s montage as both his response to and his visual configuration of the crucial years from the end of the Weimar Republic to the rise of German fascism. Scholars have either focused on Heartfield’s dadaist phase or his photomontages of the thirties, overlooking the visual interrelationship between these two decades of work. To tie together Heartfield’s critique of rationalization in the twenties with his critique of evolutionary progress in the thirties is to address the parallel historical and thematic interrelationship between the twenties and thirties in Germany. This interrelationship also builds upon Buck Morss’s assertion that Heartfield’s allegorical interpretation of *German Natural History* expresses Benjamin’s critical “idea” of natural history (Buck Morss 59–60). Furthermore, my reading of Heartfield’s montage in relation to its nineteenth century precedent and in the context of the *AIZ*’s 16 August 1934 issue emphasizes Heartfield’s critical views on revolution and progress. Finally, this essay concludes with Heartfield’s critique of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) in photography and its failure to create a critical readership.

THE “IDEA” OF NATURAL HISTORY

In July 1935, around the time of a major exhibition of Heartfield’s photomontages at the Maison de la Culture in Paris, Heartfield and Benjamin met and had a very interesting conversation about photography (Benjamin, Correspondence 494). Although this undocumented conversation did not contribute to Heartfield’s conception and execution of his *German Natural History*. Heartfield’s montage, however, aided Benjamin in thinking through the relation between objectified phenomena and history.

Benjamin came across *German Natural History* at the Heartfield exhibition in Paris. This exhibition was organized as a gesture of solidarity for Heartfield, who had been exiled by Hitler in 1933 and whose 1934 exhibition in Prague had become a political issue. In 1936, Benjamin referred to Heartfield’s montage in a critical comment on bourgeois intellectual development since Immanuel Fichte: “The revolutionary spirit of the German bourgeoisie has been transforming itself into the chrysalis from which the Death’s Head Moth of National Socialism later crawled” (Scholem 64). In this one statement,

moments, in the visible *ur phenomena*, that the totality of an historical event is to be discovered. Benjamin borrows from Georg Simmel the Goethean concept of the *ur phenomenon* to overcome the separation between the particular and the general. This concept made possible a new understanding of transient historical objects in relation to theoretical knowledge. Such objects visibly exhibited their developmental, conceptual nature and thereby pictured theory. Heartfield's dialectical image is Benjamin's theory of natural history applied to the actuality of everyday life and the political and historical developments that shaped it in 1934.

GERMAN NATURAL HISTORY

The critical point of Heartfield's montage (fig. 1), Buck Morss asserts, was to point out that the belief in evolutionary progress as synonymous with social history's natural course was a myth, in the sense of an illusion, an error, and an ideology (Buck Morss 62). Heartfield's powerful dialectical image of progress and catastrophe identifies this error with Social Democracy, which "causes" the Weimar Republic's radical evolutionary truncation.

Heartfield presents this radically truncated evolutionary process as a fable in the form of a modern day emblem for both a moral and a political didactic purpose. Here the archaic form of allegory renews itself in the modern technological medium of the photograph. Heartfield produces a temporal constellation that allows the photographs to be seen as allegorical rather than as merely verifiable. He also views photography with suspicion and dissociates himself from this medium of empirical history by nesting it in a constellation of historical precursors: the archaic myth of metamorphosis, nineteenth century natural history, and the symbol of the oak branch.

The montage of the words "nature" and "history" in the German word *Naturgeschichte* (Natural History), used in the title, meaningfully plays on the human animal comparison visualized in the montage of natural forms and historical figures. The oak branch, a symbol of the German nation, is the structure Heartfield builds upon in order to represent the three evolutionary stages of the Death's Head moth. The branch is almost bare, except for a few leaves, some vestiges of life. It is presented against a neutral background, reminiscent of the pictorial format of scientific specimens, lending the image the veracity of a document. The three stages of the zoological development of the Death's Head moth correspond to the three key stages of the history of the Weimar Republic: Ebert, Hindenburg, and Hitler. All three politicians wear top hats, marking them as Social Democrats. Ebert, represented as a

caterpillar, was president of the Weimar Republic during a period of economic dislocation and counterrevolution. Hindenburg, represented as a larva, succeeded Ebert as president, and dedicated himself to "symbolic politics" to maintain his historical reputation and image as the figure of national unity.⁵ He was then followed by Hitler, represented here as the Death's Head moth, who proclaimed himself chancellor and president when Hindenburg died in August 1934. The skull or death's head on the moth's back signifies its bestial nature and refers to the Freikorps symbol,⁶ later inscribed into the Nazi symbolism of the *Sturm Abteilung*. The skull is counterpoised against the swastika, signifying the insect's embodiment of both death and fascism. Together, these signs delineate the development of Nazism from autonomous, paramilitary groups to an organized entity. Hitler is also shown taking flight since he ingeniously used the metaphor of flight to propagate a godlike image of himself as *Führer* above everyday political conflict.

The caption informs us that metamorphosis has three meanings: one from the discourse of nature, "zoology: the development of some animals through larvae forms and caterpillars"; one from that of history, "the Weimar Republic: the straight succession of Ebert, Hindenburg, and Hitler," and one from the discourse of myth, "the metamorphosis of human beings into trees, animals, stones." This use of mythology explains the representation and provides a critical judgement of the referent (Buck Morss 62).

Nature as a mythical sign has as its referent the historical moment of 1934. Its meaning metaphorically and literally builds upon the idea of death: Hindenburg, the legendary national war hero, is politically outmaneuvered by Hitler, who ascends to power at the moment of his factual death. The allegory of death in relation to natural history demarcates the boundary between physical nature and symbolic meaning.

Heartfield's transformation of photography, the metaphor of history, into an allegory of death originates from his dadaist images of a grotesque exchange between the idea of death and playfulness. An example of such an image is the advertisement for the "Small Grosz Portfolio" in *Neue Jugend* (*The New Youth*, 1917). The conventional representation of a skull with crossed bones, a sign for poison, signifies life as a macabre "buffoonery and death mass" (Hugo Ball qtd. in Bergius, 58) and reveals the interrelationship between street, society, and murder. In the 1924 montage *After Ten Years: Fathers and Sons*, death takes on a demonic, yet fantastic character in the line up and brutal illumination of soldiers' skeletons. Death, madness, and war are nouns that help define the reality of the postwar era in Germany. Embodied as skull and skeleton, they reappear in the 1930s in montages such as *The Face of Fascism* (1928) and *The Seeds of Death* (1937) to describe the deadly danger of fascism.

It is through the allegory of death that these montages activate processes of consciousness meant to shock the viewer and oblige him or her to fight fascism (Pachnicke and Honnef 59).

All the symbolism of death that appeared in Heartfield's previous work is concentrated upon the image of Hitler as Death's Head moth in the montage *German Natural History*: from the skull on the back of the moth's head to signify war and the strategy of murder, to the swastika on the moth's tail end to symbolize the destructive power of fascism. This juxtaposition of symbols across the back of the moth implicates Nazi leadership in the Weimar Republic's political disintegration. This outcome gave credence to the German Communists' criticism of the Ebert government for holding on to old forms of power—the military and the powerful elite—rather than instituting a wider, democratic political base.

Heartfield interweaves the concept of metamorphosis with references to the Nazi regime's characterization and persecution of humans as animals. The montage *The Bug as Exterminator* (1933) refers to the 33 German leftist intellectuals whose citizenship was revoked on 7 September 1933. Wilhelm Frick, the Reich's minister of the interior, instigated and implemented the Nazi policy to eliminate any enemy of the state (Smelser et al. 80–89, esp. 84). Heartfield himself had his citizenship revoked on 1 November 1934. In this montage, he represents the anti Semite Frick as a bug exterminator who is out to clear his house of unwanted pests. The beetle's body is labeled with a swastika to identify its type.⁷ The spray can is labeled as though it were a product manufactured under the Frick name brand. Heartfield's montage brings full circle the *AIZ*'s critical attacks against the National Socialists' use of biological premises and causes in the sphere of politics.⁸

THE MODERN BESTIARY

Heartfield's insects were drawn from a zoological source, unlike the other animals he had used in his montages as representations of death, the grotesque, or of evil powers. They play on the tradition and the modern meaning of metamorphosis.⁹ The tradition of metamorphosis combined science and fable and offered a basic parallel for the transformation of nature by art. With the rise of natural history in the eighteenth century, its fable like dimension declined, while in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, natural history transformed nature into a physiological object of study of human geography or demography. Concomitantly, the modern bestiary represented the physiognomy of man in the form of biological and racial categories.¹⁰



Fig. 2. Anonymous, *Der Präsident* (*The President*).
Berlin: *Kladderadatsch*, 6: 1881, n.p.

The dadaists used the concept of metamorphosis as a means of critique in the form of the unmasking or assimilation of one's enemies' representational themes, attitudes, and motifs (Schaske 188). They drew on animals of metamorphosis, such as butterflies and beetles, as well as the classifiable biological forms of transformation, such as larvae and chrysalises. The association of the beetle with pests and the fact that people deemed so were shunned, made the beetle a perfect vehicle for dadaist critique under the influence of Franz Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis* (Schaschke 284–85). The very abhorrence of human nature, as is expressed in the bodily transformation of Kafka's main character Gregor Samsa into a beetle, is best explained by the expressionist poet Karl Brand (1885–1917): "All work transforms man into a parasite who saps up money, and lies or crawls bug and beetle like and to no good" (qtd. in Kafka et al, 104). Kafka's story can be seen as a significant precedent to Heartfield's allegorical image in which the evolutionary process is similarly inverted.

HISTORY AS MONTAGE

In presenting the paradox of progress as tragicomedy, Heartfield's montage visualizes Benjamin's contention that "the last stage of a world historical form is its comedy" or in Marx's words, "world historical facts and personages occur ... twice ... the first time as tragedy, the second as farce" (Tucker 594). The

tragedy of the Republic reveals itself in the visual constellation of Heartfield's montage *German Natural History* and its nineteenth century precedent, *Der Präsident* (*The President*; fig. 2), published in the German satirical magazine *Kladderadatsch* (1881).¹¹ These two caricatures are antithetical images of origin, emblems of the Left's thwarted attempts to create a social democratic republic. Whereas the Parisian Commune of February 1848 brought to a head the unresolved debate over the meaning of the republican ideal, the Weimar Republic failed miserably in coming to terms with the new democratic order. It remained a constitutional aberration (Bessel and Feuchtwanger 15–16).¹² Eduard Fuchs contended that because the same utopian features underlay the whole socialist movement in Germany, the "pathetic allegory" as opposed to the sharp reality satire played a large role in its political caricatures (Hartwig and Riha 120–21).

The caricature *The President* depicts key government proponents during the Franco Prussian War and the Commune. In the aftermath of the Franco Prussian War, the Commune provided an alternative vision of the Third Republic that was politically democratic, socially egalitarian and loosely confederated. The caterpillar at the top left wears the face of Adolphe Thiers, the president of the Third Republic, who was considered a prophet and incarnation of traditional France. Thiers presided over the destruction of the Commune, represented by the leaf the caterpillar endowed with his features is about to eat. The second caterpillar wears the face of Maurice de MacMahon, the leader of the conservative republicans. Jules Grévy, represented as the chrysalis, became nominal head of the Republicans upon Thiers's death. However, the real leader was Léon Gambetta, the butterfly. This triumphant republican abandoned his radical republican position for the sake of securing the republic, while Grévy, a seemingly dormant being, waited for the right moment to burst forth onto the political stage as president, becoming the true republican (Hutton 1: 410–11 and 438–39).

The ideals and experience of the French Revolution served as a lasting model for German and Parisian insurrections, of which the Commune was the last. For Benjamin and Heartfield, revolution meant something different than it did for Marx (Witte 188), who understood the inevitability of a world proletarian revolution as a "natural" historical process (Rees and Thorpe 118). This change in meaning transpired in Germany in December 1918. Kurt Tucholsky feared the Spartacus movement would end up destroying itself, as it happened in 1848, and Franz Pfemfert, who championed revolution, similarly worried. Revolution no longer meant that moment when society metamorphoses into a new form appropriate to the state of economic and productive conditions (Hartwig and Riha 175–78); it now meant society at a point of rupture in human history. In light of this critical view of revolution,



Fig. 3. Anonymous, *Reichsführer Hitler, Oberbefehlshaber der Reichswehr, er redet und redet vom Frieden... Die Kanone vor ihm tut es auch!* (Hitler, Leader of the Reich, Commander in Chief, he talks and talks of peace... The canon, standing before him, also does so!). Berlin: *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (16 August 1934), front cover.

Heartfield's montage can be understood as a critique of the euphoria of progress under Lenin and Stalin as well as the betrayal of the working class at the end of the Weimar Republic.¹³

For Heartfield, the historical moment of 1934 revealed the farce in Nazi propaganda. In the 16 August *AIZ* issue, his montage *German Natural History* appeared on the back cover as a counterpoint to the front page photograph of Hitler as both national leader and commander in chief (fig. 3). The caption under the photograph reads: "Reichsführer Hitler, Oberbefehlshaber der Reichswehr, er redet und redet vom Frieden ... Die Kanone vor ihm tut es auch!" (Hitler, Leader of the Reich, Commander in Chief, he talks and talks of peace ... The canons, standing before him, also do so!) This montage of text and image plays on the fact that the image is an original photograph, which the *AIZ* editors are keen to document in small print so that readers do not mistake it for a photomontage or false statement. The reproduction of Heartfield's montages in the *AIZ* blurred the distinction between original photographs and photomontage. This minute, yet significant editorial comment emphasizes Hitler's hypocritical rhetoric of peace. Heartfield's montage provides a link between the Weimar Republic and fascism, and shows

Hitler as “death” to Socialist Democratic progress. Yet, this view is filtered through Communist policy, which, in the early 1930s, aggressively attacked the Social Democrats as well as any united front with them (Pachnicke and Honnef 365). By the time the dadaist Heartfield launched his attack against the Social Democrats, he had become more steadfastly guided by directives from Moscow. The *AIZ* editors, however, strategically gave up the concept of progress in view of the threat of war and fascism. Rather than strictly conveying party policy, they aimed at eroding the common assumptions about progress in Nazi Germany’s socialist politics.

The fusion of a naturalistic materialism with social history spoke to German workers’ fascination with science and in particular, their familiarity with Darwinism. Hence, the regular readers of the *AIZ* would have readily understood Heartfield’s farcical inversion of natural evolution as the “overarching reason” for disintegration. A satirical image they could relish, since the *AIZ* was smuggled back into Nazi Germany.¹⁴

THE MECHANICAL EYE OF UNREASON

Heartfield’s allegorical interpretation of natural history exposed the ideological “nature” of progress.¹⁵ Nature, technology, and perception successfully sustained, through photography and its apparatus, a belief in a naturalized technical order, visualized through *neusachlich* (new objective) signs of stability and continuity in a moment of cultural crisis.

Albert Renger Patzsch, whose photographs quintessentially represent this *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), insisted in his photobook *The World is Beautiful* (1928) that photographs of both natural and industrial objects offer a school for seeing (Jennings 23–56; Heckert; Renger Patzsch). The photographs structure and guide vision; they intend to train the eye through a pattern of vision to find meaning in the everyday world. For Renger Patzsch, the essential purpose of photography was to reveal faithfully and immediately the essence of the object world. As Matthew Simms claims, “to Renger Patzsch ... the restoration of photography to its rightful being consequently also becomes the restoration to legitimacy of that place from which the world can be taken in as a totality” (Simms 198). The inclusive and varied character of Renger Patzsch’s book suggests an attempt to surmount the impossible task of recuperating presence through serial representation, which by its very repetitiveness negates the notion of an “authentic” print. By grounding his world of pictures in the nineteenth century analogy between the eye of the camera and the human eye, Renger Patzsch sustains a naturalistic vision of the world.



Fig. 4. Anonymous, *Deutschlands Wiederaufstieg in den letzten Jahren* (Germany's re ascent in recent years) Berlin: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* 37, 46 (11 November 1928); 1957. © 2006 Ullstein Bild, Berlin.

In Germany's major illustrated magazines, images of modern technology prevailed over this new way of seeing. For example, in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (Berlin Illustrated Magazine, BIZ), technology itself became the object of veneration and together with attractive photographic reproductions provided an optimistic view of social rationalization as in the switchboard of the huge electrical factory.¹⁶ The predominance of objective images of a prosperous everyday life furthered the assumption that technological progress predetermined Social Democracy. Not even economic instability could diminish this optimism, as the photomontage *Deutschlands Wiederaufstieg in den letzten Jahren* (Germany's re ascent in recent years; fig. 4) demonstrates.

The illustrated magazines' reliance on photographs and their captions resulted in their "non objective" (uncritical) reading; this was only the beginning of the unraveling of the new objective realism and its reputation as truthful witness. The contemporary critic Joseph Roth contended that the common reader did not test a photograph's authenticity, but simply trusted the caption under the photograph (qtd. in Kaes, 623 24, 653 54, 658; Feldman and Müller Luckner 391 92). Benjamin, sensitized by constructivist photography,



Fig. 5. John Heartfield, *After the Flood*, 1925. Berlin: Akademie der Künste © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild Kunst, Bonn.

held that the caption promised to become the most important part of the photograph as cameras became smaller and more ready “to capture fleeting and secret moments whose images paralyze the associative mechanisms in the beholder” (Benjamin *One Way Street* 256).¹⁷ The caption, for Heartfield, highlighted what was characteristic in the subject pictured in the photograph (März, *John Heartfield* 181), while for Bertolt Brecht it was to narrativize the photograph. While critics could provide a “new sensibility” as a way out of the cultural predicament of the New Objectivity, photography itself “seemed to offer only a ‘new insensitivity’ as a response to a sick economy, facing an inescapable crisis” (Feldman and Müller Luckner 391–92).

This criticism of rational “objectivity” appeared not only in the mass media and propaganda of the late Weimar Republic, but also in photo books and photo essays. Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold’s photo book *Photo Eye* (1929) serves as an example of how the German avant garde turned an insensitive photographic realism against itself to critique the very social order it represented. The 1929 depression proved rationalization to be a “natural” technique. In Roh and Tschichold’s book, Weimar appears as Atlantis and is swallowed up by the deluge: Laszlo Moholy Nagy’s photograph *Paris Drain* depicts the modern drainage system overwhelmed by urban runoff, and Heartfield’s book jacket design for Upton Sinclair’s book *After the Flood* of 1925 (fig. 5) visualizes a great wave swallowing a city. The avant garde’s sense of impending disaster, here expressed in prophetic terms as a biblical deluge, is further elaborated upon in Heartfield’s montage *German Natural History* which bridges these images of a doomed social and economic order with the specter of utter political disintegration.

The critique of rationality during the Weimar Republic expressed dissatisfaction with science and concern about the psychological and social consequences of the mechanized and standardized experience of the individual.

It focused its criticism on the "Cult of Technology" and on Americanism. Siegfried Kracauer's review of Adolf Seidel's book *Consciousness as Disaster* (1927) further explains that "enlightened" scientific teachings of the time in many ways are a cover for selfish drives. Consequently, Seidel argued, soul and life are subverted, because they go against reason—or rather, a reasonable consciousness (Kracauer 11–13). Heartfield's montage *Die Rationalisierung marschiert: Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa* (1927; Rationalization Marches: A Spectre Goes around Europe) takes this critique to its anarchistic conclusion in the form of an industrious capitalism shown as a prosthetic humanoid machine, devoid of consciousness, and running rampant across Europe.¹⁸

Today Heartfield's photomontages appear as mere signs of a slain democracy or as a gesture of protest against capitalism. As Heartfield lived in exile in the 1930s, the photomontages he created represented the failure of the New Objectivity to produce a critical readership who could rely on their own eyes and experience to discern the character of their social landscape and make the painful choices dictated by "the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted" (Feldman and Müller Luckner 122).

NOTES

- 1 This Heartfield montage appears in the 16 August 1934 issue of the *AIZ*. John Heartfield fled Germany in April 1933. The *AIZ* resumed publication in Prague in March 1933, twenty days after the last issue had been published in Berlin.
- 2 This mythical form of metamorphosis points to what Marx called "the tragicomic contrast between the illusions of these heroes about their achievements and the actual achievements themselves."
- 3 I borrow Rudolph Arnheim's term "imperceptible montage" to refer to the hardly detectable cutting, pasting, and retouching of elements to construct this contradictory image of natural evolution as mythical metamorphosis. Arnheim claimed that stroboscopic motion is in fact "imperceptible montage." "This is the principle that made it possible for Eisenstein to make stone lions roar in *Battleship Potemkin*." (Arnheim 74ff.).
- 4 Benjamin's "Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress" is distinct from the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," which were completed in the spring of 1940 and first published in *Neue Rundschau* 61.3 (1950). However, there are passages and thoughts from his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" which overlap with passages and thoughts in the "Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress" (*Konvolut N Arcades Project*).
- 5 The 16 August 1934 issue of the *AIZ* also included an article on "Hindenburg: Legende und Wirklichkeit" (Hindenburg: Legend and Reality).

- 6 In 1920, the tanks on the streets of Berlin bore the Freikorps' trademark death's head. See Simmons, "Advertising." Simmons addresses the response of former dadaists in 1923-24 to the NSDAP *Wahrzeichen*, the swastika, in "Mihaly Biro's Red Man with the Hammer: Labour's Image in the Struggle of Signs," a paper presented at the conference *Work and the Image* that was held at the University of Leeds in April 1998.
- 7 Hitler conceived the swastika's use as the NSDAP emblem in May 1920 (Simmons "Hand to the Friend" 324).
- 8 The German government had designed all measures of racial welfare according to the "adoption of biological knowledge to statesmanship." A popular Nazi expression first coined by Fritz Lenz in 1931 was, "National Socialism is nothing but applied biology" (see Kuhl *The Nazi Connection* 36). It is noteworthy how the *AIZ* also reproduced images of insects as "wonders of an insect circus" for children and as scientific specimens for the study of evolutionary progress very much attuned to positive applications of scientific research in Russia. A photograph of children amazed at the stunts in the insect circus appears in the *AIZ* XII.37 (21 September 1933): 638-39.
- 9 The theme of metamorphosis also found resonance among avant garde photographers and graphic designers such as Man Ray's *Natural History* (seaborse) of 1930 and Herbert Bayer's *Metamorphosis* of 1936. These two images of metamorphosis address the transformation of life into death, and nature into science.
- 10 One should keep in mind that biological categories were based on zoological categories.
- 11 Roland März first identified this visual affinity between this nineteenth century caricature and Heartfield's montage (März, *Heartfield montiert* 106). *Kladderadatsch* was one of the new illustrated journals published in Berlin after the March Revolution of 1848, which is understood as an imitation of the Paris revolt of February 1848. The Commune in turn served as a model in socialist caricature in Germany.
- 12 Arthur Rosenberg contends that the revolution of 1918 did not create a sufficiently deep break from the established political interests and the social and economic structures that determined the course of the Weimar Republic (see Rosenberg).
- 13 I wish to thank James Goodwin for pointing out this connection.
- 14 The German secret police reported on 21 May 1933 that, in addition to the illegal Communist newspapers produced in Germany, illegal newspapers were produced outside of Germany, printed in German and then, smuggled into Germany, such as "die Wochenschrift 'AIZ,' das 'Ruhr Echo,' das 'Freie Wort,' und 'die Antifaschistische Front.'" See Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde (Microfiche). Reichssicherheitshauptamt: R/58/3218, Nachrichten de Geheimen Staatspolizeiamtes, Berlin, 21 May 1933, fol. 96. As late as 1935, small versions of the *AIZ* were sent through the mail to German contacts in Germany to

- be distributed, along with other communist publications. See Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, Reichsjustizministerium: R 3001/RJM AG Illg 1 6695/37, fol. 52.
- 15 The paradigm of scientific naturalism corresponded to a belief in photography's pseudo natural, rather than technical genesis. This binary relationship between natural history and technology structured the visual field of reality in terms of a naturalized technical order. Therefore, scientific advancement (technological determinism) could be easily construed as the progress of mankind. Civilization could appear to be successfully combating death.
 - 16 *Das eindrucksvollste Symbol unserer technischen Zeit: Die Schalttafel des Riesenkraftwerks* (BIZ 37. 40, 1709; 30 September 1928; "The most impressive symbol of our time: the switchboard of the huge electrical plant").
 - 17 The caption, in relation to constructivist photography, was understood to unlock what had been arrested at the approximate moment of the taking of the photograph.
 - 18 Amelia Jones refers to this 1927 montage to illustrate how Taylorism and Fordism rationalize *bodies* by making humans into machines through repetitive labor. Heartfield depicts this concept through a figure he constructs out of fragments from machines and factories, "striding (as a symbol of the march of socialized industry) across an urban, industrial landscape" (Jones 14).

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The Photographic Thought of Latina/o Literature and Cultural Critique

María DeGuzmán

This essay grows out of my work as a conceptual photographer interested in the relation between word and visual image, especially photographs, and what can be done with their pairing or their simultaneous appearance, or even their synchronic displaced appearance, as when a text invokes photography but is not accompanied by an actual photograph. Furthermore, this essay has evolved out of my research and teaching on this relation, specifically with regard to photography. In these various guises I have been posing questions such as: May we speak of that relationship and if yes, how? Do words and visual images compose, complement, and/or rival each other? How else might we describe this relationship? Is the relation one of continuity or discontinuity or both? Is “photo graphy” a kind of writing as the term itself would suggest? And what can we say about stories that reference photos and, as their central device, “pretend” to re construct them textually or ask readers to visualize them? Is there anything special about imagining a photograph or still film image? If so, how is it special and special in what ways and to what ends? For instance, when and how does the device of the photograph in the text turn a “negative” (the absence of an actual photo in this case) into a complex meta fictional maneuver, a comment on representation itself and the terms of power that structure representation?

My dual role as a textual scholar and as a photographer producing photographic images not only spurs me to ask these questions, but invests the questions with the quality of a passionate quest. I take photographs as someone who begins a story. Each photograph contains the intimation of a story, or even of multiple ones, mutely signified by the image the silent story or stories whose silence speaks volumes. Take this image, for example: *Miel: Honey Bear Mystic* (fig. 1). The plastic honey bear and a very hazy Virgin Mary appear to be listening to one another or telling each other something. Their eyes are cast in each other's directions. The Virgin Mary's head is cocked to one side, receptive to the bear whose eyes are permanently shifted in her direction. Maybe I am only imagining the active presence of this Virgin and



Fig. 1. María DeGuzmán (b. 1964), *Miel: Honey Bear Mystic*. 2003. SX 70 Time Zero film Polaroid. 7.6 x 7.9 cm. Collection of the author/photographer.

have drawn other viewers into this fantasy. However, the imagined relation is in fact a graphic relation that abolishes the difference between apparition and presence just as a textual virtual photograph is as much *there* in its verbal conjuration as an actual photograph embedded in or placed alongside the text. My photograph is captioned by a title and subtitle as text, *sans* story. The viewer must supply the story, if she or he chooses. I supply this photography in an essay on stories about photography that are, in fact, unaccompanied by actual photographs. I see *Miel: Honey Bear Mystic* as a visual corollary to the kind of stories I am investigating. Its composition and its iconography (the poses of a plastic honey container in the shape of a teddy bear and the image of the Virgin Mary) encode the acts of listening and speaking, confessing and revealing. And yet no words compose the image. Only the title “miel” Spanish for the substance “honey” and the subtitle “anchor,” to use Roland Barthes’s term, the image, suggesting that the bear might be more than an object, but an object with a subjectivity that of a mystic (Barthes, *Image Music Text* 40). The plot of the implied story thickens. The title does not explain the image but rather resonates with it in a potentially

implosive crisis of reference. Can plastic bears be mystics? What sort of cultural commentary is this? A similar thickening, productive ambiguousness, and edginess characterizes the Latina/o stories about photography that I am about to examine.

As a scholar of Latina/o literatures and cultures in a pan ethnic sense Chicana/o, Puerto Rican, Dominican American, Cuban American, Central American, etc. I notice patterns in the word/picture production, intra ethnic ones and cross ethnic ones that seem to be about a shared cultural positioning vis à vis the United States or hitherto Anglo dominated U.S. culture despite differences between Latina/o groups. For instance, in terms of visual iconography, one might point to the predominance of various figures central to Catholicism for example, the Virgin Mary deployed with some kind of vernacular syncretic twist that distinguishes the use of the figure from more European and Euro American usages. Or, to offer another example of a cross ethnic pattern, one might highlight the acceptance of a more baroque profusion of objects in visual images within Latin American and U.S. based Latina/o cultures even through the twentieth and into the twenty first centuries. Abstraction and minimalism have never had the cultural hold in Latin American and within Latina/o cultures that they have had in the predominantly Anglo American art world of the United States. Such an argument was implicitly made in, among other texts, the 2000 exhibition catalogue *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art*.¹ This kind of pattern recognition comes with familiarity with an area of study. So, what patterns are currently interesting me the most with regard to Latina/o literatures and cultures panethnically, transculturally, in the United States?

Noteworthy are the numerous references to photographs and photography in post 1960s and especially contemporary Latina/o fiction, short stories and fiction in particular, though not exclusively. For just a few examples recall or consider the pointed mention in Margarita Cota Cárdenas's 1985 *Puppet: A Chicano Novella* of a Polaroid photo of a character named María. In a section from chapter 8, "A Letter from María," the creation and description of the photograph very pointedly juxtapose text and image:

María's letter contains a Polaroid photo in front of the beach in Santa Cruz, the University at a distance, and a smiling María, standing tall, with brilliant eyes, brilliant like the young stars. She's wearing a yellow T shirt that says in big black and red letters: CHICANA 1/2. (Cota Cárdenas 64)

María's letter expresses her "ambivalent, conflictive feelings" about her heritage and its interpretation in the environment in which she finds herself (Santa Cruz, the university, a progressive place but within limitations in a state California with a history of complex Mexican/Latina/o Anglo relations) and so does the photographic image that accompanies it. One might

ask then how the transposition of these feelings from letter to photo functions. What is accomplished by the parallelism that may also be a differential split between text and image both between letter and photo and within the photo itself? Why a Polaroid rather than one of the many available or possible photographic mediums/media? Until the advent of digital photography, Polaroid was the preferred medium for both forensic purposes (furnishing an almost instant record of damage) and for the arrest and visual fixation of the passing moments of both routine and extraordinary life. Instant Polaroid connotes “snapshot” more than any other medium (even digital subject to total touch up after the fact) in as much as the seemingly unreflecting and therefore candidly revealing quality of the spur of the moment shot is heightened in the speed by which a photo is taken and developed. In the case of Cota Cárdenas’s *Puppet*, the rapid ease with which the photo may be taken underscores, paradoxically (by contrast), the contested, difficult identity positioning of a young Chicana woman negotiating the ethno racial and class power relations of a politically Anglo dominated late twentieth century California.

Speaking of snapshots, Chicana writer and academic Norma Elia Cantú’s fictional 1995 autoethnobiography *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la frontera* employs 1950s black and white family snapshots throughout to launch and punctuate the semi fictional memoirs that the author elaborates around concrete memories of people, places, and objects of a time between her birth and her late teen years, living in the borderlands where Mexico meets Texas. Here snapshots (as an aid to memory) form, on the borderlands, a visual psychic borderland between absence and presence, between the past and the present. In fact, according to the author, these photos from the past often carry a hint of the future and, though the majority of them are happy photos, some of them contain other visual accents that create a tension within any one photo. They begin to seem more like the Polaroid photo mentioned in Cota Cárdenas’s *Puppet*. Cantú writes:

This photograph [a photo taken when Cantú was three] stays with me I’m only three and it must be important I was a happy child . . . My eyes are sad though. As if I were thinking of the pain, the loss, the burdens that are to come. Funny how some sadness seeps onto the look, la mirada, even on my own three year old face. The feelings of future loneliness creeps in oh, what a strange look for a three year old. Does one know what is to come, even at three? (Cantú 54)

The snapshot photo, in particular, as might be guessed from its basis in hunting terminology (“snap shot”) belongs to the more forensic side of the spectrum of photography and as such reminds us that one way to understand *Puppet* is within the framework of forensics, in this case the forensics of identity itself. This is not the only Chicana fictional text to signal its engagement



Fig. 2. María DeGuzmán, *Ghost of an angel or fleshly remainder: transformation of light into a body*. 2003. SX 70 Time Zero film Polaroid. 7.6 x 7.9 cm. Collection of the author/photographer.

with a forensics of identity through the evocation of textual photos. In Lucha Corpi's 1992 novel *Eulogy for a Brown Angel* the main character, Gloria Damasco, compares her sixth sense or dark psychic gift for sensing trouble before it happens to a semi transparent photographic negative reminiscent of the actual photographic work of a Chicana photographer such as Kathy Vargas²:

I had a sense that I was looking at two sides of myself as if on a photographic negative—the lighter areas being “reality”; the darker shades of colors, even perhaps the absence of color, being optical illusions. (Corpi 30)

Photography and in particular the relation of negative to positive, of the negative strip to the developed photo on paper, furnish a powerful visual correlative (also haunted by the unseen, the invisible) to the intangible concept of, and according to *Eulogy for a Brown Angel*, the reality of another self or the cognitive extension of the self, “this psychic being ... this dark gift” (Corpi 123). To give visual embodiment to the investment in an alternate epistemology—or way of seeing/knowing—in Chicana/o literature and as textual scholar turned photographer, I experimented with a prism, a small clay figurine of an angel given to me as a protective talisman, and, as with the making of *Miel*, an SX 70 Polaroid camera and time zero film. The result was what I later titled *Ghost of an angel or fleshly remainder: transformation of light into a body* (fig. 2). The photograph, when it emerged from the camera body, stunned me. It still does. I cannot get over the fact that the refracted virtual image of the angel in the prism on the left looks fleshlike and human whereas the unrefracted figurine on the right appears so cold and white as to seem like marble, not clay. The result of my experiment surpassed my rational calculations or expectations. To this day, this photograph disorients me as reader/writer and photographer playing with “my clocks” and compasses for seeing.³

In Chicana/o literature photography is not only related to the dead what Christian Metz describes as “[p]hotography’s deeply rooted kinship with death” (Metz 140)—or to the living who are already dead but just don’t know it yet—the premise, after all, of much of Roland Barthes’s theories about the absent presence function of photos in general.⁴ More specifically, a number of Chicana/o texts connect photography to what Chicana writer and cultural critic Gloria Anzaldúa has termed *la facultad* or the faculty of nepantlism by which she means a radical uncertainty and willingness to embrace, how ever shiveringly, a dreaded non identity of the night, another way of thinking and feeling that defies Western rationalism. In the testimonial essays and poems of her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) she elaborates an associational constellation of images to talk about this faculty: “shadows” (Anzaldúa 42), “Shadow Beast” (38, 42), “dark” (*passim*), “diosa de la noche” (218), “creature of darkness” (103, 208, and 209), and “black Angelos” (206). Traces of Anzaldúa’s language of night, darkness, and the status of the visual image (appearing mostly as shadow) can be detected everywhere in Jimmy Santiago Baca’s 1992 memoir *Working in the Dark*. Worth noting is the fact that this dark psychic gift—and photography as both a correlative of and a medium for it—is by no means divorced from the project of recovering lost

or buried histories. Many Chicana/o writers harness the numerous crises of and about the real that photography introduces into daily life to both project and resurrect fragments of buried histories, histories eclipsed by the dominant culture.

Cuban Americans are notorious (and much of this pattern may be attributed to the experience of exile and to an exile mentality among Post Revolution Cuban émigrés) for organizing both their ontology and epistemology around nostalgia, memory, and the past. In this vein and in reaction to it, Cuban American writer Elías Miguel Muñoz's 1998 novel *Brand New Memory* begins with the prescriptive epigraph taken from Alan West Durán's book of poetry *Finding Voices in the Rain* "Whatever isn't image isn't memory" (West Durán 127; qtd. by E. M. Muñoz, n.p.) and continues on in the very first chapter with a discussion of memory, the ambivalent activity of remembering what is painful, and the role of fading photographs in providing the "only clues" to the years of early exile from Cuba to the United States, circa 1966, for the family of Gina Domingo.⁵ Like a puzzle's missing piece, the snapshot fills the gap between present and past, sentience and oblivion. In particular, the Polaroid does so "[t]here are snapshots taken with the first Polaroid" (E. M. Muñoz 4) but, as in Cota Cárdenas's novel *Puppet*, a certain emotional ambivalence attaches itself to these Polaroids. In *Brand New Memory*, there are too many of them "too many shots of Gina at different stages" (E. M. Muñoz 4). It's almost as if the Polaroid, for all its convenience in recording the passing moment and in more or less instantaneously returning a portion of any given moment back to one, runs the risk of introducing yet more banality into the flow of life.

To challenge precisely this potential Polaroid banalization of experience is what Cuban American writer Achy Obejas's 1986 short story "Polaroids" sets out to do, paradoxically through an intimate, obsessive invocation of the Polaroid medium itself. Obejas's story deploys Polaroid and the particular features of the medium its chemical instantaneity, instability, and intensity to critique the forensic uses of Polaroid that reduce personhood to a crime scene sensationalism drained of dignity and uniqueness. Moreover, the story conscripts the Polaroid medium into a critique of human rights, identity eroding banality of consumerist, assimilationist culture that reacts uncomprehendingly (or not at all) to the psycho social pain of a Mexican woman in a Mojave desert town.

In contrast to the thematization of photography as representationally deficient in Obejas's story that sets out to rivalrously compensate for those deficiencies, Elías Miguel Muñoz's novel explores the identity recording and actively creative uses of various photographic media (still photos, video, and film) by a Cuban American family. Despite its discomfort with "too many

shots” (E. M. Muñoz 4), the novel provides an extended meditation through the videographic exploits of the main protagonist Gina Domingo, also called “camerawoman,” on the role of visual images and imaging technologies. These include television, videocams, computers, laser holograms, and the human brain, which are shown to be involved in pre scripting yet also deciphering and re coding identity and subjectivity and stretching the limits of consciousness. Such activity has political consequences as it entails the creation and acceptance of new forms of identification and of what is taken to be “reality,” thus challenging versions that offer only a rigid menu of “identities.”

A central question is: how do people form brand new memories based on images, in particular on images that are not stereotyped or clichéd but manage to enact something of the complexities and possibilities of their present reality? The novel poses other questions about the rivalrous relation that is also the deeply complementary imbrication between text and visual image, clue and narrative:

Some nights, while reading an assigned passage [from a book], she [Gina Domingo] had the disquieting suspicion that she was on to something, that a wondrous secret was about to unravel. Nothing ever happened, though, outside her own imagination. But what a feat that was already! She had never felt so aroused creatively, transported as she was by these tales (and her own mind) beyond the walls of her safe and uneventful room.

Movies can't be so mind blowing, she had to admit. Or maybe here was the ultimate challenge: turning this literature into film, bringing filmmaking to a higher dimension. Movies as art. Was that possible? (E. M. Muñoz 38)

The implied question seems to be how to turn movies or moving visual images into something other than an occasion for passive consumption, into an imagination sparking, identity creating opportunity. In many ways, this is the question that another Cuban American Muñoz — José Esteban Muñoz — poses in his 1999 book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, when he traces how culturally and politically marginalized people interpolate themselves into the images of the dominant culture rather than merely allow those images to interpolate and control them on terms alien to them.

Continuing with this question of structures of feeling and what activities or objects reveal those in a fundamental way and how photographs in relation to words are implicated, I would point to the prominent role played by family photographs in Dominican American fiction. Some of the central issues for Dominicans both on the island and for those who migrate to the United States (given the U.S. supported Trujillo legacy of the denial of blackness in favor of a whitened mulatto status that downplays its *mulatez*) involve questions about racial identification and socio political agency. Take, for instance, writer Loida Maritza Pérez's first novel published in 1999 entitled *Geographies*

of *Home* about an Afro Latino Dominican family who have immigrated from the Dominican Republic and struggle to survive a double legacy of racism, both of the Dominican Republic and of the United States. The main protagonist Iliana's perusal of the formal photographs "preserved behind dusty glass and contained within a gilded frame" (Pérez 40) raises questions about the relation between time, memory, and identity (the photographs are of past moments, of course, some of them in the Dominican Republic). This textually narrated act of looking at photographs is also implicated in a painful self-contemplation through the mental grid of visually encoded racial stereotypes. Iliana thinks as she gazes on a photo of herself, "Her lips, wide as Marina's but the length of Beatriz's, pouted so sullenly that despite chiseled cheeks and a nose her sisters envied as 'white' she appeared the ugliest of the three" (Pérez 41). In other words, the photographs, the textual photographs, function like the message board hanging from Iliana's dorm room door at the beginning of the novel "the ghostly trace of 'nigger'" (Pérez 1) scrawled on it.

Thus, photographs are invoked to underscore a legacy of racism and bodily typing that structures the intimate consciousness of the Dominican characters in the novel as they negotiate a new but not entirely different environment of ethno racism in the United States. At the same time the stiff family photos that occasion Iliana's painful and somewhat self-hating musings contain within them other possibilities. Again, we find a text that conjures photographs through descriptive language not merely to reproduce the evidentiary aspect of photos but also to provoke the narrative self-creation that photos can supply, as in Muñoz's novel *Brand New Memory*. The following passage illustrates this use of photographs:

Last of all, Iliana raised her eyes to the enlarged copy of the photo her mother had long ago preserved in one of the family's many albums. The blacks, whites, and greys of the copy were so blurred that Aurelia and Papaito each appeared to be of indeterminate race and age. They neither smiled nor frowned but gazed unflinchingly at the camera as if prepared to confront whatever challenges life might throw their way. At the center of their impenetrably dark pupils, pinpoints of light possibly a trick of the camera receded far back into their heads so that, although their faces appeared to shield emotions, their eyes suggested stories only waiting to be told. (Pérez 44)

The passage is significant for the way in which it disassociates the photographs described from an ability to capture the people represented in them. With age the photos have faded, the shades of black, white, and gray have lost their contrast, have blurred and blended into one another. The photos have lost their capacity to index race and age. Thus, they have lost their complicity in a visual repertoire of social typing. In Roland Barthes's terms, they no longer have any of the *studium* or study (understood as a coded and thus generally conventional lesson) about them; all that is left is the surprising *punctum*, the

pinprick, in this case the “pinpoints of light” that catch the viewer off guard and fascinate with the hint of possibility yet to be revealed, to be told: “their eyes suggested stories only waiting to be told” (Pérez 44).⁶ This passage offers itself as a revelation about the way in which the narrative as a whole works trying to reach a zone of possibility, of potential that open endedly links the past, present, and future, despite the entrapping socio economic and psychic reality in which this Dominican family finds itself in New York.

Overall, one begins to see patterns in how and why Latina/o writers are drawn to the device of a textually conjured photo in the context of a hitherto dominant Anglo U.S. culture that historically has tended to both “disappear” and “hyper visualize” Latinas/os. The photographic image, whether an independent still photograph or a film still, plays a central role in Latina/o fiction. Is it merely a coincidence that, as Boris Kossoy informs his readers, the word *photographie* (whence came the English word “photography”) was first coined in Brazil in 1833 by Hercules Florence (1804–79), French draftsman and naturalist explorer of the Amazons (Kossoy 13)? Or is the so called “coincidence” significant in that it points to the inseparability of photography from processes of documentation as domination, and domination not simply as epistemological mastery over “the unknown” and “the Other,” but as the colonization, moreover the internal colonization, of places and people? By internal colonization, I am referring to the expectation of colonizing cultures that the Other is and ought to be fascinated with the apparatus of the camera, the supposed magic of the white man. In the face of “colonial photography,” to borrow Michael Taussig’s phrase, the use of the camera by the Other to other purposes is part and parcel of a decolonial project as much as a colonial one (Taussig 198–207).

Significantly, the word for the process of taking and attempting to fix pictures was coined at a time—the 1830s—when the Portuguese regent and self styled Emperor Pedro I was forced to abdicate control of Brazil and was succeeded by his son, the popular Pedro II, whose reign saw Brazil’s gradual move toward independence from Portugal, a process that had definitively begun in 1822 and culminated in the abolition of slavery in 1888 as well as in the establishment of a Republic in 1889 (Bethell and Carvalho 58, and Costa 161, 164).

These changes have been read by historians as proof of “modernization.” The birth of a conceptual category for the capturing of an “order of things,” photography, occurred in the midst of the struggle between on going colonial projects and postcolonial ones (Foucault xx). By extension it may be posited that the interest in the photographic image in Latina/o fiction represents an attempt to re appropriate “self image” within the context of a history of colonization and colonialism and the contemporary experience of new kinds of

colonialism involving a complex play of external and internal forces defining the Americas since World War II.

Despite photography's involvement with cinema, the still photographic image has been contrasted with moving film (movies) so that the idea of the photograph has become shorthand for a mode of discontinuous association the mortification of cinema and of narrative discontinuity or anti narrative. By mortification of cinema, I mean the way in which the photograph as a discreet unit or even as a collection of discreet units, a sequence, represents a counter cognitive event to the apparently seamless, continuous flow of film. The photograph spaces time, suspends the length of its exposure indefinitely, and leaves us to observe, study, ponder that captured time and the condensed concrescent rhetoric of any photo image. Argentine writer and inspiration for a number of Latina/o writers Julio Cortázar once compared film to the novel and the photograph to the short story (Cortázar 246). Structured in terms of epiphany, the flash, brevity, unity of action, symbol and/or tone, and intensity, the photograph and the short story are metonymically related with regard to form and effect. Numerous short stories embed the device of the photograph as a formal analogy for short fiction itself, one being in a nested, self critical relation to the other. But, we have seen that the photographic image composes an integral part of the morphology of the short story and the longer tale, a novel, for instance. The device of the photograph in fiction is increasingly a post World War II phenomenon coinciding with what various critics have considered the post war saturation of everyday life by the intensification and acceleration of visibility, particularly photographic visibility (Baudrillard 87, 105 107; Debord 9, 15, 128; Samuel 315 49; Sontag 8, 10, 153; and Virilio 43, though none of these theorists are in agreement with one another about exactly how or to what effects).⁷

The photograph rather than other signs of doubling and/or duplication like painting or sculpture, dolls, idols, mirrors, or other copies has been important for Latina/o fiction because of its special relation to the "real," to history and memory as well as because of its link to the hyper visibility/visibility of media culture in which the image is taken for the real. Despite the link to documentary practices, photography also holds a privileged relation to fantasy compounded by its omnipresent use in advertising. Thus, the photograph is an important motif and device for social realist as well as fantastic literature and becomes a medium and theme for attempts to constitute a brief glimpse of an existing world as well as for inventing one or even for doing a bit of both.

Latina/o fiction manifests a certain self consciousness and aesthetics of double assertion. The aesthetics of the double assertion articulates itself around the use of the photograph as a means to call attention to, work against,

or even revel in the idea of Latina/o or Latin American as derivative and imitative vis à vis the U.S. and Europe, what Chilean based cultural theorist Nelly Richard analyzes as the “First World’s” ritual invocation of a “Model/Copy” paradigm of geo political and cultural relations (Richard 217–22). The device of the photograph turns a “negative” (so to speak) into a savvy meta critical maneuver, a comment on representation itself and the terms of power structuring the relations of Latinas/os to both the indigenous and the European/Anglo American and which implicate them in systems of dominance and subordination.

Ultimately, photographs are suited to the exploration and interrogation of a key phrase used to describe Latin American and, increasingly now, Latina/o fiction — *lo real maravilloso*, the marvelous real. Susan Sontag (16, 24, 111, 155) and Roland Barthes (*Camera Lucida* 79, 82, 85, 119) have both pointed out that the photograph functions as marvelous and paradoxical proof of the real. Stories about photography or which rely on the image of a photograph or the act of taking pictures as a central device may duplicate the effect of “the marvelous real.” On the one hand, this technique defamiliarizes and interrogates the everyday, the positivistic proof, and the truth claims of history. On the other hand, the duplication of *lo real maravilloso* functions like quotation marks, both emphasizing and questioning that sought after, much commodified element of mystery, enigma, and the fantastic. Thus, the photo story may work to detach the reader from the fiction while at the same time drawing the reader into it: this doubling technique is of particular importance to Latina/o fiction as a form of cultural critique.

NOTES

- 1 See Armstrong and Zamudio Taylor.
- 2 See Lippard.
- 3 In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes associates cameras with devices for keeping time: “I recall that at first photographic implements were related to techniques of cabinet making and the machinery of precision: cameras, in short, were clocks for seeing” (15).
- 4 See Metz. Also, see, in particular, chapters 36–40 of Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*.
- 5 The line “[W]hatever isn’t image isn’t memory” occurs in the last poem of Alan West Durán’s book of poetry. This poem is entitled “O Tempora! O Mores!” and is dedicated to Chris Marker, the French writer, photographer, filmmaker, and multi media artist who has spent his life investigating and experimenting with the socio political uses of images and the relationship between visual images,

narrative, and anti narrative. Alan West Durán's poem contains references to *La Jetée* (1962) and *Sans Soleil* (1983) among several other films by Marker.

- 6 Roland Barthes provides an extensive definition/discussion of *punctum* and "studium" throughout *Camera Lucida* in various sections, 6 28, 32 34, 40 59, and 94 96.
- 7 Curiously, unlike many other critics, Marshall McLuhan linked the intensification of the visual to its transformation into an order quite unlike itself, into an "aural" culture of the electromagnetic, the electronic, and the cybernetic which in many of his writings and interviews he opposes to the regime of the visual that he associates with continuity, uniformity, and connectiveness. See "The Future of Man in the Electric Age" (McLuhan 56 75).

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Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein, Fassbinder: *Découpage* Aesthetics on the Divide

Susan Nurmi Schomers

One way of comprehending the complexity of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's filmic take¹ on Theodor Fontane's epochal novel *Effi Briest* (1894-95) is to behold it as a study on boundaries. Because of the two fold sense of the word: a study on the boundaries imposed upon and in significant ways transgressed by the protagonists of the narrative, but also aesthetic boundaries defined, redefined, or transgressed by Fassbinder the filmmaker. Fassbinder's filmic adaptation of Fontane's celebrated chamber piece derives its aesthetic quality in no small degree from the way in which it plays with boundaries, producing a complex dynamics of content and form in the process which raises crucial questions about word and image bound genres and the sense and negotiability of dictates which govern genre traditions, in this case the singular "genre tradition" described, or rather, constructed by Roland Barthes in an article whose title names its protagonists: "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein." In adding Rainer Werner Fassbinder to this peculiar group portrait as sketched by Barthes, I intend to call into question the rationale behind its "composition." In this piece, Fassbinder is to act as a catalyst for the quasi unravelling of Barthes's tradition making endeavor, affording a revisionist view of "Barthesian" *découpage* aesthetics² on the divide of word and image literary text and film which reveals the heterogeneity of intent behind its myriad "applications."

In the narrative dimension, Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* is all about the boundaries which defined nineteenth century Prussian aristocratic society, these playing a crucial role in Theodor Fontane's tragic tale of adultery and its lamentable consequences. But at the same time, Fassbinder's rendition of *Effi Briest* constitutes a self reflective act, an inquiry into artistic form and the logic of genre. As an *adaptateur*, Fassbinder is inevitably confronted with issues of genre. Insofar as the filmic medium in its "mainstream" form essentially cultivates a narrative idiom, the act of "translating" a literary work of art to the screen is facilitated enormously by a series of cinematic narrative

conventions, and the moviegoer who is cognizant of such conventions will have no trouble “reading” the filmic narrative much in the way he or she would read a literary text. And yet, the fascination and impact of Fassbinder’s film derive in no small part from the systematic defiance of such conventions on the part of the filmmaker. Fassbinder presents us with an extremely stylized mode of adaptation which refuses to make use of established “narrative” cinematographic devices. As I hope to show, his second hand story of a pitiable adulteress entails a highly calculating appropriation of principles applied in various “foreign genres,” demonstrating how aesthetic boundaries can be violated, collapsed, and redefined in artful ways while dashing the expectations customarily placed on, because traditionally cultivated by, “mainstream narrative cinema.”

In a 1974 interview Fassbinder made comments on his adaptation of *Effi Briest* that are very illuminating in the context of the issues I am addressing here. As he says,

To show the narrative on film is like an author telling a story, but there’s a difference. When one reads a book, one creates as a reader one’s own images, but when a story is told on screen in pictures, then it is concrete and really “complete.” One is not creative as a member of a film audience, and it was this passivity that I tried to counter in *Effi Briest*. I would prefer people to “read” the film. It’s a film which one cannot simply experience, and which doesn’t attack the audience ... one has to *read* it. That’s the most significant thing about the film. (qtd. in Thomsen, 46; emphasis added)

On one level, Fassbinder constructs a film which is to be “read” in a literal sense of the word. His use of intertitles, taken *verbatim* from Fontane’s novel, is one aspect of the act of reading he expects his audience to perform. The sense of artifice evoked by the “unnatural” manner of recitation adopted by the narrator (whom Fassbinder lends his own voice) and the protagonists alike is also significant in this context.³ It is apparently intended to underscore the “readerly” origin of the film, to counteract the illusion of a perfect translation, a perfect translation of the literary into the “cine narrative” idiom. As I contend, the peculiar style of recitation adopted in Fassbinder’s *Effi Briest* is also informed by Brechtian principles of epic theater *Schauspielerei*, most notably the self conscious gesture, which is employed as a key strategy for producing the desired Brechtian alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*).⁴ In an important sense, Fassbinder’s *Effi Briest* is a homage to Brechtian dramaturgy. And in fact, the essence of what Fassbinder means when he speaks of his intention to, as it were, coerce his audience into “reading” his film is closely connected with his openly acknowledged indebtedness to Bertolt Brecht and the defining principle of Brecht’s epic theater (cf. Hughes and Riley 14).

Apart from subscribing to Brechtian epic theater tenets in more or less general terms, Fassbinder’s Fontane adaptation evidences quite a specific kind

of Brechtian influence, however. Interestingly, this aspect of Brecht's legacy concerns aesthetic principles formulated in his theoretical reflections on film as he envisioned its use in epic theater. The essence of Brecht's observations on this subject as formulated in "Der Film im epischen Theater" ("Film in Epic Theater") are remarkable. He begins his inquiry by attempting to characterize the "artistic or scientific" nature of this medium, claiming that film follows the same laws as graphic arts. As he contends, film is, like the graphic arts, static in nature, and he posits that as such, a film when used as an element in epic theater should take on the form of a succession of tableaux. This principle of composition is not called upon by Brecht to nonetheless achieve continuity of sequence. On the contrary, Brecht calls for a "breaking off" (an *Abbrechen*) of the individual tableaux. "This clear breaking off must yield effect," says Brecht in a highly prescriptive vein ("Aus diesem deutlichen Abbrechen muss Wirkung entstehen": Brecht 2: 76).⁵ According to him, anyone who does not use film (in theater) in this disjunctive way commits a common error. The next dictum formulated by Brecht demands that each individual tableau render a "perfect composition" ("durchkomponiert": Brecht 2: 77), with "each detail corresponding in a large way with the center" ("jedes Detail in großer Art mit dem Zentrum korrespondier[end]": Brecht 2: 77). As Brecht claims, the fundamental law which is to be derived from film's static nature is that it is "limited to one single vision, a vision which is in essence motionless" ("beschränkt auf eine Vision, die an sich bewegungslos steht": Brecht 2: 77). What he calls the "basic law of film" ("Grundgesetz des Filmes:" 2: 77) "as rigid a law as one will find in any other art" ("ein so strenges wie die strengsten nur irgendeines anderen Kunstzweiges": Brecht 2: 77) makes it ill disposed to, that is, ill suited for any kind of plot, of action in its own right. So Brecht's theory goes.

In Roland Barthes's aforementioned essay, both Brecht and Eisenstein are placed in the tradition of Diderot's 200 year old theater aesthetics, which, as Barthes elucidates, "rests on the identification of theatrical scene and pictorial tableau: the perfect play is a succession of tableaux, that is, a gallery, an exhibition; the stage offers the spectator 'as many real tableaux as there are in the action moments favorable to the painter'" (Barthes 173). In Barthes's own words, Diderot's tableau be it pictorial, theatrical or literary "is a pure cut out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view" (Barthes 173). Barthes likens Diderot's tableau to the epic scene in Brecht, the shot in Eisenstein. They are, as he says, "so many tableaux, ... scenes which are *laid out* (in the sense in which one says the table is *laid*), ... firmly cut out" (Barthes 173).

At first sight, Barthes's thesis is appealing. But let us look more carefully beyond the surface of similarities, at the larger context of aesthetic principles and the ideological impetuses behind them. To begin with Diderot, it is perhaps banal, but crucial to note that his *découpage* aesthetics, although designed for the theater, are in fact derived from observations on painting.⁶ Diderot engages in a kind of Lessingian discourse when he argues that in rendering his *sujet*, the painter is compelled to select the most pregnant moment and that the art of painting eminently involves such a selection process. One might ask oneself why Diderot, when playing the role of theater aesthete, should concern himself with a constraint inherent to painting—a static art—if his business is to define aesthetics for a spatiotemporally organized performing art which, as such, need not shackle itself with such limitations. The answer lies, perhaps, in Diderot's understanding of order and chaos in cosmic terms and the place which art occupies in this larger framework. Diderot's aesthetics, as I understand them, are informed by a notion of time and history as constituting an essentially chaotic flux, with certain moments of time unpredictably transforming chaos into ephemeral states of order before reverting to the usual dynamics of disorder again. One could find in this belief a rationale for subscribing to the theater aesthetic described above. Rendering a succession of tableaux composed around a center would, in this reading, correlate with the static, isolated moments of order Diderot sees as welcome relief from the flux of chaos.

If we look to Fassbinder, we find *composed* shots (to be taken in two highly relevant meanings of the word), which are the result of the filmmaker's conscious, if not to say, overtly self-conscious effort to inhibit movement, to almost freeze his scenes and configure them like tableaux vivants. But although the quality rendered by Fassbinder's *découpage* technique, like that aimed for by Diderot's tableaux, suggests order, it is not the only too welcome order of temporary relief from chaos, but rather the negatively viewed order engendered by a highly restrictive, and, as such, stifling society that we find manifested here, a society most vividly represented by Effi Briest's husband Instetten as the most relentless upholder of its codes. It is the order which demands that Instetten act in the name of honor yet against his better judgment, bringing about Effi's ruin and robbing himself of any hope for felicity he might have entertained before. The sense that Effi is caught within the confines of this oppressive society is underscored by the excessive use of mirrors and door frames which visually entrap her (cf. fig. 1).⁷ Such cinepoetic metaphors, coupled with the sense of physical inhibition which the slow motion pace of a film composed almost exclusively of long shots generates, evoke a society hampered by its very ideals—a quasi Prussian love of order and the tempering of affect.



Fig. 1. Fassbinder's cinepoetic trope of entrapment: Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945–82), *Fontane Effi Briest*, 1974. Film black/white. Munich: Tango Film. Still courtesy of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation.

In juxtaposing Fassbinder and Diderot, one could say that the two follow very different ideological agendas but with quite similar aesthetic results. Diderot's striving for order in cosmic chaos and for decorum in the socio-political realm contrasts with Fassbinder's attack on an aristocratic order based on the notion of honor as the supreme societal good. One suspects a hidden agenda behind this period piece, however, for in light of Fassbinder's focus on engagement, documented in his other works, it seems plausible to "read" his adaptation in the context of Nazi fascism and post-Nazi Germany. The diagnostic formula which serves as a prelude to the film proper, and provides a "subtitle" of sorts, would seem to be addressing the postwar "sons of the perpetrators" rather than summing up a moral geared to an extinct social order.

Irrespective of their varying putative and/or self-revealed motivations for adopting certain aesthetic strategies, one might say that Diderot, Brecht, and Fassbinder all neatly fit into Barthes's gallery of *découpage* aestheticians. The same cannot be said of Eisenstein, however. In focusing on the frame as the

“cell” unit of the filmic medium (this being a perspective which informs the Russian filmmaker’s notion of montage as film’s defining stylistic device, if not to say the elementary principle of composition) Eisenstein does not take the same kind of as it were “isolationist” view which Diderot, Brecht, and Fassbinder do, albeit for varying reasons.

Eisenstein’s intense theoretical and practical engagement with cinematic art yielded a highly idiosyncratic cinepoetics which he subjected to ongoing experimentation and development. As such, I contend, it does not lend itself well to the kind of aesthetic equation Barthes tries to establish. At the core of Eisenstein’s aesthetics is the notion, formulated by his contemporary Lev Kuleshov in the early 1920s, that montage is “the essential factor differentiating cinema from the other arts and forming the specific impact that film can make.”⁸ In subscribing to this dictum, while differing with Kuleshov on many other fundamental issues of cinepoetics, Eisenstein himself discusses aspects of montage in numerous theoretical reflections, treating it variously in terms of language, the physiology of retinal perception, and Marxist dialectics. These three aspects of montage are called upon in different ways, at different times, and in different contexts to make a case for his own brand of *découpage* aesthetics. As concerns the physiological side of it, Eisenstein develops the idea, put forth in his 1923 manifesto entitled “The Montage of Attractions,” that a film must veritably attack the viewer, administering a succession of shocks to create the desired mood, that is, to agitate.⁹ As he writes in 1925, “[i]t is not a ‘Cine Eye’ that we need but a ‘Cine Fist,’” (Eisenstein 64; emphasis added).¹⁰ In this view, cinematic art ideally delivers stimulants designed to elicit, initially, certain reflexological responses, which in turn produce certain emotions, with the latter ultimately triggering the desired thought process. It was not the individual shots which were to produce this effect, however, but rather the jarring *juxtaposition* or “collision” of shots.

In a linguistic framework, Eisenstein looked for analogies between cinematic semiotics and language, entertaining the notion that the shot was analogous to a depictive sign and that shots were organized in a way similar to the syntactical structuring of language. Drawing on Japanese ideograms, Eisenstein saw the process of concept formation effected by the conjunction of object referent ideograms as being in some sense equivalent to film editing techniques. Thus ideograms depicting two concrete entities *dog* and *mouth* for example joined to form a concept (in this case *barking*). Apart from the fact that this theory is problematical from a linguistic perspective, it does not comply with Eisenstein’s demand that cinematic form provoke strong affect in the viewer. For this reason, the model ultimately proved unsatisfactory for his purposes, but it paved the way for a dialectical understanding of *découpage* cinepoetics.

On a purely perceptual level, the theorized dialectics of montage derive from a banal, but fundamental fact about cinematic art, namely that the individual frames of the celluloid product do not generate motion in themselves, but that it is by projecting individual frames in rapid succession that the *illusion* of motion is created. As Eisenstein argued at length in his 1929 “Dramaturgy of Film Form,” elucidating “The Dialectical Approach to Film Form” (Eisenstein 161), this kind of illusion making was dependent upon a pronounced configurational disparity between successive frames. In a dialectical vein, he saw the retinal perception of such disparity as performing the desired leap to a new “plane” of aesthetic expression, as generating the new, desired quality — this quality being: movement. This notion that montage unleashes a dialectical process is then taken to the level of the image. The juxtaposition of disparate, and thus tension producing images is seen by Eisenstein as a method for effecting qualitative “leaps” onto ever higher levels of cinempoetic form (Eisenstein 161–80). In contending, as I do, that Eisenstein looked for ways of generating “interaction” between shots, the term “interaction” can be read in the sense of “inter action,” as denoting action which takes place between or beyond the shot, with this action producing the desired qualitative leap.

This dynamic, dialectical notion of montage differed from the kind employed by Eisenstein’s contemporaries Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Pudovkin, who, as Eisenstein says, “regarded montage as a means of producing something by describing it, adding individual shots to one another like building blocks” (Eisenstein 163), adopting a “brick by brick” construction principle lacking in the explosive quality he himself was aiming for.¹¹ Not harmonious continuity, but disruptive contiguity was his ideal. In light of Eisenstein’s understanding of montage as I have presented it here (albeit, for want of space, only too schematically), Barthes’s appraisal of Eisenstein’s art seems surprisingly misguided. As he contends, the Eisensteinian film,

is a contiguity of episodes, each one absolutely meaningful, aesthetically perfect, and the result is a cinema by vocation anthological, itself holding out to the fetishist, with dotted lines, the piece for him to cut out and take away to enjoy, ... a summation of perfect instants. (Barthes 174)

What Barthes fails to recognize — perhaps in an overzealous attempt to “fill his gallery” — is that Eisensteinian cinempoetics is anything but anthological, its effect relying on a dialectics of juxtaposition at once studied and explosive. How then is Eisenstein’s place in Barthes’s equation to be defined? The question of differences and potential affinities poses itself.

One decisive way in which Eisenstein contrasts with Brecht and Fassbinder is in what he hopes to achieve with his brand of *découpage* aesthetics, for in one respect, his aesthetic aim is diametrically opposed to theirs. The latter put

their mutual stylistic strategy in the service of the desired alienation effect, employing it to undermine or prevent, from the very start, any affect driven identification with the protagonists on the screen, their aim being to evoke, instead, an eminently cognitive, critical response on the part of the viewer. In contrast, Eisenstein's intention was to generate highly charged emotions, to attack the viewer and provoke drastic responses. In the final instance, Fassbinder, Brecht, and Eisenstein pursue essentially the same goal, however, for the tripartite process which cinepoetic montage was designed to set in motion ultimately hoped to launch critical thought processes in the viewer.

Taking up, once more, the notion of continuity versus contiguity Kuleshovian versus Eisensteinian cinepoetics one last point might be made concerning potential affinities between Eisenstein and Fassbinder. Eisenstein's remark expresses the "anti," or "non narrative" impetus behind his aesthetics, and this equates, more or less, with a similarly pronounced, consciously "engineered" force in Fassbinder's take on *Effi Briest*. Eisenstein's involvement in the heated debate of his time as to how to standardize the dimensions of movie screens in cinemas is illuminating in this context. In this debate, he propagated a format which would allow the vertical axis to take perceptual dominance over the horizontal one. In advocating the introduction of what he called the "dynamic square," Eisenstein saw a way to escape from what he lamented as "passive horizontalism" (Eisenstein *ibid.* 207) and to remedy the "*exclu[sion]*" (Eisenstein *ibid.* 207; original emphasis) of "all the possibilities of *vertical, upright composition*" (Eisenstein *ibid.* 207; original emphasis), equating the horizontal bias of the standard screen with the "'narrative' type of picture" (Eisenstein *ibid.* 211) found in the "nineteenth century pre Impressionist period" (Eisenstein *ibid.* 210–11) and labeled by him as "the worst period of painting" (Eisenstein *ibid.* 211). Eisenstein's aesthetics of "plotless cinema," for which his montage technique was pivotal, is in keeping with such an "anti narrative" agenda.

It is significant that Fassbinder's propensity for presenting his figures in full length produces the kind of vertical dominance Eisenstein is also out to achieve. As an effect which creates a sense of great physical distance between the viewer and the figure on the screen, the pronounced verticality of Fassbinder's film shots is a constitutive element of the filmmaker's distanciation strategy. At the same time, it acts as an "antidote" to the kind of linear narrative continuity Eisenstein associated with "passive horizontalism." Interestingly, the turn to verticality as advocated and practiced by Eisenstein and Fassbinder can be seen in the context of the aforementioned discussion on the role played by the *figure*, that is, the *whole* human body, in a Diderotian tableau aesthetics. A dominance of the vertical over the horizontal caters to an aesthetic which calls for the (re)presentation of the full length, that is,



Fig. 2. Strategies for verticalizing the shot: Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Fontane Effi Briest*, 1974. Film black/white. Munich: Tango Film. Still courtesy of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation.

the whole figure while at the same time promoting what Brigitte Peucker calls a Diderotian “exterior[ization] of the spectator,” the effect of which stands in sharp contrast to that aimed for by the “dominant mode of narrative cinema,” this being “to conflate the camera eye with that of the spectator” (Peucker 25). Fassbinder’s excessive use of framing devices enhances the desired “exteriorization” enormously (cf. fig. 2). Thus as a spatial parameter, verticality promotes the desired distancing effect which Fassbinder is after in his Fontane adaptation while the tableau vivant, as the form which such verticality tends to take on here, suspends time and in doing so “defers narrative” (Peucker 25).

The marked will to counteract narrativity manifests itself in yet another salient feature of Fassbinder’s film as well, notably one which is closely connected with its *découpage* principle of composition, namely the “blotting out,” or rather, “whitening out” of the space “between the images” (in a temporal as well as a spatial sense). Whereas the fadeout to black, a technique



Fig. 3. Portraits of ladies – caught images: Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Fontane Effi Briest*, 1974. Film black/white. Munich: Tango Film. Still courtesy of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation.

devised to suggest that the image which has just vanished from the screen has some kind of afterlife, feeds the spectator's desire for an illusion of continuity, Fassbinder's fadeout to white technique, the trademark of his adaptation of *Effi Briest*, achieves the opposite. Significantly, this striking artifice undermines the narrative pull of the "storyline" just as it compels the viewer to engage with the work of art on a cognitive level, for the two effects are co dependent. As Fassbinder himself remarks,

"[the white fadeout is] one element of alienation. ... According to Kracauer, when it gets black, the audience begins to fantasize, to dream, and I wanted the opposite effect through white. I wanted to make them awake. It should not function like most films, through the subconscious, but through the conscious." (qtd. in Hughes and Riley, 16)

To borrow Barthes's words regarding Diderot's tableau, one can describe Fassbinder's shots by saying that "everything that surrounds [them] is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed" (Barthes 173). This is not a "nothingness," an "unnamedness" which invites the play of interpretation and signification processes on the part of the viewer, however.¹² To be sure, Fassbinder defies narrative convention by refusing to "connect the dots," leaving this task to the viewer, who must join together the individual shots to "tell the story," to "piece it together" herself, or, as Fassbinder puts it,

**Viele, die eine
Ahnung haben
von ihren Möglich-
keiten und
ihren Bedürf-
nissen und trotz-
dem das herr-
schende System
in ihrem Kopf
akzeptieren
durch ihre Ta-
ten und es so-
mit festigen
und durchaus bestätigen**

Fig. 4. “Forcing the word into the dictatorial vertical dimension” (Benjamin): Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Fontane Effi Briest*, 1974. Film black/white. Munich: Tango Film. Still courtesy of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation.

to “read” the film (qtd. in Thomsen, 46), but significantly, its trajectory is foregone. For this reason, I contend, we must not understand Fassbinder’s brand of active “reader” participation in a Barthesian “writerly” sense, as William R. Magretta does in his seminal investigation of Fassbinder’s film. As I argue, Fassbinder takes his cues from Fontane here. Fontane shows the relentlessness with which the social order upheld, so uncompromisingly, by Gert von Instetten, subscribes to a single “reading,” a single vision, and in employing his peculiar brand of *découpage* film aesthetics, Fassbinder follows suit. The “perfect composition” (“durchkomponiert”; Brecht 2: 77) is the epitome of the single vision which allows for no latitude of interpretation, for no play of signification. In Fassbinder’s notion of the “readerly” as a quasi Brechtian ideal which demands that the reader, or rather viewer, perform an active *monteur’s* task in his or her re construction of the narrative, the “dots” which are to be connected are pre positioned and immobile.

Fassbinder's *découpage* technique manifests itself in other dimensions as well, and the remarkable accumulation of effects which results evidences the appropriateness of its application for the *donnée* in question. In a sense the page, as an element of the material aesthetics of the book, provides the defining metaphor for Fassbinder's editing technique, with the fade outs to white between the shots corresponding to the turning of the page as the reader makes his or her way through the novel. If this self reflexive device is employed to highlight the adaptational nature of the filmic product, perpetually reminding the viewer of the fact that he or she is being presented with a "second order" rendition by evoking the almost tangible materiality of the word bound original, it is perhaps with a gesture of "mock" deference to the "mother art." Or does Fassbinder's screen *Effi* intend, by overtly demonstrating its "faithfulness" to the original, to point to what is lacking in the story's doomed adulterous protagonist?

Significantly, through the very choice of a certain visual leitmotif, *Effi*'s inability to collapse the boundaries erected by the minor aristocracy she has married into finds tangible image bound expression. I am referring to the previously mentioned persistent use of mirroring effects in the film. Time and again, *Effi*'s image is "caught," or "captured" in mirrors, doorways, and window frames. Interestingly, this excessive gesture finds application in terms of the other female figures as well (fig. 3). In Fassbinder's film the mirror, as a symbol of socially drawn boundaries, and not as the hallmark of any cult of subjectivity, develops an alarmingly public dimension, evoking visions of entrapment and censorship. An observation made by Walter Benjamin on the history of writing is illuminating in this context. In performing a sweeping retrospective, Benjamin speaks of the process during which the written word "began to lie down" the process during which "upright inscriptions" were gradually replaced by "manuscripts resting on slanted lecterns" before, with the advent of the printing press, the written word finally "bedded itself" (Benjamin 103). Benjamin identifies what he sees in his own day as a reverse development, a gradual regaining in dominance of "the vertical over the horizontal," with film and advertisements "forcing the written word completely into the dictatorial vertical dimension" (Benjamin 103). As he remarks, "the thick flurries of transmutable, colorful, contesting letters which alight before [the reader's] eyes lessen his chances of penetrating the archaic tranquility of the book" (Benjamin 103).¹³ One might ask oneself: Should the vertical bias of Fassbinder's film, contributed to by his *découpage* aesthetics, be seen as illustration of such a change of medial paradigm? Interestingly, the "public" quality of the mirrors which capture Fassbinder's *Effi* and their pronounced verticality are "reflected" in form and content by the inscription rendered in a long, narrow column which we are presented

with at the very beginning of the film (fig. 4).¹⁴ Does such mirroring tell us that Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* is ultimately to be read as a kind of Brechtian *Lehrstück* served up to Germany's post war generation?¹⁵ Or is the excessive use of framing devices—figures in mirrors, doors, and window frames—designed to foreground the very foundation of the filmic medium itself: the *frame*, as cell unit or filmic “morpheme”? What Fassbinder seems to be offering us in any case is a multi layered meditation on tasks and terrains of genre rendered through the play of *découpage* aesthetics on the divide: on the divide of word and image, page and screen.

NOTES

- 1 The title and subtitle—arguably the longest in film history—read: *Fontane Effi Briest oder Viele, die eine Ahnung haben von ihren Möglichkeiten und ihren Bedürfnissen und trotzdem das herrschende System in ihrem Kopf akzeptieren durch ihre Taten und es somit festigen und durchaus bestätigen* (1974); cf. Note 14 for the English translation of the subtitle. Other film adaptations of Fontane's novel include Gustaf Gründgens's *Der Schritt vom Weg* (1939), Veit Harlan's *Immensee* (1943), Rudolf Jugert's *Rosen im Herbst* (FRG, 1955), and Wolfgang Luderer's *Effi Briest* (GDR, 1968).
- 2 Generally speaking, the French term “*découpage*,” for which there is no real English equivalent, refers to the design or construction of a film as determined by the arrangement of its shots. The term “*découpage classique*” denotes the “Hollywood” style of editing which aims toward narrative continuity. The term is nevertheless open to (re)definition and interpretation, and this very fact reflects differences in filmmakers' and film historians' aesthetic convictions and the ideologies which inform them. In his seminal essay “Acinema,” Jean François Lyotard uses it to refer to “the cuts and splices of editing” as well as “the spatio temporal synthesis of the narration” (Lyotard 169). The seemingly paradoxical fact that the term applies to exclusion and synthesis alike derives from the generally acknowledged necessity of the cinematographer—the “inscriber of movement,” as Lyotard calls him or her—“to select, sort out and exclude” (Lyotard 169). In his aforementioned essay, Roland Barthes taps into the literal meaning of the word, defining *découpage* as the sovereign “act of cutting out,” this being, as he says, one aspect of the “dual foundation” of the “‘Organon of Representation’ ” (Barthes 172). A comment made by Jean Luc Godard in his capacity as film critic for *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* is illuminating in this context. As he writes, “the *découpage* of comic strips is aesthetically years ahead of film *découpage*” (qtd. in Roud, 67). In connection with this statement, Godard applauds the advent of a “bolder” style of editing in French film, a style which departs from the “*découpage classique*” striving for (narrative) continuity. Barthes's use of the term, which implies both exclusion and selective inclusion (insofar as what is “cut

out” constitutes a representational “cut out”) informs my inquiry. One could say that in Eisensteinian terms, this discourse on definitions and the concepts behind them presents itself as a theoretical and practical negotiation of continuity and “collision.” Cf. the following discussion of Eisenstein’s cinepoetics.

- 3 *Effi Briest* could be cited as an illustration of what David Barnett diagnoses as the tendency towards “de dramatization” to be found in “postdramatic theatre,” which he defines as a “theatre beyond representation, in which plot as structured time gives way to the a linear experience of text, and character itself becomes a ‘text bearer,’ the mere deliverer of words.” As Barnett argues, “the offer of a text to an audience without colouring or tone ... moves Fassbinder into [this] realm” (Barnett 254). It might be noted that Barnett makes no specific reference to Fassbinder’s Fontane adaptation in his study.
- 4 Cf. Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater*. When asked, in 1975, about Brecht’s influence on his cinematic work, Fassbinder answered: “What’s important to me and everyone else is the idea of alienation” (qtd. in Barnett, 251).
- 5 All translations from German are by the author
- 6 It is illuminating to consider the “painterly” effect of such tableaux poised, as Brigitte Peucker puts it, “at the interface between theater and painting” and providing, “no doubt,” a “model for tableau vivant” (Barnett 143) in terms of Bazin’s distinction, called attention to by Peucker, between the picture frame and the cinematic frame, with the first underscoring, as he observes, the “discontinuity between the painting and the wall, that is to say between the painting and reality” and the latter presenting itself, in his eye, as “the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality” (Bazin 166). As Peucker remarks in regard to Fassbinder’s *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972), “Fassbinder’s gesture of removing the painting [Poussin’s *Midas and Dionysos*] from the frame, as it were, ... suggests a comment concerning, on the one hand, the cinematic frame as reproducible image rather than Bazin’s slice of reality and, on the other, the extension of the representation space of painting into those of theater and film” (Peucker 150). For Peucker, the incorporation of the frameless painting into Fassbinder’s film also indicates the filmmaker’s “commitment to an art that typically transgresses boundaries of gender and genre, that insists on blurring the arts in a heterogeneous text in which literature and painting both have their sometimes disputed place” (Peucker 148). And as she continues, “we can recognize in Fassbinder an open allegorization of the themes whereby film willingly embraces its status as a hybrid text” (Peucker 148). The purpose behind such hybridization, as Peucker sees it, is highly significant, for, as she argues, Fassbinder’s “layering of painting, sculpture, theater, and the cinematic” serves as a means of “explor[ing] the place of the body within representation” (Peucker 148). This observation plays into a whole line of inquiry pursued at length by Peucker’s excellent study, but one which I can only touch upon here: the Diderotian notion, seized upon by Barthes in his aforementioned essay, that the human body – the *whole* human body, that is, the *human figure* – constitutes the object *and* agent of the single vision,

the single point of view. As Peucker sums up Diderot's "organic model," "the unity of a composition has its analogue for Diderot in the unity of the figure or body" (Peucker 25; cf. Barthes 174).

- 7 Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972) is a melodrama dedicated to Detlef Sierck alias Douglas Sirk, whose hallmark was mirrors, window frames, and doorways; Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* can be viewed as an intertextual homage to the purported master of the genre. As Brigitte Peucker points out, it "is commonly accepted that early cinema derives its tableau form from the staged melodrama" (Peucker 182). In exploring the roots of cinematography, Sean Cubitt contrasts "the stillness of the image and the motion of the body" as embodied in "the protocinema of railway travel" with the "complementary form, movement of the image and stillness of the body." Cubitt follows Augusto Boal in identifying this second "form of modernity" as originating in Greek drama, with the "protocinemas of the masque, the melodrama, and the magic lantern" adding "the spectacle of technique" (Cubitt 6). I am grateful to Catriona MacLeod for calling my attention to this direction of inquiry, which is beyond the scope of this essay.
- 8 As summarized by Bordwell (21); cf. Kuleshov 41. Significantly, Kuleshov emphasizes the synthesizing effect of montage as he understands it, namely as a device which organizes "separately filmed fragments, disordered and disjointed, into a more advantageous, integral and rhythmical sequence" (Kuleshov 41).
- 9 As Eisenstein writes, "[a]n attraction (in our diagnosis of theatre) is any aggressive moment in theatre, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator" (Eisenstein 34).
- 10 "*Cine Eye* (*Kinoglas*), a six reel exploration of 'life caught unawares,' directed by Vertov, was released on 13 October 1924" (Eisenstein 307).
- 11 Eisenstein, in "Beyond the Shot" (1929), elaborates on his ongoing dispute with Kuleshov School graduate Vsevolod Pudovkin, who, as Eisenstein says, "defend[ed] the concepts of montage as a *series* of fragments. In a chain. 'Bricks.' Bricks that *expound* an idea serially. I opposed him with my view of montage as a *collision*" (144). Cf. my discussion of the term *découpage* in Note 2.
- 12 For all the emphasis which Fassbinder puts on viewer engagement in regard to his *Effi Briest*, he does not expect the viewer, or "reader" of the film to "fill in the blanks" created by the "white zones" between the shots; paradoxically, Fassbinder envisions the images themselves as providing the "blank space" for the play of the viewer's imagination and emotion. In a conversation with Kraft Wetzel Fassbinder says: "I think the images are constructed in such a way that they almost function like blank film, so that even though there are images there, you can fill them again with your own imagination and your own emotions" (Fassbinder 157).
- 13 "Wenn ... [die Schrift] allmählich sich niederzulegen begann, von der aufrechten Inschrift zur schräg auf Pulten ruhenden Handschrift ward, um endlich sich im

Buchdruck zu betten, ... beginnt sie nun ebenso langsam sich wieder vom Boden zu heben. ... Film und Reklame drängen die Schrift vollends in die diktatorische Vertikale. Und ehe der Zeitgenosse dazu kommt, ein Buch aufzuschlagen, ist über seine Augen ein so dichtes Gestöber von wandelbaren, farbigen, streitenden Lettern niedergegangen, dass die Chancen seines Eindringens in die archaische Stille des Buches gering geworden sind" (Benjamin 103).

- 14 In the English translation this inscription, which in fact constitutes the subtitle of the film, reads as follows: "Many who have a sense of their possibilities and needs nevertheless acquiesce in the prevailing order through their actions, and thereby confirm and strengthen it absolutely" (cf. Magretta 258).
- 15 Albeit without the "dryness," the lack of "sensuality" which Fassbinder attributes to Brecht while subscribing to his didactic impulse (cf. Hughes and Riley 14).

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(Ideo-)Logical Alliances between Image and Script: Calligraphic Reconfigurations in Contemporary Chinese Art

Birgit Mersmann

In East Asia, the authority of script in terms of literacy and its power in terms of imagery have a long tradition. This legacy continues to live on, albeit only partially intact and critically reflected. The strong shaping power and impact script bears upon East Asian culture can be illustrated by two examples of urban planning, one from Korea and the other from China.

In the early 1920s, the Japanese, who had made Korea their protectorate, located the center from which they intended to rule and reshape the subjugated nation on the very grounds of the Kyōngbok kung, the Korean Royal Palace. The colonial authorities removed most of the royal buildings in order to erect the offices of the Government General in an architectural style similar to Western historicism and transformed the remainder of the Kyōngbok kung buildings into exhibition halls and a zoo. Viewed from the air, the new office building and the city hall building half a mile away were shaped to form the word “Japan” in Chinese characters (Breen 105). This colonial strategy documents that the Japanese were seeking to accomplish their colonial aim of amalgamating Korea and Japan into one single Japanese corporate state through the power of script. The character for Japan was thus engraved into Korean soil. By visually giving the idea a name, the intention was to effect its realization and embody facts. By using Chinese and not Japanese characters, the Japanese stressed the historically derived authority and formative power of script as prescription while at the same time it pointed to Chinese as the common origin of both the script and the shared culture within which the unification of Korea and Japan could be brought about.

If we turn to China we find that the shaping and effective power of Chinese characters likewise lives on in public space and city planning. In Shanghai's contemporary architecture and infrastructure characters accumulate to form symbolically loaded super signs of a growing urban and state power: highway tangents are constructed to form the Chinese character for Shanghai, thus realizing the promise of success and fortune inscribed into the city name. The image of the script shapes the city image; it is lifted out of the

two dimensionality of the visual and transposed into the three dimensionality of reality and life. The written sign is neither dead nor silent, it is moving and sprawling, crossed by arterial roads in which life incessantly flows and pulses.

These two examples make it evident that in East Asian culture script and image are tied very closely together. Genealogically, this can be explained by the fact that in China, images have evolved from writing: calligraphy emanated from writing, and ink painting in turn from calligraphy. Due to this interconnectedness between writing and painting, specific visual (media) forms of inscription have emerged, which escape western categories and thus reveal the existence of a specific mode of scriptural iconicity. Most notably and contrary to the widespread prejudice that scriptural definitions of the visual primarily appeal to the intellect and exclude sensory perception as well as sensuality the body as a whole is powerfully involved as script (image) producer, as both designer and sign. Aren't these ideal preconditions for brand(mark)ing? For projecting bodies by imprinting images onto the body, inscribing political messages, advertising slogans, logos, signs, and desires into it? For creating corporate through corporeal identity?¹

By looking at contemporary Chinese body and performance artists such as Xu Bing, Song Dong, Gu Wenda, Huang Yan, and Qiu Zhijie, it becomes manifest how complex the relationships between bodily inscription and corporate identification are be they cultural, national, or commercial. In the following, I wish to demonstrate how calligraphy, one of the predominant art forms in Chinese culture, as well as traditional print and stamp practices, are reinvented by the above mentioned contemporary artists as branding tools, be it to recompose and redefine cultural, personal, and bodily identity, or to undermine the cultural socialist paradigm of script as pre script and inscription into the body.

ICONOSCRIPTURES AS BODY PROJECTIONS

How could it happen that calligraphy, the most traditional art form throughout East Asia, predominantly practiced by the so called literati, the aesthetically educated elite officials, was reinvented as a branding tool? In order to understand this process of transition and revaluation, it is necessary to review briefly the characteristics of calligraphy, and how script and image, body and spirit interact within it.

Calligraphy is not to be regarded only as tidy and beautiful hand writing a misinterpretation unfortunately still alive but rather should be comprehended as projected corporeality, that is to say, as body project(ion) in

a concrete sense. Calligraphy serves to register the internal and external body motions, and therefore it authorizes itself as body mark. The calligrapher activates his or her body sense(s) in order to provide the characters with corporeality. In Chinese there is even a term that equates the calligraphic act of writing, the configuration of the characters within space, with the act of corporealization. The word *jieti* which is directly related to *jiezhi* (designing a character) literally means “to form the body of a character” (Billeter 27). The analogy between body (sense) and scriptural image is so pronounced that it includes a correlation between the condition of the body and the script’s gestalt – a correlation the beholder in turn can read out of the calligraphy, its script image. For script drawing is tracing the bodily self perception and is in turn capable of retroactively affecting the body of the script designer. Calligraphy is said to have positive effects on body and mind; in the long term it keeps the bodily energy budget in balance, strengthens the spirit, and prevents diseases.

The motion of the whole body is involved in the process of scribing; it is concentrated in the tip of the paintbrush. At the same time the body remains relatively calm in space. Precisely this external stasis of the body is the precondition for annihilating the bodily limits; this dissolving of the boundaries is in turn another precondition for being able consciously to perceive the inner (e)motions and impulses of one’s own body. It was the Swiss Sinologist Jean François Billeter who introduced the distinction between the proprietary body and the object(ive) body, that is to say the body of the Other which is perceived from outside, as an object, and because of this object status is bound to the model of mimetic representation – a distinction with great relevance for East Asian culture.² Not until the proprietary body is fixed in its subject position is bodily self perception rendered possible.

The outside space is the result of the external projection of one’s own bodily perceptions; those, in turn, evolve as interactions between interior and exterior space. Traditionally, nature functions as interaction partner: the landscape into which the body projects itself affects the spatial feeling: “la montagne nous met d’aplomb, la mer nous élargit, les fleuves nous donnent le sentiment de la continuité” (Billeter 145; “the mountain grounds us, the sea gives us depth, the rivers give us the feeling of continuity”). This interlacing of exterior nature and interior body is visualized by Liang K’ai’s twelfth century ink painting *An Immortal* (National Museum Taipei). The mountain steps out of the human body, the internalized landscape is projected outward so that the body image appears as natural scenery, and the correspondence between man and nature is revealed. Painting, in East Asia traditionally ink painting, inherits from calligraphy its somatic motivation and refers it to the handling of the paintbrush. In Ching Hao’s (905–58) treatise on painting, it is said



Fig. 1. Huang Yan (b. 1966), *Chinese Shan Shui Tattoo Series*, No. 6, Ciba chrome, 50 x 61 cm., 1999. Mauensee: Collection Uli Sigg.

that the flow of the paintbrush should be composed out of four elements: muscles, flesh, bones, and respiration.³ Shen Tsung Chien, another author of a treatise on painting, points out that the strokes of the paint brush represent the painting's backbone and that the totality of all strokes forms the skeleton without which the muscles and tendons would not be able to connect with each other and flesh and blood could not be alive. The definition of ink painting as analogous to the structure of the body is the central theme throughout the history and theory of Chinese painting. Certainly this accounts for the questioning and rearguing of the interrelation between body and visual representation precisely at the moment when western notions of the body (image), and concepts of embodiment immigrate into Chinese visual culture.

THINK TATTOO BRANDING BODY AND BRAIN

In the *Shan Shui Tattoo* series, Huang Yan achieves this analogy between body and landscape with his own body (fig. 1). It is as if he were literally illustrating Shen Tsung Chien's thesis that Chinese (ink) painting is made out of flesh and blood, and that painting is body projection. This view is confirmed by the fact

that in earlier works the artist daubed flesh and beef bones with mountainous landscapes. In the *Tattoo* series the body appears both as in reality and as an image. Through this doubling a perceptual shift takes place and the projective relations are inverted. The mountainous landscape does not step out from the interior via the imagination, but is projected and applied onto the body, imprinted as a tattoo to which the title refers. The branding of a real body followed by the photographic representation of the tattooed body marks a fundamental change of perspective that not only concerns the perceptual mode but also the gaze. When the projective relations between the perceiving body and the perceived image of nature are visualized in the picture itself, when they are self referentially reflected, then the proprietary body is transformed into an object body and the traditional Chinese body image which the artist himself illustrates by means of his own body comes closer to western body representation, that is to say the exhibition of the physical body. By taking the proprietary body into the picture, as the artist himself steps into it with his body creating an auto icon, the image is not any longer defined as a product of the body or as a seismographic body mark; it rather mounts the body, takes possession of it, seizes hold of it.

When images are projected onto a body, not only is it transformed into an object body; by the same token, the gaze is retrieved as a supervisory authority. Screen theory draws attention to the fact that the gaze is a means of projecting individuals as subjects. Referring back to Foucault's panopticon, Kaja Silverman stresses the fact that images projected by the gaze always tend to be ideological: the gaze is a "disciplinary apparatus allocating 'subject positions' to individuals, that means socially predetermined images of what the subject should be" (qtd. in Angerer, 32). Whereas in Huang Yuan's tattoo pictures the change of perspective, particularly the inscription of images into the body, still looks unideological, rather aesthetic, Qiu Zhijie's *Tattoo* series (figs. 2, 3) reveals the potential ideological shift.

If we bear in mind that in China the pictorial evolved on the basis of scriptural iconicity, and that calligraphy is somatically motivated, it stands to reason that the conflict between proprietary body and objective body is worked out at the intersection of script image and body image. It is the artist himself who brings his own body into the picture. By means of this representational act he converts his own self determined perceiving body into a perceived body, vulnerably exposed to the gaze. The nakedness, frontality, and openness of the self exposing body stresses that the body as object body is subjected to an external "opposing" gaze authority. The overscribing of the naked upper part of the body with the Chinese character for "no" or "you should not" in red color comes close to a disciplinary action (fig. 2). The horizontal upper stroke of the character, drawn over the mouth like a "ban on speaking" bar, marks

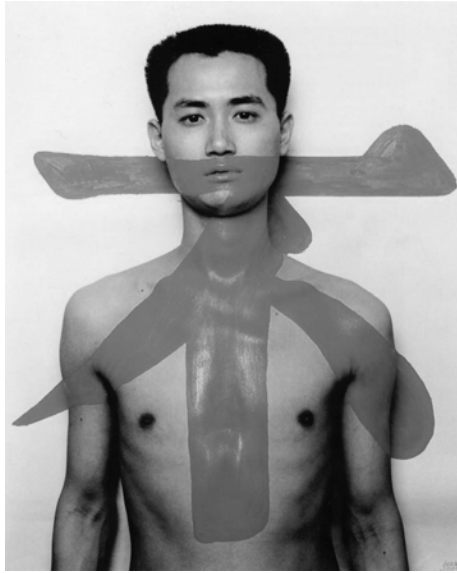


Fig. 2. Qiu Zhijie (b. 1969), *Tattoo Series*, No. 2. Cibachrome, 180 x 140 cm., 1994. Beijing: Collection of the artist.

the strangling of the body by a projected (script) image, by a “character” sign that is no longer organically interconnected with the body, inscribed into it as natural sign, but has detached itself from it, positioned as it is in front of the body, usurping it and thus gaining the status of a pre script. The blood red character, whose color refers to seals as authentication signs, crosses out the body as visible signifier and transmitter of identity, suffocates him as a speaking being involved in lively interaction with his environment. On the one hand, the stasis of the body is produced by virtue of the character itself: it settles onto the body, transgresses the bodily boundaries, drives and fixes the body to the wall. On the other hand, the visual medium of photography effects the fixing of the body, which in turn sets off the eye’s fixation on the body.

The fact that the clash between the real body and the (script) image to which the former is subject is realized in the medium of photography has much to do with the mediality of the photographic image; for photography, as a visual medium that represents a highly technical means of reproduction, turns the body into an image. Through reduplication by media technology, the body is reduced to a mirror image and the true perceiving body increas

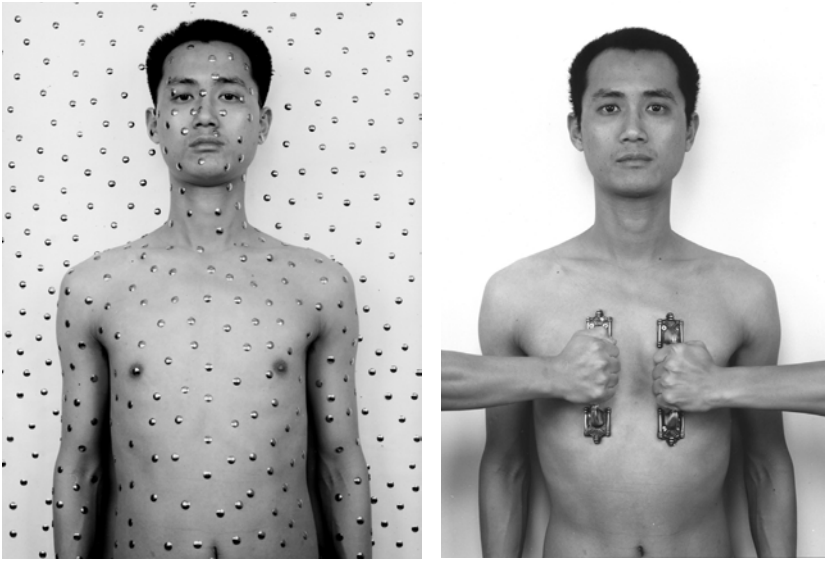


Fig. 3. Qiu Zhijie, *Tattoo* Series nos. 1 and 9. Cibachrome, 180 x 140 cm., 1994. Beijing: Collection of the artist.

ingly disappears behind its image, its exterior perception. What remains is the body fixed by and within the photographic image. The representational mode in which the artist allows himself to be photographed documents the fact that the position from which the body of the subject is visualized is called into question: he poses in front of the camera like a criminal whose unknown or dubious identity will be determined through the pictorial incorporation of his real body, its photographic fixation, and the scriptural character.

This tacking on of identity, its being tattooed into the body, is articulated more explicitly in Qiu Zhijie's *Tattoo* pictures nos. 1 and 9 (fig. 3). The puncturing of the represented body, as well as of the entire image surface, refers to tattooing as inscription into the body, while also hinting at the potential ideological danger of stigmatization is referred to. *Tattoo* picture no. 9 displays the marking of the body as the labeling of the person; the identity marks are branded into the flesh. Two irons, presumably door handles, are impressed into the breast close to the heart. This form of imprinting is tied to the Chinese tradition of certifying and authenticating pictures by means of name seals; yet, at the same time, it undermines the imprinting power and formative authority of script by replacing the seal with door handles in an ironic turn.



Fig. 4. Xu Bing (b. 1955), *A Case Study of Transference*, Performance at the Han Mo Arts Center in Beijing, 1994. New York: Courtesy Xu Bing Studio. Photo Xu Zhiwei.

FROM IDEOLOGY TO IDEOGRAPHY: RECONFIGURING AND RECORPOREALIZING THE SCRIPT IMAGE

The uncovering and undermining of the supremacy of script, its predetermining effect on the subject, as played through in Qiu Zhijie's *Tattoo* series, is not an individual case; it is rather a type of strategy which can be found throughout Chinese body and performance art, albeit differently orientated and implemented. In Xu Bing's *A Case Study of Transference* (fig. 4), a happening which first took place at the Han Mo Arts Center in Beijing in 1994, branding is literally realized as bodily inscription.

In a pen strewn with books in many languages, the artist put a male and a female pig that, it was hoped, would mate with one another. Then the artist and his assistants printed the pigs' skins with orderly rows of invented Chinese characters on the female and invented English words on the male. While the possibility existed that the pigs would not fulfill the author's expectations, they did however perform at length, mating repeatedly. Since the pigs had been transformed into vehicles of culture by the printing of letters and

characters on their bodies, their sexual union became a symbol of cultural transference, the western anglophone and the Chinese culture unified in the image of copulating pigs. The male West passes his cultural heritage on to the receptive, female China. The union of the script bodies suggests Chinglish as a transcultural language. Or, should we see in the performed sexual act a rape, a taking over of Chinese culture by the western anglophone culture?

Upon closer scrutiny, the union between the cultures turns out to be a farce and a fiction. The linguistic signs are already fragmented intraculturally, they appear as pure script and phonetic images that in fact negate a message oriented conventional transference of meaning. The signification and imprinting power of script is evaded by impressing texts that are composed of freely invented Chinese characters and made up English words. The newly configured Chinese characters derive from the *Book from the Sky* (1987–91) for which the artist engraved 4,000 arbitrarily composed characters into small squares of wood, thus producing print letters or more precisely print characters as text modules. By inventing so called “square words” a term referring to the imaginary square in the midst of which the Chinese character positions itself the transference of meaning is foiled. What remains is the materiality of the characters, the corporeality of script beyond its educational mission. The pigs do not care about the script culture, their instinct is not held back by the superficial layering, namely, the texts imprinted onto their flesh, or their cultured surroundings, the book strewn pen. They perform transculturally (that is, beyond cultural prescriptions) as living bodies of flesh and blood. It is precisely this natural vitality inscribed into the body that Xu Bing and other contemporary Chinese artists, who critically deal with their own script imaging, with literate culture, and with its instrumentalization for communist propaganda purposes, try to revive in the domain of scriptural iconicity.

Gu Wenda, for instance, in his installation *United Nations* uses human hair to weave tapestries with self invented, illegible pseudo words written in different scripts. In *Printing on Water*, Song Dong makes an attempt to reanimate the ossified script, its dead sign character, by betaking himself into the midst of a river landscape and repeatedly, under physical strains, printing on water with a script seal in which the Chinese character for water has been engraved. Life is a continuous flow, which can neither be halted nor prescribed; script as bodily trace is an expression of this natural dynamic. When script is prescribed an act by which the imaging power switches from bodily presence to bodily representation ideology slips into ideology.

How relevant the recovery of natural semiotics, of script (images) as natural script(s) is, can best be exemplified by Xu Bing's *Silkworm* series (Tsan Series, 1994–95; fig. 5). In a first step, the artist pasted up open pages of books with white paper strips. In a second step, he placed egg laying moths on it.

For the *Silkworm* series, he placed them upon old Chinese books, Cultural Revolution artifacts, newspapers, and a computer with a flickering, text filled monitor. When the egg laying process was complete, the paper strips were removed. Rows of black eggs appeared, stunningly resembling the text columns of a book or written documents – proving by experiment the natural origin of script.

That natural script indeed lives a performative life of its own, that it escapes any prescription, is documented by further developments: the hatched larvae crawled over the pages and muddled the orderly arrangement; thus, the script image they embody was set in motion, squirmed about, and wandered off the page. It moved, dissolved, and finally disappeared. The power of the script to embody is also confirmed by the fact that the Chinese character for “silkworm” is homonymous with the character for “damage” and “disfiguration.” For the larvae began spinning silk threads to create a cocoon within which they can evolve into moths, they incorporated the script/literate culture represented by the texts and books and transformed it into natural and embodied script. Script was thus divorced of ideology, stripped of its logos, its rationalist logic, and transformed into a script of natural iconicity.

From these examples, it becomes clear that it is precisely the somatic foundation of scriptural iconicity that abets its misuse as a powerful instrument of indoctrination. Because scriptural iconicity is projected corporeality, it can also be instrumentalized for the purpose of reverse projection, the project(ion) of the subject by the inscription of ideas and mental images into the body. The body as a self-perceiving proprietary body is wiped out by this empowering act of over-scripting, it mutates into a heteronymous object body that is naked and exposed to the gaze and to a controlling authority beyond itself. Wherever the ideography of Chinese script, within a communist context and with the help of socialist cultural propaganda, is recast into an ideology of prescription that follows the rational logic of an arbitrary and representational script system, the relationship between (script) image and body is deferred. The body appears as a real body inside the picture, thereby becoming one that is represented and therefore reflected, a notional imaginary projection screen. A visual medium, mainly photography, joins in as a mediator between body and image. The body becomes image, and the image becomes a self-referential representation of the interactive relationship between imagination as bodily image production and iconicity as a body external image product.

It is in this decorporealization of the script image that contemporary Chinese body and performance artists not only display but also reflect a loss of their own script/literate culture. They point to the fact that the moment of contact and tangency, of the bodily sense immediately becoming image, is now missing – that moment of central significance in calligraphy and ink



Fig 5 Xu Bing, *Silkworm Book*, 1995 Silk and cocoons on book, on board; Silkworm eggs on book, 56 x 56 x 12 cm , 1995 New York Courtesy Xu Bing Studio

painting. The traditional script image is generated by the imprint of a body on a surface; the paintbrush takes in the pressure and bleeds it off. The image support medium, paper or silk, reacts in correspondence with that pressure. To paraphrase Georges Didi Huberman: it is the (im)pressing gesture, the touching gesture that produces the script image as body index.⁴

In East Asia, iconicity arises from the premise of a script/literate culture, in which handwriting, seal script, and print play an equipollent role because they underlie the same impression paradigm. Scriptural iconicity is based on imprinting. It is a matter of tattooing, impregnation, and indentation. Impression and imprint coincide with the script image. Where direct contact is perturbed or interrupted, where the body is labeled as a decal picture of the script and made to stand still, Chinese body and performance artists intervene with their attempts at reanimation. The body contact is re conquered by undermining script as a transmitter of meaning and revitalized by imprinting characters into shut down bodies.

NOTES

- 1 See Wheeler; Balmer and Greyser; and Hyland and King.
- 2 See Billeter, chapter 7: "Le Corps actif."
- 3 "Le pinceau comprend quatre composantes: le *chin* [muscle], le *jou* [chair], le *ku* [os] et le *ch'i* [souffle]. Là où le trait tracé s'interrompt sans que l'élan s'arrête, c'est le muscle. Où le trait, en son plein et son délié, exprime la substance charnelle des choses, c'est la chair. Où le trait, vigoureux et droit, est traversé de force vitale, c'est l'os. Où le trait, se combinant avec d'autres traits, concourt au maintien in tact de l'image peinte, c'est le souffle" (qtd. in Cheng, 26).
- 4 "[...] l'empreinte suppose un *support* ou substrat, un *geste* qui l'atteint [en général un *geste* de pression, au moins un contact], et un résultat mécanique qui est une marque, en creux ou en relief" (Didi Huberman 23).

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