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CONTENTS
Volume 23
2007

Articles

Interview

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Debating Domesticity: Gender Roles in Tompkins Matteson's *Now or Never*

Cory Pillen

> But when Miss Rebecca Sharp and her stout companion lost themselves in a solitary walk... they both felt that the situation was extremely tender and critical, and now or never was the moment, Miss Sharp thought, to provoke that declaration which was trembling on the timid lips of Mr. Sedley.
>
> —William M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 1848

In this passage from *Vanity Fair*, the phrase "now or never" lends a sense of immediacy and tension to the courtship scene that Thackeray describes. The phrase suggests an action that has yet to transpire but one with important consequences for its participants. Like Thackeray, American artist Tompkins Harrison Matteson (1813–1884) engaged with tensions surrounding courtship in his 1849 painting *Now or Never* (fig. 1). Matteson's painting shows a young man, well-dressed and kneeling on a bench, leaning intimately toward the woman seated next to him. The September 1849 *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* describes the scene as taking place in the interior of a farmer's kitchen. The *Bulletin* explains that on "the left, beside an open window, through which the summer breeze is blowing, sits the young lady of the house, who has fallen asleep while sewing. Her lover has just made up his mind and his lips to kiss her, but turns partly around to ascertain if his motions are perceived by the old people."[1]

In many respects, *Now or Never* can be viewed as a lighthearted image of rustic courtship. Although the farm kitchen is sparsely furnished, it is cheerful and suggests the upright and honest values, promoted as a moral ideal in the popular press, that many antebellum citizens associated with rural families. An abundance of apples lies in a bowl on the floor, and cabbage, carrots, onions, and beets surround the kitchen table, suggesting that the family is rich, if not in worldly goods, then at least in the items necessary for a healthy and happy life. Also suggesting this rural ideal is the young lady who turns away from her suitor and is seemingly unaware of his advances. She can be seen as well mannered and virtuous, suggesting her suitability as a potential marriage partner.

A closer look at *Now or Never*, however, complicates this ideal of domesticity. The young woman basks in sunlight flowing in from an open window, a common symbol of freedom and longing in early nineteenth-century genre painting.[2] The blue of the young woman's dress evokes the blue of the sky, linking her with the world outside the window. Similarly, a sheer curtain hanging from the window blows in toward the maiden, its fabric mirroring the shape of her shawl. Countering the traditional domestic model, these formal associations between the maiden and the window could signify an alternative life for the woman, one free from the burdens of marriage and domesticity that her suitor might represent.

As *Now or Never* suggests, antebellum genre paintings engender multiple meanings that speak to the culture in which they were produced. Art, like society, is multivalent and contradictory, often reinforcing the ideologies of its time as well as resisting them. As art historian David Lubin

Fig. 1 Tompkins Harrison Matteson (American, 1813–1884), *Now or Never*, 1849, oil on canvas, 27 x 34 in. (68.6 x 86.4 cm). The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY (The Clark Collection, 1961.1. Photo: Gary Mamay)

has explained, the goal of the scholar is not to determine on which side a painting falls, whether it ultimately upholds or resists dominant norms, but how it functioned in a diverse and self-opposing culture.[3] This essay builds upon the work of Lubin, Elizabeth Johns, and other scholars who have recently reconsidered antebellum genre painting by addressing the multiple ways that Matteson and *Now or Never*, a little-studied painter and painting, engaged with antebellum debates regarding gender roles.[4] Acknowledging the contested nature of the issue, which was openly discussed in print media like illustrated magazines, Matteson created an image that both adhered to and challenged dominant cultural beliefs regarding women's roles and rights. Moreover, by crafting a painting that allowed for multiple interpretations, Matteson actively participated in and facilitated the dialogue, allowing viewers to confront a range of viewpoints regarding prescribed behavioral norms and the role of women in the home.

In his 1867 biographical compendium of American artists, Henry T. Tuckerman described Matteson as a "pioneer genre painter" whose early years were a story of "hardship and struggle which seems like the opening chapter of a local novel."[5] Born in Peterboro, New York on May 9, 1813, Matteson began studying art at an early age. In addition to copying the work of an itinerant silhouette-limner in Peterboro, Matteson studied art with a prisoner who was awaiting trial for

murder in the Morrisville jail.[6] Following these and other informal lessons, Matteson traveled throughout New York State painting portraits. After several years of working as an itinerant painter and refining his artistic skills at institutions like the American Academy of Fine Arts, Matteson moved to Sherburne, New York and married Sarah Elizabeth Merrill.[7] In 1841 the couple relocated to New York City, where Matteson began to solidify his reputation as an artist and became active in arts organizations such as the American Art-Union and the National Academy of Design. Surrounded by painters like William Sidney Mount (1807–1868), who was among Matteson's circle of acquaintances, he began to experiment with new subjects, painting historical scenes and genre images like *Now or Never*.[8] Despite achieving a significant level of success in New York City, Matteson returned to Sherburne in 1850, where he remained until his death in 1884. In Sherburne, Matteson completed numerous patriotic and historical paintings and took aspiring artists under his tutelage, including the painter Elihu Vedder.[9]

Matteson painted *Now or Never* while living in New York City and sold the work to the American Art-Union after its completion.[10] Subsidized by subscription dues, the Art-Union purchased paintings to be exhibited in its gallery and then reproduced the works as engravings for Art-Union subscribers or distributed them by lottery in an annual ceremony.[11] *Now or Never* was exhibited in the Art-Union's gallery and won by N.W. Briggs of Boston in the Union's December 1849 lottery.[12] While working to promote a national school of art, the Art-Union sought to elevate the "tastes" of the American public while simultaneously appealing to its predominantly middle-class subscribers.[13] Although the Art-Union claimed that these members were distributed throughout the United States, the bulk of its subscribers were based in the Northeast, where the majority of Matteson's own patrons were located.[14]

To understand the meaning that *Now or Never* held for Matteson and antebellum viewers, we need to see it as a product of, and a participant in, the complex culture in which it was created. The antebellum years marked a period of rapid economic and cultural development in America. Cities expanded with the rise of industrialization and changing cultural attitudes challenged earlier patterns of social behavior. As the economy shifted away from home-based production, many Americans migrated to urban areas and took jobs as wage laborers. Sons left farms to find work in the cities and daughters were employed as domestics, teachers, and mill girls, among other occupations.[15] While these cultural changes presented new opportunities to many Americans, others felt that they posed a threat to the established social order. The traditional elites feared the increasing wealth and social mobility of a growing middle class that asserted its increasing economic power and desire for social equality.[16] Moreover, many Americans, regardless of class, felt that the rapid expansion of cities, with their unsavory characters and commercial emphasis, posed a threat to traditional republican values and moral order.

As fears regarding America's social structure increased with the growth of urban areas and the middle class, many Americans sought new ways to mold the behaviors and opinions of their fellow citizens. Social reformers challenged artists to adapt their profession to practical needs and enlisted them in the struggle to improve the nation's morals and manners. These reformers believed that art's refining and elevating influence had the potential to temper social ills by promoting proper

values and conduct.[17] *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art*, for instance, noted in 1851 that "all men are rendered happier and better by the power to appreciate fine forms; the mind becomes refined, and with it a gentleness of feeling, and consequent kindness of heart, renders the community happier and less restive in disposition."[18] In the same spirit, an 1845 issue of *The Anglo-American* suggested that art tends "to implant nobler and better feelings in society, to diminish vice, to encourage virtue, to aid the mechanic arts and to benefit the community in every way possible."[19]

The integration of art and morality during the antebellum period was coupled with the call for a national art representative of American life and values. Genre paintings fulfilled both needs by depicting everyday scenes of American life that simultaneously celebrated and shaped America's citizens.[20] Genre paintings illustrated a wide variety of American places, from rural and urban areas to the untamed frontier. They also reinforced and advocated particular ideologies, addressing social and political issues by depicting tensions surrounding race, gender, and class.[21] Many domestic genre paintings, for example, illustrated an idealized view of the American home and suggested particular codes of behavior governing domestic interaction. The ideal that emerged in these images was grounded in the values of middle-class Northerners. The images expressed what Americans with adequate means from primarily mercantile and industrial backgrounds believed exemplified America's morals and manners.[22]

In *Now or Never*, Matteson uses compositional elements and character typing that suggests a social model scholars have termed the "ideology of domesticity."[23] The behavioral ideals associated with this ideology became especially important during the antebellum period, in part to combat the perceived degradation of the family and the loss of American morals resulting from dramatic regional and socio-economic shifts. A middle-class cultural phenomenon, it found expression in a variety of forms, including songs, sermons, literature, and theatre, as well as in prints and paintings.[24] Proponents of the domestic ideal, who included ministers, reformers, and educators, among others, advocated a separation between the domestic sphere and the male-dominated public sphere. In contrast to the public sphere, which was associated with the world of business and urban life, the domestic sphere was considered the domain of women and the place where proper manners and morals were instilled.[25] Advocates of the ideology, in addition to suggesting a predominantly domestic life for women, outlined a narrow set of behavioral norms that defined women's proper social conduct. In addition to being sincere, the ideal woman was pious, pure, and virtuous.[26] In the view of antebellum sentimentalists, these traits made women particularly suited to counter the materialism and deceit of the public realm. Women were charged with using their skills to make the home a place where men could find refuge from the vexations and pecuniary values pervading their work lives.[27]

Scholars such as Nancy Cott, Stephanie Coontz, and Kathryn Kish Sklar have suggested that the ultimate function of the ideology of domesticity was public.[28] By fulfilling their domestic duties and ensuring the moral health of their families, women were thought to be maintaining social stability and working for the success of the republic. Sarah Josepha Hale (1788–1879), editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, opined that "[t]he prevailing manners of an age depend, more than we are aware

of, or are willing to allow, on the conduct of the women: this is one of the principle things on which the great machine of human society turns."[29] Reformers like Hale enlisted genre images similar to *Now or Never* in prescribing morals and manners associated with the ideology of domesticity, encouraging their exhibition and dissemination through the popular press. Genre images, with their anecdotal scenes and stereotyped characters, satisfied the requirements of moral reformers who felt that images must be intelligible to a large audience to be an effective tool of social reform. Elizabeth Johns suggests that genre painters used typing to distinguish their characters by class, gender, age, intelligence, and manners. Rather than portraying real individuals, genre paintings depict anonymous Yankee farmers, country bumpkins, unscrupulous merchants and, in the case of *Now or Never*, virtuous young maidens and conniving young men. Johns notes that genre artists drew their models from social relationships and prejudices already in place in antebellum society, making the types discernable to a large audience. This method of social typing provided a way for individuals to order their relationships in a culture of rapid economic and social change, distinguishing themselves from others and providing a framework for their social interactions.[30]

Matteson uses typing in *Now or Never* to communicate ideals associated with the ideology of domesticity. For instance, he sets up a series of comparisons between types that serves to illustrate the distinction between virtue and vice. Juxtaposing the virtuous young woman with her suitor, Matteson suggests a domestic ideal for women and invokes behavioral norms surrounding courtship. Similarly, Matteson contrasts the older and younger couples, providing the viewer with a model of familial harmony in the older pair, who are situated in a recessed area on the right of the image.

The young woman in *Now or Never* suggests antebellum ideals associated with the ideology of domesticity. During the antebellum period, beauty and fashion were considered measures of taste

Fig. 2 Fashion Plate, Engraved by J.L. Pease, *Godey's Lady's Book* 38 (April 1849): 299. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-48150)

Fig. 3 Jones, *The Favored Captives*, Engraved by Rawdon, Wright & Hatch, *Graham's Magazine* 25 (May 1844): between 204 and 205. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-43454)

and goodness. They reflected the inner nature of a woman and were expressions of her virtue and purity.[31] The ideal woman was often a model of beauty and exhibited good taste in both appearance and behavior. Embodying these characteristics, the young maiden in *Now or Never* is clothed in a becoming blue dress decorated with polka dots. Her pink apron is drawn up over one knee with her skirt falling gracefully to the floor, her slippered feet peeking out daintily from beneath its hem. Although not obviously corseted, the woman sits with a straight back. The bodice of her dress is tucked into the narrow binding of her skirt, its material converging in such a manner as to emphasize her small waist. The woman's hair is parted in the middle, braided, and brought back into a fashionable low coil at the back of her head.[32] In many respects, the young woman closely resembles the figures depicted in antebellum fashion plates, such as one included in the April 1849 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book* (fig. 2). She has a similar dress and hairstyle and exhibits equally delicate facial features, slender arms, and tiny feet. The maiden also communicates the same demure manner as the fashion models through her sloping shoulders and down-turned head.

Further reinforcing the ideals associated with young women of marriageable age, Matteson includes objects that can be read as symbols of the maiden's virtue and domestic ability. For instance, the woman has a needlework project draped across her lap and a box of sewing supplies rests on the table. Charged with tending and beautifying the home, antebellum women were expected to be skilled needleworkers. Women occupied themselves with practical tasks like darning clothes and produced decorative household items such as quilts, pillows, and seat covers.[33]

A birdcage hanging from the ceiling also serves as a sign of the maiden's readiness for domestic life. Birds served as emblems of love in the Dutch genre paintings that influenced many American artists and were often shown in cages as symbols of domesticity and chastity during the colonial period.[34] Suggesting this same association during the antebellum period, a poem in the May

1844 edition of *Graham's Magazine* uses the metaphor of a caged bird contentedly singing behind its "prison bars" to signify a beloved woman in her domestic environment. The accompanying illustration, *The Favored Captives* (fig. 3), depicts a woman leaning out of a window to look at two birds in a cage. The arch of the window and the window's multiple panes frame the woman in the composition and suggest the cage of the captive animals. Matteson, too, visually cages the maiden in *Now or Never* between a table, the mirror, and her suitor, emphasizing a connection in the image between the maiden and the birdcage. Raised above the scene in *Now or Never*, the birdcage alludes to the propriety of the maiden and implies that she is capable of an elevated love of the type thought necessary for a successful marriage.

Likewise, the plants in the window and on the shelf above the maiden are suggestive of the young woman's proper upbringing. Often associated with women and children, plants and flowers signified maternal care and piety. Influential author Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance, wrote several books and articles on cultivating a proper home and the joys of nurturing young creatures, including plants.[35] Similarly, Margaret Coxe's essay "Floral Lessons in Morals," included in the April 1843 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*, discusses the role of flowers in the moral instruction of youth. Coxe stated that "the youth of our country may be brought...to a more lively perception of the love of God...and may be better prepared hereby to appreciate the same divine attribute in the moral universe" through an appreciation of flowers. Coxe explained that the contemplation of flowers may be a "balm for the healing of nations," a sentiment that antebellum reformers also expressed when discussing both women and art.[36]

In contrast to the young woman who, in many ways, suggests the antebellum ideal, her suitor can be seen as a character of questionable intent and behavior. He bends mischievously over the maiden, who is seemingly unaware of his proximity. A light orange shawl draped over her shoulders is loose on one side, exposing the full length of her neck to the looming young man. Glancing over his shoulder to make sure that the woman's parents are occupied, he can be seen as both humorous and alarming in his drive to kiss the maiden.

Antebellum artists often employed humorous characters and situations to engage the viewer and ridicule inappropriate conduct.[37] The young man's comical countenance and awkward stance imply that he could be an object of satire. Advice writers of the period often equated a person's physiognomy with his or her moral character, asserting that facial expressions, dress, and posture reveal an individual's inner feelings and temperament.[38] Whereas the woman's placid face in *Now or Never* suggests her moral integrity, the man's mischievous demeanor and ungainly stance expose his flawed character and lack of sophistication. With one hand on the wall and one knee on a bench, the young man exemplifies the poor social behavior admonished in antebellum advice manuals.[39] *The Gentleman's and Lady's Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment*, for instance, explains that the body "betrays to the observer all the shades of character" and warns against the use of "strange motions, ridiculous gestures, pretending attitudes, affected looks, and clownish movements."[40] Another etiquette manual, warning young men to never elevate their feet or lounge on one side, explains that "too much care cannot be exhibited in one's attitude," particularly when one is "in the company of ladies."[41]

The young man's behavior not only betrays improper visiting etiquette but inappropriate conduct in courtship. Although young people were given some autonomy and privacy to develop relationships, they were trusted to act according to appropriate codes of behavior that were addressed in antebellum etiquette books. One manual suggested that a "young man who solicits a lady in marriage, should be extremely devoted and respectful" and should avoid "all misplaced familiarity."[42] Similarly, the *Ladies and Gentlemen's Pocket Companion of Etiquette and Manners* explained that everything "secret and unacknowledged is to be avoided, as the reputation of a clandestine intercourse is always more or less injurious through life. The romance evaporates, but the memory of the indiscretion survives."[43] While the reality of antebellum courtship most likely deviated from this prescriptive literature, the young man, nevertheless, strays from the ideal by surreptitiously trying to steal a kiss from the maiden.

Francis W. Edmonds's *The Image Peddlar* (fig. 4) shares compositional similarities with *Now or Never* and provides a point of comparison for analyzing the young man's behavior. Both paintings depict the interior of a rural cottage with a table near the window and a woman engaged in domestic activity in a recessed area. Moreover, each depicts a male visitor in a central position in the scene. Matteson, working in New York from 1841 to 1850, would have most likely been familiar with *The Image Peddlar*, which was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1844.[44] Edmonds was one of the most celebrated artists in New York during the period, and several of his paintings were made into prints and distributed through the American Art-Union. Edmonds even encouraged the Art-Union to purchase Matteson's *The Spirit of '76* in 1845, which suggests that the two artists may have been acquainted.[45]

Fig. 4 Francis William Edmonds, *The Image Peddlar*, 1844, oil on canvas, 33 x 42 in. Collection of the New-York Historical Society, New York, NY (Accession #1858.71)

The Image Peddlar depicts a rural family visited by an itinerant peddler selling small sculptures that include political figures. On the right side of the picture, several women are shown gazing at the peddler's goods while another attends to domestic tasks in the background. The men, situated by the window on the left, are grouped around a bust of George Washington, which is presumably one of the peddler's wares. The New England peddler was a common caricature during the antebellum period, depicted in printed material and portrayed by actors on the New York stage. Characterized as a master trickster, the peddler was believed to travel America selling wares of often dubious value and quality. He became a national symbol of exchange conducted quickly and a character whose moral integrity had been eroded from a life driven by profit.[46] In Edmonds's painting, image peddling refers to both the sculptures that the peddler sells and the antebellum practice of promoting political candidates with misleading images.[47] Matteson, in many ways, suggests that the suitor in *Now or Never* is also an image peddler, presenting himself as something he is not. Well dressed in a jacket, bow-tie, and yellow satin vest, the suitor is clothed to impress the young woman and her parents. Nevertheless, the young man's unsophisticated behavior seems to contradict his respectable attire, which bears a striking resemblance to the jacket, bow-tie, and vest ensemble that the peddler wears. His actions belie his garb and can be seen as exposing his true character and lack of moral integrity.

Just as Edmonds's peddler provided a parallel for the suitor, the parents in *Now or Never* offer a point of comparison from which to evaluate the potential couple. Unlike the young woman's suitor, Matteson depicts the father at ease in the domestic sphere. He is shown smoking a pipe and watching his wife prepare dinner. The hearth illuminates the pair, suggesting warmth and familial comfort.[48] In this glimpse of domesticity, Matteson portrays the mother as integral to the success of the scene. Her activity and industry have produced both a contented husband and a seemingly virtuous daughter. By juxtaposing this ideal image of domesticity with the awkward courting scene, Matteson provides a standard for middle-class behavior and seems to reinforce stereotypes of women as caretakers of the domestic realm. The older couple provides an ideal to which the young pair can aspire. Similarly, the young woman's mother becomes a model for her future, a suggestion that is reinforced by the similar attire that the two women share.

Defining the women in *Now or Never* in relation to the men, Matteson implies that the young woman's virtue and domestic skill, documented by the many emblems of propriety that surround her, are essential for refining the unsophisticated nature of her suitor. Women, in addition to providing a retreat where men could escape from the materialism and hardship of their public lives, were thought to exert a refining influence on their male counterparts. A woman's superior sensibilities and beauty could promote a man's virtuousness and encourage genteel behavior and values. In 1845, a young Midwesterner wrote to his fiancée that the "true female character was perfectly adapted and designed by its influence often exerted to soften and beautify the wild rough and turbulent spirit of man."[49]

Matteson compositionally reinforces the maiden's obligation toward marriage and her suitor. He frames the scene with two tables placed near the foreground of the image. From each table Matteson leads the viewer diagonally toward the center of the picture, where the young man is

Fig. 5 Tompkins Harrison Matteson, *The Unwilling Bride*, Engraved by H. S. Sadd, *Union Magazine* 1 (October 1847): between 176 and 177. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-43460)

stationed at the apex of a triangle delineated by an uncluttered area of wood floor. The placement of the young man, who divides the maiden and her parents, suggests that the woman is being asked to choose between her former life and marriage. Matteson implies that the parents, who are placed in a secondary position and recessed in the image, belong to the woman's past. Using these compositional strategies to suggest a separation between the maiden and her parents, Matteson depicts a reality of marriage for many antebellum women. With marriage, which initiated a woman's vocation as wife, mother, and domestic caretaker, came demanding duties that meant less time for extended family and friends. The author of a poem entitled "The Bride's Soliloquy," although embracing her new role as wife, outlined the consequences of marriage on a woman's familial relationships. The poem, included in the April 1844 edition of *The Ladies' Companion*, exclaims:

> HAVE I no more a place in that dear home,
> Where tiny footsteps and the merry laugh
> Of childish glee, bade slumb'ring echoes wake?...
> Home of my early days, and dear tried friends,
> Guides of my infant years, guards of my youth—
> Farewell!—Often we may not meet, yet I
> Shall live in your affections—ye in mine.[50]

Just as the suitor in *Now or Never* constitutes a barrier between the woman and her parents, the author of this poem explains that marriage has separated her from her family and the life that she knew as a child. Although many antebellum women like the author of "The Bride's Soliloquy" accepted the separation that marriage implied, others did not. Some women regretted the effect that the institution had on their relationships with family and friends. A schoolteacher from Ohio

lamented in an 1850 diary entry that marriage was the "final separation[,] for it certainly separates the parties, the woman especially from all friends."[51]

As this statement indicates, the behavioral norms and values that the ideology of domesticity prescribed held negative connotations for some antebellum women. Despite the efforts of reformers and artists to promote the place of women in the domestic realm, many antebellum women asserted social beliefs and lived lives that pushed the boundaries of the ideology of domesticity and the notion of separate spheres. Christine Stansell has discussed urban working-class women during the antebellum era, many of whom lacked the time and money to uphold the ideal presented by the maiden in *Now or Never*.[52] Patricia Okker has addressed the literary and editorial work of middle-class women, such as Sarah Josepha Hale, who occupied positions of power within the public world of publishing.[53] Likewise, other scholarship on the antebellum era has discussed women who chose not to marry, performed or underwent abortions, and participated in a range of social and religious groups that advocated beliefs contrary to the ideology of domesticity.[54]

As we have seen, Matteson links the maiden in *Now or Never* to the realm outside her immediate domestic environment. While this association could signify the end of girlhood and its related freedoms, it could also imply that the woman is reluctant to accept the responsibilities and limitations of marriage and domesticity. The fact that Matteson created *The Unwilling Bride* (fig. 5), an image depicting a woman's conflicted feelings about marriage, suggests the viability of this alternative reading. Published in the October 1847 edition of the *Union Magazine of Literature and Art*, *The Unwilling Bride* depicts three women in a domestic interior. One of the women, the mother of the other two, looks with a disapproving scowl at her seated daughter. A story accompanying the print explains that the seated woman, Margaret, is being forced by her parents

Fig. 6 H. Corbould, *The Love Token*, Engraved by A. L. Dick, *Graham's Magazine* 27 (December 1845): frontispiece. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-43455)

to marry a man she does not love. Captured the moment before her wedding, Margaret laments, "it is all over now."[55] Matteson suggests Margaret's "unwillingness" to marry by situating her near a window and directing her attention to the outside world. Like Margaret, the maiden in *Now or Never* sits with one arm resting on a table, her head turned toward the window. She is visually linked with the realm beyond her immediate domestic environment, perhaps signifying her hesitation to accept the roles of wife and domestic caretaker.

Moreover, the woman in *Now or Never* is shown as if sleeping, with her head turned away from her suitor. She is not the attentive maiden depicted in other antebellum scenes of courtship. An engraving entitled *The Love Token* (fig. 6), published in the December 1845 issue of *Graham's Magazine*, offers a striking comparison to the pair in *Now or Never*. The woman in *The Love Token*, neglecting the pitcher that she has been filling with water, directs her attention to a young man who is offering her a token of his affection. The couple turns toward each other, eyes locked and hands clasped in a gesture of intimacy. Conversely, the maiden in *Now or Never* leans away from her suitor and is separated from him by the jug next to her on the bench. Whereas the forgotten and overflowing water jug in *The Love Token* underscores the couple's connection, the jug in *Now or Never* suggests a divide.

Just as the young woman appears disconnected from her suitor, she enjoys a reprieve from the sewing project before her. She sleeps, neglecting her domestic duties. Her right arm rests over the cloth on the table and her left hand, resting in her lap, gently grasps the material as if to keep it from sliding to the floor. Although many American women welcomed their prescribed domestic roles, the ideology of domesticity required women to subordinate their own aspirations to the needs of their families and homes. Bound by social forces requiring that their attention be directed toward household duties, many women fulfilled their domestic tasks begrudgingly. Needlework, for instance, sometimes became an activity more obligatory than rewarding. As Susan Burrows Swan notes, while done in abundant quantities, much of this needlework was not of an exceptionally high quality.[56]

Read in the context of contemporary social events, the maiden's lack of involvement with her domestic tasks and her connection with the outside realm could reflect tensions surrounding antebellum women's roles and rights. A year before *Now or Never* was painted, a women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York. The Seneca Falls Convention, often cited as the beginning of America's organized women's rights movement, resulted in a "Declaration of Sentiments" that challenged an establishment that legitimized male authority and denied women equality in politics, employment, education, and property ownership.[57] Moreover, scholars such as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Lori Ginzberg have noted that some antebellum women used reform movements to channel frustrations over their prescribed duties and limited social roles.[58] By increasing women's presence in the public realm, reform movements allowed women to establish their own identities and expand their range of influence outside the home. Matteson, linking the maiden with the outside world and disassociating her from her domestic duties, complicates traditional conceptions of ideal domesticity and creates an image that engages with contemporary debates surrounding women's roles and rights.

Fig. 7 Tompkins Harrison Matteson, *The Novel Reader*, Engraved by M. Osborne, *Union Magazine* 1 (November 1847): between 176 and 177. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-43463)

Further complicating a singular reading of Matteson's domestic scene, the suitor in *Now or Never* can be seen as a threat to the ideals prescribed by the ideology of domesticity. While it is likely that many antebellum viewers considered the suitor a humorous character in need of refinement, some might have regarded the young man as a potential danger to the maiden and therefore to domestic harmony. The suitor represents a threat to the young woman's virtue, one that might lead to public or familial scorn. The title *Now or Never*, implying action on the part of the young man, reinforces the reality of this danger. Asleep and unaware of her suitor's intentions, the woman is as exposed and vulnerable as the naked bird lying on her mother's table.

The American Female Moral Reform Society, a militant reform association that promoted moral purity, represents a group of individuals that might have viewed the suitor in this negative light. Smith-Rosenberg has explained that the Moral Reform Society grew out of the Second Great Awakening, a protestant religious movement that stressed the importance of individual action in combating sin.[59] First organized in New York during the early 1830s, the New York branch of the Society initiated a crusade to reform New York City's prostitutes and curb illicit sexuality by addressing the double standard that existed between the sexual behavior of women and men.[60] The Society maintained that the licentious and predatory male, while often excused for his vice, was the initiator of all illicit sexual acts and the source of America's widespread immorality. The Society also held that women, who were frequently shunned for their sins, were defenseless, passive, and easy prey for the advances of the "male lecher" who was driven only by his sexual desire. The organization called upon virtuous women to exclude any man suspected of inappropriate behavior from their society and publicly expose him as an "evildoer," "villain," and "seducer."[61] In addition, the Society campaigned to make seduction a criminal offense, a reform that the New York State Legislature enacted in 1848.[62]

Although members of the Moral Reform Society might have professed the maiden's innocence in this unfolding drama, Matteson could be implying that the maiden is partially responsible for her precarious position. Leaving room for yet another interpretation of *Now or Never*, Matteson provides little visual evidence, other than the maiden's closed eyes, that the woman is actually sleeping. Sitting rigidly on the wooden bench, with a straight back and an upright head, her body language seems to deny any semblance of sleep. Similarly, the young woman rests her extended arm on the table with a tension that suggests a certain awareness and awakeness. By depicting the woman in this manner, Matteson could be insinuating that the maiden's slumber is a pretense to encourage her suitor's advances. If this is the case, the young woman can be seen as privileging her desires over prescribed social ideals. Not only is she neglecting her domestic duties and thereby falling short of the behavioral norms associated with the ideology of domesticity, but she also risks both her virtue and reputation in accepting the advances of the suitor. One etiquette manual acknowledged: "Ladies...know how the shadow of suspicion withers and torments them. This shadow, it is necessary to avoid at all hazards, and on that account to submit to all the requirements of propriety."[63]

Although Matteson's intention in depicting the woman in this manner is unclear, he uses compositional devices to suggest that the maiden, with her future dependant on the intentions of her suitor, should reflect upon her situation. The young man's outstretched arm directs our attention to the mirror hanging on the left wall of the room. The mirror, tilted pointedly toward the maiden, can be seen as a metaphor for the necessity of self-examination and awareness in courtship, an intimation that the young woman should be wary of her precarious position.

Matteson's *The Novel Reader* (fig. 7), though more overt in its message, demonstrates a similar

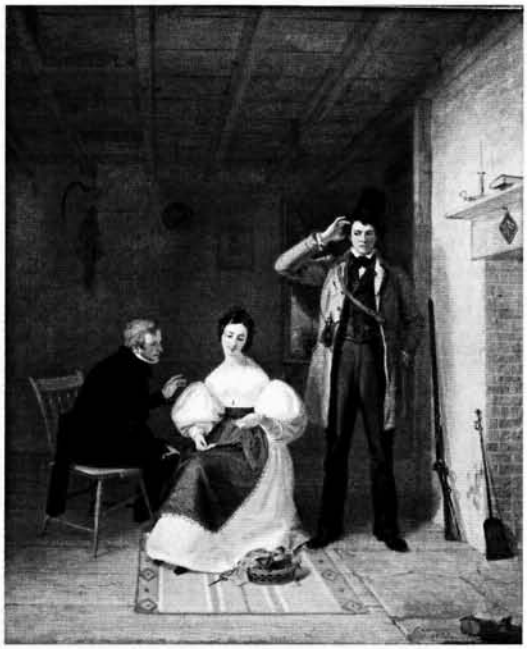

Fig. 8 William Sidney Mount (1807–1868), *The Sportsman's Last Visit*, 1835, oil on canvas. The Long Island Museum of American Art, History & Carriages, Stony Brook, NY (Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ward Melville, 1958)

moralizing sentiment. Published in the November 1847 edition of the *Union Magazine*, the engraving depicts a woman who has neglected her household duties to read a book.[64] Because of the woman's inattention, a baby is left crying in its cradle, a dog steals food from a plate by the window, and a cat drinks from a jug on the floor. A description accompanying the print indicates that the image conveys a "severe" yet "wholesome" satire. The text, written for husbands whose wives sit in "unwomanly rags, while...[their] home is the abode of discomfort," advises men to speak correctively to their wives and shame them by setting out neglected domestic objects.[65] Similarly, Matteson could be using *Now or Never* to suggest a model of behavior and outline discrepancies between ideal conduct and the real lives and desires of some antebellum women. The visual similarities between the images reinforce the viability of this connection. Both images show women sitting near a table by the window and neglecting their domestic duties, the rustic interiors of the rooms providing a setting for the didactic narrative.

Now or Never's stage-like composition suggests a play suspended in a moment of time, its conclusion remaining to unfold in a series of dramatic scenes. Matteson's theatrical tableau, although similar in composition to European and English genre paintings, bears a striking affinity to contemporaneous works by William Sidney Mount. *Now or Never* depicts a sparsely furnished interior similar to *The Sportsman's Last Visit* (fig. 8), with the rear wall of the room providing a backdrop for the unfolding scene. As Sarah Burns has explained, the theatricality of Mount's images was directly related to antebellum stage productions, in which characters such as the Yankee were used to explore relationships between various social types.[66] Like Mount, Matteson provides a stage upon which cultural tensions are allowed to interact and play out.[67] Through his carefully crafted composition, Matteson both supports and challenges dominant beliefs regarding gender roles. Ultimately ambiguous regarding his stance, Matteson leaves the viewer to engage with and finish the drama's narrative.

Matteson's multivalent image drew from and contributed to a broader cultural discourse regarding gender roles. As Judith Wellman explains, Americans began to debate the laws and customs defining gender relations during the antebellum period.[68] This discussion, taking place in a variety of cultural forums and encompassing a range of beliefs and opinions, generated diverse and often contradictory assertions regarding women's roles and rights. Matteson would have been aware of this dialogue through his work with illustrated magazines, which were an increasingly popular forum for the articulation and dissemination of cultural ideals during the antebellum era. These magazines, for instance, published prints and texts that suggested standards of behavior associated with the ideology of domesticity. Conversely, they also included images and texts that complicated this model, promoting expanded rights and increased education for women. In *Now or Never*, Matteson engaged with this printed dialogue, advocating not one side of the discussion but suggesting its complex and multifaceted nature.

Matteson, like many antebellum artists, was actively involved in print culture. While working on paintings such as *Now or Never*, Matteson also created images that were distributed as prints in popular publications. *Columbian Magazine* and *Brother Jonathan*, the latter a pictorial newspaper based in New York, published several engravings after Matteson's work, including *The Spirit of*

'76 and *The Bridal Prayer*.[69] Moreover, Matteson worked from July 1847 to October 1848 for the *Union Magazine*, where he was listed as having exclusive control over all art engravings included in the publication.[70] As the magazine's authority on art, he designed the majority of its prints, his depictions ranging from domestic interiors and courtship scenes to sentimental images of familial harmony with titles like *Going to School*. Matteson's prints were so popular with the *Union Magazine* and publications like the *Columbian* that Henry Tuckerman noted in his 1867 *Book of the Artists* that the "name of Matteson is associated with patriotic and popular prints."[71]

Matteson's involvement in print culture undoubtedly contributed to his awareness of the tensions surrounding gender roles that he dramatizes in *Now or Never*. Although *Now or Never* was not reproduced as a print itself, it addressed much of the debate surrounding women's rights and roles being circulated in illustrated publications like the *Union Magazine*. Reliant on the print world for financial support, Matteson would have looked to popular publications to discern the types of images that were commercially viable. In doing so, he would have encountered a range of beliefs and assertions regarding women and their place in society. As Johns indicates, the content of popular publications played a role in shaping artists' work. Mount, for example, was influenced by a repertoire of comic imagery that pervaded New York during the antebellum years, including the humorous political cartoons and books of New York artist David Claypoole Johnston. Johnston's images led Mount to abandon generalized rustic scenes for depictions of Yankee farmers laden with political and social puns.[72] *Now or Never*'s multivalent narrative was informed in a similar way by tensions surrounding women's rights being articulated in these popular publications.

Both moral reformers and publishers used illustrated magazines to communicate their diverse and often competing beliefs, including attitudes regarding behavioral norms and women's social roles. Reformers, believing that their message had to be physically accessible to affect change, were attracted to the widespread distribution and public appeal of these illustrated magazines. In an 1864 oration, Professor Frederick Barnard (1809–1889) summarized this missionary impulse and the benefit of prints in communicating a moral message:

> [T]he encouragement of art culture among any people, and the multiplication of works accessible to the multitude, beautiful in themselves, and well chosen in their subjects, must be among the most powerful of possible instrumentalities in ennobling and refining the sentiments and purifying the morals.[73]

Publishers and editors often mirrored the reformer's call for social uplift, contributing to the dialogue regarding women's roles and rights. The *Union Magazine*, for instance, professed an orientation toward moral reform under the direction of Matteson and Catherine Kirkland, suggesting that Matteson had an awareness of social issues and was involved in the cultural dialogues taking place in print. In the introductory July 1847 issue of the magazine, Kirkland explained:

> There are more ways than one of exhibiting patriotism. To defend our country when she is attacked is one which commands the loud applause of the world, and which is therefore the more popular.

> To elevate the intellectual and moral character of the people, is a work no less necessary and commendable, although far less showy; and this is the aim of the author and the artist.[74]

Many of these reformers, publishers, and editors encouraged the publication of prints that reinforced the domestic ideal Matteson engaged with in *Now or Never*. Engravings and illustrations were central to the economy of antebellum periodicals, and publishers carried as many illustrations as they could afford despite the considerable expense of large plates, which could cost as much as a thousand dollars per piece.[75] Because much of the concern over moral reform and domestic stability revolved around guiding and educating the young, publishers often printed didactic images that addressed proper etiquette in marriage and courtship. *The Reprimand* (fig. 9), for example, depicts a young woman who has been caught with flowers given to her by an inappropriately forward suitor. Published in the November 1842 issue of *Graham's Magazine*, the image shows the young man furtively sneaking out a window behind the woman's guardian. Unlike the uncovered birdcage that signified virtue in *Now or Never*, a partially covered birdcage in *The Reprimand* suggests the woman's indiscretion by being situated dangerously close to both the window and the suitor. Although humorous, the image would have warned young women of the consequences of improper conduct in courtship, which could result in a reprimand or worse, the public loss of one's reputation. Similar to the ideal presented in *Now or Never*, *The Reprimand* implies that antebellum women should be virtuous and pure.

Stories published in illustrated magazines often played a parallel role in promoting the

Fig. 9 Destouches, *The Reprimand*, Engraved by J. N. Grimbrede, *Graham's Magazine* 21 (November 1842): between 260 and 261. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-43452)

Fig. 10 Sir David Wilkie, *The Pedlar*, Engraved by A. L. Dick, *Godey's Lady's Book* 23 (December 1841): frontispiece. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-43469)

behavioral ideals associated with the ideology of domesticity. An article in the June 1844 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book* fervently states that the true sphere of women is "Home!" The author, a self-confirmed "crusty old bachelor, quite too fond of moralizing," begins "The True Rights of Woman" with a discussion of women's suffrage. Although the author concedes that the right to vote might be a legitimate demand, he ultimately dismisses the idea as preposterous. He explains that women, whom he believes to be both intellectually and physically inferior to men, can best distinguish themselves in the domestic realm. In this domain, women can promote the virtue and happiness of society by "softening and humanizing" men and fulfilling their duties as sisters, mothers, and wives.[76] Matteson, drawing from such articles, suggests similar sentiments in *Now or Never*. Although the painting is ultimately ambiguous regarding gender roles, Matteson implies that antebellum women had the power to refine their male counterparts and promote virtue in their domestic roles.

Prints included in illustrated magazines were often accompanied by text that served to elucidate these behavioral ideals and norms. *Godey's Lady's Book*, for example, commissioned a poem from W. J. Walter to accompany its December 1841 frontispiece. The poem, entitled "The Scotch Pedlar," was written for an engraving after Sir David Wilkie's *The Pedlar* (fig. 10). The engraving depicts a group of four women looking at a peddler's wares. A man sits by the window, his left hand guarding the coin purse inside his jacket pocket. An excerpt of the poem reads

> That huckster from the banks of Forth,
> That genuine Yankee of the North...
> So long has told the ready tale
> Of wondrous bargains on the nail,
> That, in due time, the knavish elf
> Has turned believer of himself;
> Doats on the coinage of his brain,
> To him than naked truth more plain;
> Deals out his falsehoods without ruth,
> And credits them as gospel truth.
> Nay, do but mark his wheedling ways,
> That crone believes each word he says.
> Nay, Goody, thou wilt learn ere long,
> The burthen of the good old song,
> That "hope's best sweets are dashed with bitters,"
> And that "all is not gold that glitters."[77]

The poem goes on to contrast the Yankee huckster with the "Gude-man" of the house, suggesting that the good man's wariness and frugality were to be commended in uncertain economic times. The poem delineates an ideal standard of behavior and would have provided readers with a contextual basis for interpreting Wilkie's image. Just as Matteson contrasts the older and younger men in *Now or Never*, the poem outlines the questionable intentions of the peddler and contrasts him with an older and honorable male figure. Moreover, the poem warns women against trusting the

Yankee peddler, explaining that his wheedling ways are based in falsehoods that might leave them disappointed. Originating from the same moralizing sentiment, both the poem and *Now or Never* can be interpreted as warnings to women, notices to be wary not only of peddlers, but also of the dishonorable intentions and false promises of suitors.

In addition to these normative messages, however, illustrated magazines sometimes included articles that attempted to redefine and challenge the boundaries of women's traditional roles. Some magazines, for instance, published editorials proposing expanded rights for women, including the right to education and an increased presence in public life. An article entitled "The Sphere of Woman," published in the *Union Magazine* during Matteson's tenure, questions some dominant beliefs regarding gender roles. The author, Horace Greeley, explains that women should be free from having to choose between an unwanted union and a "life of galling dependence on remoter relatives, or of precarious struggle for daily bread."[78] To free women from having to marry out of necessity rather than love, he recommends that women be educated for "independent usefulness and happiness" in addition to acquiring the skills necessary to perform as wife and mother. Moreover, he proposes that women be provided with more professional opportunities and paid a salary equivalent to men when performing like jobs. Although Greeley concedes that political power in and of itself is not valuable to women, he suggests that women's right to vote and to be elected to office should be "defined and established" if it helps them to achieve the goal of independence. Viewed in the context of Greeley's essay, with which Matteson would have been personally familiar from his work for the *Union Magazine*, *Now or Never* complicates the notion of separate spheres for men and women. Matteson could be advocating that the maiden in *Now or Never*, presented with her unsophisticated and inept suitor, be given the right to a more public life rather than being subjected, in Greeley's terms, to a state of vassalage in an unwanted marriage. Within this framework, the young woman would have the agency to choose her own future.

Unlike Greeley's unequivocal essay, however, the public dialogue surrounding gender roles was often complicated and ambiguous, much like *Now or Never*. The contradictory nature of this discussion reflected the divided attitudes of antebellum individuals regarding the nature of women's roles and rights. Illustrated magazines, for instance, rarely expressed public support for particularly controversial subjects like women's suffrage, although they were advocates for women's rights in certain other respects. Sarah Josepha Hale, for example, wrote editorials for *Godey's Lady's Book* stressing the importance of education for women while simultaneously publishing images and stories supporting a more traditional role for women in the home. Despite her belief that women's primary duty was in the domestic realm, Hale proposed the legitimacy of a separate but public women's culture that included, not surprisingly, women's periodicals.[79]

An image entitled *The Post Mistress* (fig. 11), included in the February 1850 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*, further demonstrates the complicated nature of debates regarding gender roles in antebellum America. Although images of women working outside the home were rarely included in illustrated magazines, the print depicts a postmistress with two companions. At first glance, *The Post Mistress* seemingly challenges dominant norms by depicting, in a widely circulated magazine, a woman working in the public realm. The image, however, can also be seen as reinforcing those

Fig. 11 *The Post Mistress, Godey's Lady's Book* 11 (February 1850): 90. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI (Image # WHI-43467)

norms by representing the group as unattractive and unscrupulous. The three women comprise a motley crew, their exaggerated statures and features lending humor to the scene. One of the women brazenly peeks at a letter while a figure watches from just outside the post office door. As the seated postmistress and another woman gaze furtively on, the postmistress urges the taller woman to be silent in her transgression. Suggesting the possibility of a public role for women while simultaneously undermining that potential, *The Post Mistress* suggests the divided attitude of many antebellum individuals regarding women's place in the public realm. It is this complicated and multifarious discussion that Matteson engages with in *Now or Never* by crafting an image that addresses multiple attitudes toward gender roles and allows for a wide range of interpretations.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote in 1871 that paintings mean "a thousand, and, often opposite things."[80] Constructing *Now or Never* to allow for multiple interpretations, Matteson participated in the antebellum debate surrounding women's roles and rights. Matteson's complex image both adhered to and challenged dominant beliefs regarding gender roles, encouraging a dialogue surrounding women's place in the home. Avoiding a fixed conclusion, however, Matteson leaves the viewer to formulate his or her own opinions regarding the painting's position on women's roles and

rights. The painting, like the culture of antebellum print from which Matteson drew, became a site of contest where social differences were exposed and values confronted.

University of Wisconsin–Madison

1. American Art-Union, *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* (September 1849): 34.

2. See Lorenz Eitner, "The Open Window and the Storm-Tossed Boat: An Essay in the Iconography of Romanticism," *Art Bulletin* 37 (December 1955): 286. See also Patricia Hills, *The Painters' America: Rural and Urban Life, 1810-1910* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 41; and Henry Nichols Blake Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds: American Master in the Dutch Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 76.

3. David M. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 162. See also Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), xiv.

4. For an overview of antebellum genre painting, see Johns, *American Genre Painting*. In addition to Johns's survey, many studies have been completed on individual genre painters. See, for example, Anne Gregory Terhune and Patricia Smith Scanlan, *Thomas Hovenden: His Life and Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); and Scott Casper, "Politics, Art, and the Contradictions of a Market Culture: George Caleb Bingham's Stump Speaking," *American Art* 5 (Summer 1991): 26-47.

5. Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists: American Artist Life Comprising Biographical and Critical Sketches of American Artists, Preceded by an Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of Art in America* (1867; reprint, New York: James F. Carr, 1966), 433-34.

6. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 433. See also Harriet Hoctor Groeschel, "A Study of the Life and Work of the Nineteenth Century Genre Artist Tompkins Harrison Matteson (1813-1884)," (master's thesis, Syracuse University, 1985), 2-3.

7. See Groeschel, "A Study in the Life and Work," 8, 14, and 70 n. 10. Matteson took drawing lessons at the American Academy of Fine Arts in New York City and was advised by Colonel Trumbull. He returned to Sherburne in 1839.

8. Ibid., 15, 18, and 72 n. 4. Groeschel notes that Mount refers to Matteson in his personal correspondence and painted a portrait of Matteson, a reproduction of which can be found in the Frick Art Reference Library in New York City.

9. See Elihu Vedder, *The Digressions of V* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1910), 92-93.

10. Although the American Art-Union ended up purchasing *Now or Never*, it is unclear if Matteson created the painting with the sale in mind.

11. The American Art-Union was founded as the "Apollo Association" in 1839 and officially changed its name to the "American Art-Union" in 1844. The Art-Union distributed prints until the early 1850s and disbanded in 1852, when the New York Supreme Court declared its lottery system illegal. During its existence, the Art-Union distributed approximately 150,000 engravings and 2,400 paintings by more than 250 artists. The average annual attendance at Art-Union exhibitions, which attracted a diverse range of individuals, was 250,000. See Groeschel, "A Study in the Life and Work," 22. See also Maybelle Mann, *The American Art-Union* (Otisville, N.Y.: ALM Associates, 1977), 17-18 and 27.

12. *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* (December 1849): 2. The winner of *Now or Never* is listed twice in the *Art-Union Bulletin*, once as "Briggs" and another time as "Bridge." See also Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts and American Art-Union, 1816-1852* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1953), 244-45.

13. Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism: The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in the United States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 169. For more information on the American Art-Union, see also Rachel N. Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union," *The Journal of American History*, 81 (March 1995): 1534-61.

14. See *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, 15; and Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City," 1546.

15. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 169.

16. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 8-9. See also Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 171-77.

17. See Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 102, 146, 248, 298, and 300.

18. J. J. Mapes, "Usefulness of the Arts of Design," *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 8 (March 1851): 212. *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* (1849-52) was an illustrated magazine produced in Philadelphia. The magazine, which had been published in New York under the title *Union Magazine of Literature and Art* prior to Sartain's ownership, included woodcuts and engravings, reviews of current art exhibitions, news of the latest Art-Union happenings, and biographical sketches of prominent artists, among other features.

19. *The Anglo-American* (1845) quoted in Donald D. Keyes, "Aspects of the Development of Genre Painting in the Hudson River Area Before 1852" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1973), 16. *The Anglo American* (1843-47) was a journal of literature, news, politics and drama published in New York by E.L. Garvin and Company.

20. See Jan Seidler Ramirez, "The Victorian Household: Stronghold, Sanctuary, or Straightjacket?" in *Domestic Bliss: Family Life in American Painting, 1840-1910*, ed. Lee M. Edwards (Yonkers, N.Y: The Hudson River Museum, 1986), 7.

21. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, xiv.

22. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism*, 228.

23. The attitudes and behaviors associated with the ideology of domesticity have also been referred to as the "cult of domesticity" and the "cult of true womanhood." As Nancy F. Cott notes in her introduction to *The Bonds of Womanhood*, the term relates to antebellum women's experiences and consciousness. Cott explains that William R. Taylor was the first scholar to use the term "domesticity" in this sense (Cott references an unpublished paper entitled "Domesticity in England and America, 1770-1840" that Taylor prepared for the Symposium on the Role of Education in Nineteenth-Century America, which was held in Chatham, Massachusetts in 1964). Barbara Welter subsequently coined the phrase "cult of true womanhood" in her much referenced 1966 article of the same title (see note 24 below). Similarly, Cott explains that Aileen S. Kraditor introduced the phrase "cult of domesticity" in her introduction to *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968). See Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 1.

24. Historian Barbara Welter, for instance, suggests that behavioral norms associated with the ideology of domesticity were apparent in cookbooks of the period. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966), 163-64. For an overview of other expressions of this ideology, see Seidler Ramirez, "The Victorian Household," 8.

25. Seidler Ramirez, "The Victorian Household," 7.

26. For a discussion of the virtues of the "true woman," see Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 151-74.

27. Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 57-58.

28. See Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 98. See also Stephanie Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families, 1600-1900* (London and New York: Verso, 1988); and Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: Norton, 1976).

29. Sarah Josepha Hale, "Woman," *Godey's Lady's Book* 20 (February 1840): 76.

30. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, xii-xiv.

31. Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 70-71. See also Otto Charles Thieme, *With Grace and Favor: Victorian and Edwardian Fashion in America* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Cincinnati Art Museum, 1993), vii.

32. See Elisabeth McClellan, *History of American Costume, 1607-1870: With an Introductory Chapter on Dress in the Spanish and French Settlements in Florida and Louisiana*, rev. ed. (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1942), 437-38. McClellan notes that a slender waistline was exceedingly fashionable during the period. She also explains that hairstyles similar to the maiden's in *Now or Never* were fashionable and often seen in daguerreotypes.

33. Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain and Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 204-05. Swan notes that needlework books began to proliferate during the 1840s. In addition, magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book* published needlework patterns and instructions.

34. For more information on emblems, see Roland E. Fleischer, "Emblems and Colonial American Painting," *American Art Journal* 20, no. 3 (1998): 23. See also Wayne E. Franits, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 80-82.

35. For a brief overview of Harriet Beecher Stowe and domesticity see Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 30-34.

36. Margaret Coxe, "Floral Lessons in Morals," *Godey's Lady's Book* 26 (April 1843): 197.

37. Keyes, "Aspects of the Development of Genre Painting," 25. See also Hills, *The Painters' America*, 23.

38. Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 40-42.

39. For an overview of antebellum etiquette in the hall and parlor see John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 173-76.

40. Elisabeth Celnart, *The Gentleman and Lady's Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment: Dedicated to the Youth of Both Sexes*, 5th American ed. (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot, 1846), 82, 84.

41. Margaret C. Conkling, *The American Gentleman's Guide to Politeness and Fashion, or, Familiar Letters to His Nephews: Containing Rules of Etiquette, Directions for the Formation of Character, etc., etc., Illustrated by Sketches Drawn from Life, of the Men and Manners of Our Times* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 336.

42. Celnart, *The Gentleman and Lady's Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment*, 197.

43. *Ladies And Gentlemen's Pocket Companion Of Etiquette And Manners; With The Rules Of Polite Society, To Which Is Added Hints On Dress, Courtship, Etc.* (New York, 1800-1899?), 31.

44. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 54.

45. For information on Edmonds' promotion of *The Spirit of '76*, see Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 433. See also Cowdrey, *American Academy of Fine Arts*, 244.

46. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 14-16. See also Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 31; and Sarah Burns, "Yankee Romance: The Comic Courtship Scene in Nineteenth-Century American Art," in *American Art Journal* 18, no. 4 (1986): 51-75.

47. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 54. See also Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds*, 75-78 for a discussion of Edmonds' *The Image Peddlar*.

48. Seidler Ramirez, "The Victorian Household," 8. Ramirez notes that a range of pattern books and design treatises began to appear in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Many of these publications, emphasizing the social and moral principles of house design, stressed the importance of the hearth as a symbol of security and a means of strengthening the bonds of kinship.

49. Champion Chase (July 11, 1845 letter to Mary Butterfield) quoted in Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 92.

50. Mrs. E. M. Sheldon, "The Bride's Soliloquy," *The Ladies' Companion* 20 (April 1844): 313.

51. Emily Blackwell (Diary entry from August 26, 1850) quoted in Rothman, *Hearts and Hands*, 156.

52. See Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

53. See Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995).

54. See Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband—Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy, 1800-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 164.

55. E. F. Ellet, "The Unwilling Bride," *Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 1 (October 1847): 176.

56. Swan, *Plain and Fancy*, 206.

57. See Judith Wellman, "The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks," in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, ed. Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 202. For the full text of the declaration, see "Declaration of Sentiments, 1848," in *Women's America*, 214-16. The "Declaration of Sentiments" included a series of resolutions that stated, among other things, that "all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority." Another resolution declared that "the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women...for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce."

58. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 109, 128. See also Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

59. For a discussion of the Female Moral Reform Society, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," in *Disorderly Conduct*, 109-28. Smith-

Rosenberg explains that the Society provided some "emotional redress for the feelings of passivity" caused by the ideology of domesticity. She also notes that no man was above the Society's suspicion.

60. The previously discussed "Declaration of Sentiments" also makes reference to a double standard for women and men. The declaration resolves that "the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior that is required of woman in the social state, should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman." See the "Declaration of Sentiments" in *Women's America*, 216.

61. *Advocate and Guardian* 16 (1 January 1850): 3; quoted in Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 117.

62. Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 120.

63. Celnart, *The Gentleman and Lady's Book of Politeness and Propriety of Deportment*, 28.

64. The creation of moralizing and didactic genre paintings in antebellum America had a precedent in Dutch and English genre works. For an overview of the connection between Dutch and American genre painters, see Henry Nichols Blake Clark, "The Impact of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Genre Painting on American Genre Painting, 1800-1865" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1982).

65. Catherine M. Kirkland, "The Novel Reader," *Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 1 (November 1847): 231.

66. Burns, "Yankee Romance," 51-75, esp. 54 and 64.

67. Matteson, like Mount, expressed an interest in the theater. In 1834, Matteson played the part of the Moor of Venice in Othello. He also completed several paintings that illustrated scenes from plays, including King Lear. See Sherburne Art Society, *Thompkins H. Matteson: 1813-1884* (New York: The Sherburne News, 1949), 5, 21.

68. See Wellman, "The Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention," 200-13.

69. Georgia Stamm Chamberlain, *Studies on American Painters and Sculptors of the Nineteenth Century* (Annandale, VA.: Turnpike Press, Inc., 1965), 22. See also *Columbian Magazine* 5 (July 1846): frontispiece; and *Columbian Magazine* 5 (April 1846): frontispiece.

70. See Heidi L. Nichols, *The Fashioning of Middle-Class America: Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art and Antebellum Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 10.

71. Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists*, 432.

72. Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 27-32.

73. Frederick A. P. Barnard, *Art Culture: Its Relation to National Refinement and National Morality. An Oration Pronounced before the Alabama Alpha of the Society of the Phi Beta Kappa, at its Anniversary, July 11th, 1854* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1864), 37.

74. Catherine M. Kirkland, "Introductory," *Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 1 (July 1847): 2.

75. John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13.

76. Paul Benjamin, "The True Rights of Woman," *Godey's Lady's Book* 28 (June 1844): 271-74. Benjamin asserts that "women are and always have been intellectually inferior to men" and could never "ascend to those heights of renown upon which man now stands supreme."

77. W. J. Walter, "The Scotch Pedlar" *Godey's Lady's Book* 23 (December 1841): 241.

78. Horace Greeley, "The Sphere of Woman," *Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 2 (June 1848): 270-73.

79. Tebbel and Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America*, 34. See also Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 4, 39.

80. Nathaniel Hawthorne (*Passages from the French and Italian Note-books*) quoted in Harris, *The Artist in American Society*, 141.

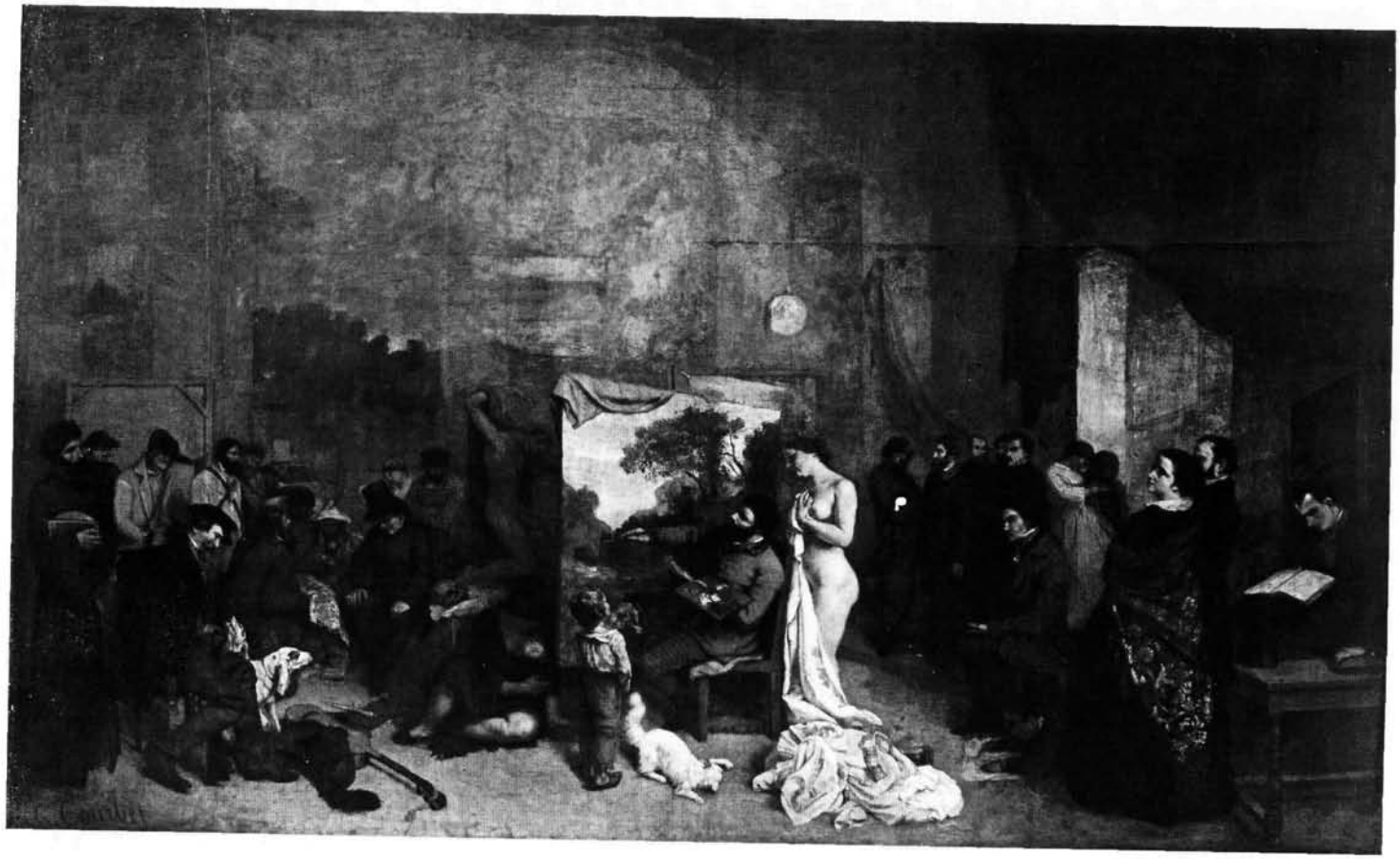

Fig. 1 Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Life as an Artist*, 1855, Oil on canvas, 141 x 237 in. (359 x 598 cm) Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

Harlot, Housewife, or Heroine? A Recovered Identity for the "Worker's Wife" in Courbet's *Studio*

Karen J. Leader

> *The Painter's Studio* contains a whole side of topical reference which is escaping from us through the death of almost all its audience.[1]
>
> —Jules Castagnary

> Every new turning point in the history of art brings with it a retrospective process of reappraisal and redramatization, with new protagonists, new sequences, new portents. We discover possible pasts at the same time as we feel the opening-up of possible futures.[2]
>
> —Peter Wollen

This paper will focus on a rarely considered figure in one of the most scrutinized paintings of the nineteenth century, *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Life as an Artist* (fig. 1) by Gustave Courbet (1819–1877). Recognizable by her red headscarf, this figure dwells on the rear left-hand side of the composition (fig. 2). She carries what is barely discernible as an infant, whose white cap peeks out from behind the hat of the "undertaker's mute" (*croque-mort*, a paid mourner). My purpose here will be threefold: to reintroduce a contemporary source for this "worker's wife," to consider the significance of recasting her role in the painting's allegorical structure, and to measure the impact that such a seemingly minor, yet significant, refiguring casts on our assumptions about nineteenth-century visual culture.

A Visual Manifesto

The Painter's Studio is imbued with so much nuance, complexity, and potential meaning that its very existence gives lie to the common portrayal of its creator as a non-intellectual or "born" painter.[3] The ever-growing corpus of scholarship and criticism offers a seemingly endless stream of data and analysis for this sprawling compendium of nineteenth-century concerns. This ambitious painting, measuring approximately twelve by twenty feet and containing at least thirty-five life-sized figures, falls into several categories. It is part of the great tradition of *atelier* paintings, although Courbet has thoroughly re-imagined the practice. It exploits the language of history painting in its monumentality and use of allegory, while including elements of the other major genres as well: landscape, portrait, still-life, nude, animal painting. Each tradition contributes to the power of Courbet's program, yet the messages are mixed, the allusions elusive. The title refers both to a personal "summing up" and to the framing of a particularly vibrant period in French, and indeed European, history (1848–1855).

The most useful primary sources we have for understanding *The Painter's Studio* are Courbet's own letters to several friends, wherein he describes the canvas he is working on and provides tantalizing hints as to its overall meaning. In the most important of these letters, to his friend and

supporter, the writer and critic Champfleury (Jules François Felix Fleury-Husson, 1820–1889), Courbet addresses each figure in turn, identifying some by name, others less specifically. It is a detailed yet deceptive letter that appears to have some ulterior motive. *Fabriquée* ("cooked" in the English translation) is HélèneToussaint's term for the deliberate tone that suggests the letter's covert messages. Toussaint mysteriously declares that "for sufficient or even compelling reasons; many of Courbet's terms have a double meaning..."[4] Parsing these meanings has been the goal of numerous studies; this project takes these studies as its starting place in an attempt to examine the mutability of such meanings as they become part of the art historical "record."

In the letter to Champfleury, Courbet identifies "a worker's wife," (*une femme d'ouvrier*) placed next to "a worker" (*un ouvrier*). The "worker" faces away from her, arms crossed, gaze down, suggesting that he is unemployed or on strike and that there is some trouble between the couple.[5] Like many of the characters in this shadowy background, the "worker's wife" is but a sliver, yet she is figured in a strongly drawn profile, framed by the blackness of the "undertaker's mute's" top-hat and her scowling husband's dark form. The light that falls on her red scarf and white collar contributes to her visibility. She holds and attends to an infant, its bonnet poking out from behind the top-hat. While this detail is difficult to discern, especially in reproduction, Toussaint describes her definitively as "a woman of the working class holding a baby."[6] The family takes its place among what Courbet calls "the other world of trivial life, the people, misery, poverty, wealth, the exploited and the exploiters, the people who live off of death."[7] In this framework, it makes sense for a "woman of the working class" to be surrounded by other representations of mid-nineteenth-century themes: family, class, poverty, religious authority, rural labor, greed, opportunism, death. Each of the figures seems to exist in its own reality. They hardly act, react, or interact.

In his 1906 biography of Courbet, Georges Riat ventured a detailed explanation of the allegorical structure of *The Painter's Studio*, attaching to each figure a contemporary role as well as a symbolic one, for example: "A clown (the theater)...a priest (Catholic religion)...a hunter (the chase.)" When he reached the "worker's wife" he declared her "a prostitute (debauchery)."[8] By identifying her as a prostitute, Riat defined her in terms of one of the most prevalent "problems" in Second Empire France. With no visual or textual evidence to support the claim, he relegated her to a position in the oldest profession. The fact that Riat could not see her as merely representing the plight of the wife of an unemployed worker who is worried about how she will feed the infant she holds, but instead chose to assign her a role that Courbet never suggested, is bad enough. What is worse is that subsequent scholars picked up and held on to this designation all the way into the 1970s, I stress again, with no evidence to support the identification. For example, in 1911 Léonce Bénédite identified "une prostituée (la Débauche)," which in the English version was translated as "a prostitute (Pleasure)."[9] René Huyghe et al., in their exhaustive 1944 examination, captioned the detail of the "worker's wife" "la fille de joie."[10] Kenneth Clark, in 1961, referred to "a priest, a prostitute, a grave-digger and a merchant, who symbolize the exploitation of our poor humanity."[11] Finally, Werner Hofmann elided the lack of visual evidence by identifying a "harlot still dressed in her plain country clothes."[12]

It was not until 1973 that anyone questioned this label. Benedict Nicolson, in his empirical

study of the painting, expressed his doubts about the designation by Huyghe et al. of the "worker's wife" as a prostitute. He softened his dissent with: "although admittedly one expects to find one in this *galère*."[13] Prostitution was ubiquitous in nineteenth-century imagery, and there is little doubt that Courbet's allegory could accommodate a *fille de joie*.[14] But there is no evidence to suggest that the "worker's wife" was meant to represent one.

In the Courbet literature, when the "worker's wife" was not being misidentified as a prostitute, she was often skipped over, ignored altogether. In otherwise detailed and comprehensive readings, numerous writers, while sometimes mentioning every other figure, merely left out the "worker's wife," failing to find a satisfactory signification. She was silenced as effectively as if she were not there at all. Courbet's contemporary Théophile Silvestre omitted her, calling the "worker" "an unemployed member of the proletariat."[15] More recently, Gerstle Mack, Youssef Ishaghpour, and Pierre Courthion all devoted a great deal of space to enumerating Courbet's characters, yet each deftly passed over the "worker's wife," essentially erasing her from the allegory.[16] A close look at these texts indicates that their authors were reluctant to view her as either a peasant or an emblem of the working class. Instead, they sought a more substantial allegorical function. This resulted in her arbitrary designation as harlot, or her dismissal for failure to signify properly. (Note that

Fig. 2 *The Painter's Studio*, detail of fig. 1 (Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

this absence is all but invisible unless one is looking for it.) Up until 1977, the "worker's wife" personified Proudhon's dictum about the role of women in society: "Harlot or housewife...I see nothing in-between."[17]

Deciphering the Allegory

As we shall see, Courbet deployed allegory, where meaning lies outside of the perceived recognizability of the scene, to inscribe *The Painter's Studio* with multiple layers of potential meaning. Challenging the verisimilitude that one would expect at the heart of Realism, the sustained metaphors of the painting strain the limits of readability, inviting the persistent to continue digging. The great watershed in interpretation for *The Painter's Studio* came in 1977 with the catalog of the Louvre exhibition celebrating the centenary of the artist's death. Curator Hélène Toussaint, following a hint given by Courbet himself in the aforementioned letter to Champfleury, uncovered specific, artfully disguised identities for most of the figures on the left-hand side of the painting (fig. 3, see p. 33).[18] In this study, she used not only contemporary images to demonstrate likeness, but also the knowledge of physical traits, gestures and idiosyncrasies, props and attributes, and interrelationships, to support her revelation of the presence and juxtaposition of a veritable who's-who of famous figures. The "Jew," for example, was said to represent Minister of Finance Achille Fould; the "curé," Catholic journalist Louis Veuillot; and the "old-clothes man," Minister of the Interior Victor Persigny. The group along the back wall was presented as a series of representations of various nationalities, embodied by revolutionary figures from the popular revolutions of 1848, such as Garibaldi for the Italian Risorgimento and Lajos Kossuth for insurgent Hungary. The most startling of Toussaint's disclosures was the convincing identification of the figure depicted in the foreground with his dogs (and not mentioned in Courbet's letter), as Napoleon III. Her identifications are for the most part still accepted today, and although the mysteries will never be completely solved, any future study of *The Painter's Studio* will be mediated through Toussaint's discoveries.

But in the case of the "worker's wife," while Toussaint boldly surrounded her with an impressive array of household names, including the Emperor himself, the author could only very provisionally suggest that "she may possibly represent Greece, which tried to ally itself with Russia in 1854, but was prevented by the French occupation of the Piraeus."[19] Toussaint offered no name, history, or corresponding image, as she had done for the others. In this scenario, the "worker's wife" was less useful allegorically than she had been as a *fille de joie*. At least then she got to represent debauchery (or pleasure).

From Toussaint's work emerged two new and captivating studies: first Klaus Herding's "*The Painter's Studio*: Focus of World Events, Site of Reconciliation," then Linda Nochlin's "Courbet's Real Allegory: Rereading *The Painter's Studio*."[20] Herding analyzes Toussaint's evidence, accepts it conditionally, and then interprets the composition as an allegory of reconciliation, in the form of an *adhortatio ad principem*, or exhortation to the ruler, designed to address Emperor Napoleon III himself. Herding reads the painting both as Courbet's personal advertisement—"a unique opportunity to show that his claim to being France's greatest painter was justified"—and as "a

lament, a warning, and a symbol of hope" in his appeal to the Emperor for reconciliation and peace.[21] Taking as his starting point the origins of Courbet's project as a submission for the 1855 Universal Exposition in Paris, Herding examines the charged political stakes of the Exposition as Napoleon III's grand gesture of French superiority "to demonstrate the glory of empire and the successes of his reign for all the world to see."[22] Reconciliation would have multiple meanings here both in relation to the domestic ramifications of Louis-Napoleon's seizing of power in the *coup d'état* of December 1851 and to the dubious interventions that had ensconced France in the Crimean War in light of the Emperor's 1852 declaration that "the empire means peace."[23] Herding's is a remarkably thorough and analytically rigorous argument.

While admiring the scholarship, Linda Nochlin finds Herding's analysis altogether too authoritative, too neat. Nochlin decides to approach the rigid structure of allegory from a different perspective:

> First of all, because allegory can be looked at from a very different viewpoint from that of authoritative closure and constriction of meaning; rather, it may be understood as a mode that operated in a theater of disjunction and disengagement. The presence of allegory signals to us the very opposite of that system of organic unity presupposed by the vision of harmony Herding has convincingly demonstrated to be present in the *Painter's Studio*.[24]

With reference to Walter Benjamin's study *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, Nochlin associates allegory with historical periods of disintegration, an apt designation for Courbet's period of "summing up," wherein revolution gave birth to the Second Republic, followed quickly by brutal suppression of dissent, the rise of Louis-Napoleon, the consolidation of power, and ultimately the return to empire. "Meaning" in culture as well as in politics (the two were exquisitely intertwined during this period) was wildly in flux.

Nochlin then identifies examples of such disjunctions that ultimately show "how Courbet's allegory fails, how it cannot create a complete and finished system of meaning."[25] Through her various readings as art historian, as feminist scholar, and as a woman, Nochlin peels away layers of received wisdom about the supposed meaning of certain signs, to reveal an "allegorical fumble" of mixed messages, cobbled together by the solidity of a central Oedipal construction.[26] While not a strictly psychoanalytic analysis, Nochlin frames her argument within the discourse of the unexamined presumptions of patriarchal power relations.

Yet even in these two nearly exhaustive works of scholarship, the "worker's wife," remains obscured. As only "a young woman who may represent an allusion to Greece" she plays a marginal role in Herding's reading of Courbet's *adhortatio ad principem*.[27] Moreover, in Nochlin's examination, "figures in the rear of the painting, like the worker's wife, are so small in scale that they seem illogically distant."[28] The seeming powerlessness of the "worker's wife," surrounded as she is by men of extraordinary power, seems incongruous given the calculated structure of Courbet's composition, as evidenced by the Champfleury letter. Significantly, Toussaint was sparked toward her investigation and discoveries by the following description in Courbet's letter:

> In front of them [the figures on the far left] is a weather-beaten old man, a diehard republican (that Minister of the Interior, for instance, who was in the Assembly when Louis XVI was condemned to death, the one who was still following courses at the Sorbonne last year)—a man 90 years old with a begging-bag in his hand, dressed in old patched white linen and wearing a broad-brimmed hat; he is looking at a heap of romantic paraphernalia at his feet, and the Jew feels sorry for him.[29]

From this convoluted yet cunning clue, Toussaint discovered a *régicide* (persuasively identified as Lazare Carnot, a member of the Convention who voted for Louis XVI's execution) posed directly behind a usurper (Napoleon III).

A Source Revealed

The intricacy of the layers of Courbet's allegory suggests that there is more to the "worker's wife" than has yet been uncovered. A single line in a footnote in James H. Rubin's 1981 study of Courbet's affinity with the anarchist philosopher P.-J. Proudhon (1809–1865), proved this to be true: "In addition, Cadot suggests that the worker's wife alludes to the Romanian revolution of 1848."[30] Rubin was referring to a 1978 article entitled "Courbet Illustrateur de Michelet?" written by French historian Michel Cadot and published in the journal *Romantisme*.[31] In it, Cadot responded to Toussaint's identifications by proposing that several of the figures representing the 1848 revolutions were probably suggested by the work of French historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874), who had authored a group of articles that were published individually as brochures, serially in newspapers, and collectively as *Légendes démocratiques du Nord* (Democratic Legends from the North) in the same period that Courbet was working on *The Painter's Studio*.[32]

Cadot's article put forth three related arguments to support his assertion of Michelet's articles as a source for Courbet's iconography. First, he offered an explanation of why Courbet chose, as Toussaint asserts, Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a hero from the past, to represent contemporary Poland; next, he agreed with Toussaint's identification of the "worker" as standing for Russian Socialism, but argued that it was, rather than Alexander Herzen, more likely Herzen's friend and compatriot Mikhail Bakunin; and third, he asserted that the "worker's wife" was a representation of the Romanian revolution, personified by one Madame Rosetti. These conclusions were based on Cadot's knowledge of Michelet's *Légendes*, which he had edited in a volume published in 1968. One of the arguments, the replacement of Herzen with Bakunin to represent Russia, is now generally accepted in the scholarship on *The Painter's Studio*.[33] But the other suggested identification, that of the "worker's wife" as Madame Rosetti, standing for Romania, was lost in obscurity, and only incorporated into the work of the one aforementioned scholar, James Rubin (and only in a footnote). In his more recent book, Rubin names Garibaldi, Kossuth, Kosciuszko, and Bakunin, and treats the identification of the "worker's wife" as a representative of the Romanian independence movement as if it were a generally accepted one, although he does not mention Madame Rosetti by name.[34] In fact, I have yet to find another account of this painting that acknowledges the Romanian connection. Toussaint cites Cadot's article in a footnote to a 1979 article, but the reference is

Fig. 3 *The Painter's Studio*, detail of fig. 1 (Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

unrelated to our topic.[35] Following the thread, Nochlin, in a footnote to "Courbet's Real Allegory" cites a conversation with Toussaint who "admitted to me...that this figure [the worker] was more likely to be based on a portrait of the anarchist Bakunin."[36] No mention of Cadot, nor of the connection to Michelet.

It is necessary to note at this point that Cadot did not reproduce all of the images that were part of the evidence for his arguments. They do appear, however, in his 1968 volume of the *Légendes*, one of which is an engraving of "Madame Rosetti, 1848" (fig. 4).[37] This image clearly shows the figure upon which Courbet based the "worker's wife," with her head scarf only partially covering her hair, strong profile, V-shaped white collar and white-capped infant. We can, for the first time, confidently identify her as Maria Grant Rosetti (1819–1893) representing the Romanian revolution of 1848, alongside those other *quarante-huitards* of the so-called *printemps du peuples*.[38] To this day the image has never been published next to Courbet's painting, and this fact alone makes it of interest to art historians. Even more interesting is that, despite the millions of words written about this major work in the history of art, this is the first female figure in *The Painter's Studio* to be definitively named. The sliver of white behind the "undertaker's mute's" top hat, the child she holds in her arms, is presumably her daughter Liby.

Courbet and Michelet—Similar Strategies

Maria Grant was born in 1819 in Guernesey to a Scottish father and a French mother. She was reared in France and married the Romanian poet C.A. Rosetti in 1847.[39] Constantin Rosetti (1816–1885) was to become one of the central figures in the Romanian struggle for independence. Yet Michelet chose to relate the Romanian portion of his *Légendes* through the character and the acts of Madame Rosetti. Her role, both dangerous and courageous, is also heart-wrenchingly dramatic.

As Michelet narrates it, on the day that the Wallachian Revolution was to begin, June 18, 1848, Maria Rosetti gave birth to a baby girl.[40] Her husband was present, and the couple's anxiety over

Fig. 4 "Madame Rosetti 1848," illustration of Jules Michelet, *Principautés Danubiennes*, 1853 (Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France)

the arrival of their first child was greatly magnified by the impending first strikes of the revolution, which Constantin Rosetti would later help to lead.[41] From this domestic scene, Michelet launches into a colorful narrative of uprisings, treason, captivity, and exile, which he dedicates to the infant Liby.[42] In this account Madame Rosetti, with Liby in her arms, hands out blue and red scarves to the revolutionary crowd and later gives bread to the suffering. When her husband and the other revolutionary leaders are captured and shipped up the Danube, she follows them on the banks of the river, negotiating with their captors along the way. From their captivity in the boat, the prisoners see her as a savior. This is the scene represented in the engraving: the boat stands in dark silhouette in the background while the young mother in peasant dress, with her tiny baby in her arms, strides toward the viewer, a heroic figure. The drama is enhanced by the animated drapery and stark lighting. The caption reads: "To them she often made the impression of an angel of God, and they were not far from praying to her."

In addition to the strong visual evidence, other corroborative factors support Cadot's claim that Courbet based his figure on this engraving. First, the logic of the placement of the figure of Madame Rosetti representing Romania in opposition to the "worker," standing for Russia, is indicated in the historical documentation of the revolution. Russia exercised what was essentially a protectorate over the Danubian Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), which the revolutionaries were determined to shake off. Contemporary accounts assert that Russia actually fomented revolution in order to extricate Romania from both Turkish and European guarantees in order to swallow it.[43] Thus, Russia stood as the face of aggression that provided unity for the Wallachians.[44] Russia was a *bête noir* for Michelet in the *Légendes* as well. Cadot describes Michelet's deepening understanding of Russia's aggression beginning in the mid-1820s and having reached a central place in his thinking by the early 1850s.[45] In that section of the *Légendes*, "Martyrs de la Russie," Michelet, while not fully resolved in his formulation, launches a confident protest against Russia's growing strength in Europe.[46] For Courbet to depict Russian radicalism and Romanian revolt in a troubled marriage seems a perfect metaphor. Second, as Meyer Shapiro and later Nochlin demonstrated, Courbet's Realist project, especially at its height in the fifties, was deeply invested in alternative, popular sources, including folk imagery and contemporary illustration.[47] A longer discussion of these sources is impossible here, but it is crucial to record that Courbet's recourse to such "common" sources reflects his desire to direct his art to alternative audiences for whom such images had cultural resonances outside the Salon proper.

But the most intriguing link, and the one that also throws new light on the composition as a whole, is the connection to Michelet himself. Courbet's "real allegory" in *The Painter's Studio* and Michelet's *Légendes* stem from similar impulses, are directed toward large audiences, and convey comparable messages. But that is skipping to the end of the seven years Courbet sought to document. To understand the correspondence and to situate the historian Michelet within the artist Courbet's milieu, it is necessary to go back to the cultural and political environment in Paris leading up to the February Revolution and giving rise to the explosive events of 1848 across the continent.

An intellectual center of activity in Paris in the 1840s, the Collège de France witnessed the enormous popularity of various lecturers, whose impassioned oratory on history, philosophy,

religion, politics, and social change had enthralled locals and foreign exiles alike.[48] The most popular of these was certainly Michelet, whose courses, lasting from 1838 to 1851, were well attended and enthusiastically received.[49] Courbet's friend Proudhon was only one of hundreds of followers. Although I have found no evidence that Courbet himself was present or ever met Michelet, it is fair to assume that the lectures were a lively topic of conversation among Courbet's circle, an impressive array of mid-century luminaries.[50] The Brasserie Andler, dubbed the "Temple of Realism" by Champfleury, seems to have been the hothouse where Courbet found himself surrounded by "influential people in the press and in the arts...[with whom he hoped to] constitute a new school" with himself as the "representative in painting."[51] The artist himself was not known as a disciplined scholar, but his understanding of the complex interrelatedness of politics, philosophy, and art—as evidenced by the sophisticated layers of signification in *The Painter's Studio*, their myriad sources, and his ability and willingness to communicate these under the censorious gaze of the increasingly oppressive Second Empire—had to come from somewhere, and the Collège de France suggests one possible source. Nochlin discusses Courbet's intellectual influences and draws a connection with Michelet:

> [I]n the years around the February Revolution, Michelet, for example, in notes for a lecture for January, 1848 for his course at the Collège de France, implores the students to break through the stifling limitations of abstract academic training and draw vitality from contact with the people. The historian opposes the reflective wisdom of the man of learning to the native inspiration and common sense of those who work and suffer. Art too, asserts Michelet, must be rooted in the experience of life, as embodied above all in the productive labor and in the daily struggle of the people for existence. [52]

A great deal could be said about this description of art's purpose, in the wake of both utopian socialist formulations and Proudhon's "mutualist" theories; for our purposes, it is enough to insist that in *The Painter's Studio* Courbet allegorizes, among other things, a harmonious gathering of all the "people," with himself, the mighty worker, at the center.[53]

When the revolution arrived, Courbet was, as T.J. Clark has documented, primarily a spectator. The painter wrote to assure his parents he would be far from the violence, waging instead a "war of the intellect." He designed the frontispiece, an odd amalgam of visual tropes, for Baudelaire and Champfleury's revolutionary journal *La Salut Public*, and he is said to have offered a revolutionary song rather than a painting for Ledru-Rollin's contest for an allegory of the Second Republic.[54] As Nochlin (1965) and Clark (1973) insist, it is in Courbet's Realism, in the remarkable paintings he introduced to a public transformed by revolution in the years after 1848, that his political interventions can be found.[55]

We now move ahead to the final phase of this seven-year period. By the middle of the 1850s, both Courbet and Michelet had reason for more sober reflection. The "romantic cast-offs" (*défroques romantiques* is Courbet's description) that lie discarded on the floor of the left-hand side of the *The Painter's Studio* are only the most obvious sign of Courbet's final rejection of the rhetoric of Romanticism.[56] In his "Realist Manifesto," Courbet referred to the "men of 1830" as having had

the title "Romantic" thrust upon them, as "Realism" had been thrust upon him. In this crucial text, written to accompany his 1855 *Pavillon du Réalisme*, Courbet separates himself from the "ancients and moderns," providing distance from both academic tradition and the most current "avant-garde," that is, Romanticism. As one of the many layers of meaning, *The Painter's Studio* visually demonstrates Courbet's independence from any "school," "master," or "movement." On this monumental canvas he declares a final break from tradition, a break that he had begun in 1848, and which can be mapped out across his "series" paintings of the period, where he begins to incorporate the popular imagery and contemporary subject matter that were at the core of Courbet's Realism.[57]

One impetus for this was certainly the political reality of the time, in the wake of the dismal failure of the Second Republic and Louis-Napoleon's audacious *coup d'état*. In a period unique for its conflation of art and politics, another of the artist's most famous letters recounts an exchange with Napoleon III's Superintendent of the Fine Arts Administration, M. de Nieuwerkerke, who had approached Courbet to commission a major painting for the 1855 Exposition and to urge him to soften his rhetoric: "He went on to tell me...that I should change my ideas, water my wine; that everyone was entirely on my side; that I mustn't be contrary, etc.—all kinds of nonsense like that."[58]

Courbet's account is our only real record of the encounter, although he was accompanied by two friends, one of whom, François-Louis Français, corroborated the exchange.[59] Courbet objected above all to the presumption that he could be bought off for a place at the table, and would capitulate to the academy and bourgeois tastes by altering either his style or his subject matter, which were both guaranteed to provoke the sort of controversy the Superintendent hoped to foreclose.

Courbet's response to the Superintendent was, by his own account, one of outrage:

> I answered immediately that I understood absolutely nothing of what he had just said, first, because he was stating to me that he was a government and because I did not feel that I was in any way part of that government; that I too was a government and that I defied him to do anything for mine that I could accept.[60]

The Painter's Studio documents, among other things, the artist's denunciation of state interference in artistic practice. Part of Courbet's Realist project was to reject the Romantic symbolism of the day, played out in academic paintings as historical costume dramas or pastoral fantasies. Instead he includes a still-life arrangement of theatrical props—a feathered cap, dagger and guitar—carelessly tossed on the floor among figures in recognizably modern dress. Thus he records his rejection of such content as a tool for interpreting contemporary conditions. It is his oxymoronic "real allegory" that replaces such symbolism, at least for this one monumental "summing up."

Significantly, Courbet both participated in the official Exposition and struck out on his own. After having been courted by the state, his larger canvases were refused, so he took the three rejected paintings, added fourteen others, and staged his own groundbreaking one-man exhibition, the *Pavillon du Réalisme*, on the grounds of the Exposition.[61] Although not the financial success that Courbet had hoped for, this retrospective exhibition allowed the world to see the transformation

of his art across these crucial years. Both subject matter and style were informed by the social conditions of post-1848 France. As his manifesto declared, Realism demanded that Courbet "be in a position to translate the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my epoch..."[62] Made manifest visually in *The Painter's Studio*, Courbet's Realism was utterly of its moment.

Between 1848 and 1855, reality had replaced the romantic idealism of the 1830s and '40s in politics as well as in art. Michelet's *protégés*, including Constantin Rosetti, had fought on the barricades in France in 1848, and then taken his ideas for democracy back to their own countries. The leaders of the Romanian effort found the model for liberating their people from tyranny in the ideas of Michelet and the other luminaries of the Collège de France, Edgar Quinet and Adam Mickiewicz. Significantly, according to Campbell, "the Collège de France had taught them democracy and republicanism, but it had also taught them romantic nationalism."[63] But later forced into exile, they had returned to Paris in the early 1850s to witness the triumph of reality (i.e., Louis-Napoleon's *coup d'état*) over romantic notions of self-determination.[64]

As a sign of the times, Michelet had been ousted from the Collège de France in 1851, mainly for political reasons:

> Losing his self-appointed priesthood (*sacerdoce*) left him so desperate that he did not continue his history [of the French Revolution] for over a year. Instead, he wrote a number of pamphlets intended for the widest public, protests in the name of the defeated revolutions of 1848 against the repression which followed everywhere.[65]

The result was the *Légéndes démocratiques du Nord*. They were created, according to Stephen Kippur, out of a reaction to the "'present barbarism' of the Emperor and his fellow silencers of history."[66] Michelet's was an unusual *realist* impulse, remarkably similar to Courbet's, of needing to convey a message to a broad public and, most significantly, to Napoleon III. Cadot describes it in his introduction to the 1968 publication: "...the first idea for the *Légendes démocratiques du Nord* was not of a historic order: rather Michelet envisaged a kind of manual of international civic instruction."[67] The *Légendes* employ, in Haac's terms, "haunting realism and biting irony" to describe the suffering in Poland, Russia, and Romania.[68] Like Courbet, Michelet chose not to water his wine. Kippur says that by the mid-1850s, Michelet had "lost faith in history."[69] Thus the *Légendes* are instructional texts, rather than the romantic historical texts for which he is known.

One further point of similarity is the deployment of actual personalities to fulfill allegorical functions. Michelet knew and corresponded with the Rosettis and many of the other revolutionary figures. His narrative is formed around their first-hand accounts, while at the same time he frames their deeds as metaphors for heroic actions against oppression. Courbet populates his studio with friends and celebrities to stand for themes and ideas. Thus Courbet's "real allegory" resembles the *Légendes* in their mix of symbolic, historical, and autobiographical content.

While similarities between the two projects could be merely an incidental reflection of the tenor of the times, Courbet's lifting characters straight out of Michelet's work suggests a stronger connection and a more concrete source for the allegorical structure on the left-hand side of the composition. The *Légendes*, a manual of civic instruction, were Michelet's response to what he

saw as the current government's mishandling of foreign affairs at the outset of the Crimean War; *The Painter's Studio* was Courbet's (an *adhortatio ad principum.*)[70] Seen in this light, the artist's appropriation of Madame Rosetti takes on additional complexity. By her placement in Courbet's parable of practicality, reason, and contemporaneity, Michelet's idealized angel is transformed into a non-idealized representation both of Romania struggling for independence, and, in light of Courbet's identification of her as a "worker's wife," of the more proximate concerns of the working class regarding employment, marriage, and parenthood. Significantly, Toussaint identifies the couple as one of the first representations of the proletariat in French painting.[71] This is to Madame Rosetti's advantage, as we shall see in the next section.

From Harlot to Heroine

> The great variety of female stereotypes, ranging from virgin, mother, and muse to whore, monster, and witch, have been shown to be signifiers for a male-dominated culture, signifying what is desirable (virgins and mothers) and what needs to be repressed and civilized (harlots, monsters, and witches). Such images are thus seen as playing a positive-prescriptive and a negative-proscriptive role.[72]

Courbet made his figures work hard in *The Painter's Studio*. Indeed, we recognize with amazement that no new interpretation of the painting's overall meaning cancels out the previous ones. Nochlin's earlier Fourierist analysis still holds water alongside Riat's symbolism, Toussaint's Masonic imagery, Hofmann's stages of man, and Rubin's reading of Proudhonian pre-Marxist Socialism.[73] And all attempts must hearken back to Courbet's own smokescreen, the social designation of the figures on the left to mask the political allegory. Thus the "worker's wife" can be revised to represent Romania in Herding's exhortation to the ruler, while still doing duty, for instance, in Courbet's autobiographical *histoire morale* as one of the references to his relationship with Virginie Binet, the artist's estranged lover and mother of his son Désiré-Alfred-Emile Binet.[74] The painter discusses his disappointment in the letter to Champfleury: "You know my 'wife' got married. I no longer have her or the child—apparently she was forced to it by poverty. That's how society devours people."[75] In his biography of Courbet, Jack Lindsay analyzes the lasting distress Courbet felt over his loss of Virginie and how he expressed this in his art.[76] On the most purely personal level then, *The Painter's Studio* can be seen to narrate the progress of his relationship with Virginie, from the young and carefree lovers on the right, to trouble in paradise in the opposing pendant of the worker and the worker's wife with infant on the left, to the figurative death of his life's one love in the tondo high up on the wall. The white, circular medallion represents a woman's profile reminiscent of numerous works from the 1840s, when Courbet would have been with Virginie. Toussaint points to the "médaillon de plâtre" as the true representation of her. While this is not universally accepted, the appearance of the artist's family tragedy would seem wholly appropriate in this self-proclaimed "résumé of seven years of my 'artistic and moral life,'" especially given how explicitly he mentions it in the "cooked" Champfleury letter. Even the Irish woman in the left foreground fits this personal narrative as the representation of maternity (she too holds an infant) and the poverty that has

apparently driven Virginie to marry someone else. This example is meant to illustrate that each unique approach to the painting's "meaning" opens out into a rich set of cross-fertilizations. So perhaps it is advisable to leave behind the question of what Courbet "meant" the worker's wife to represent, and instead to look at the ways in which her role changes in subsequent analyses. Doing so will allow us to proceed to this paper's main point, which evaluates how these changes affect our understanding of the way gender operates in *The Painter's Studio*.

With Michelet's text as a source, Madame Rosetti was already burdened with a nineteenth-century anti-feminist interpretation. The author's views on women were hardly progressive even by contemporary standards. As part of the influential lineage from Jean-Jacques Rousseau through Proudhon, Michelet located the role of women at home and hearth, their sensitivity best suited to a supporting and nurturing role. Although lacking Proudhon's outspoken, even paranoid misogyny, Michelet nevertheless pigeonholed women into a secondary role in society:

> Michelet's ideal woman belonged to nature. She lived outside of history and had "a horror of the world, a distaste for society." In return for security, happiness, and knowledge, she gave her husband the love and affection she had cultivated in the timeless world of nature.[77]

Michelet chose Madame Rosetti for his narrative for mainly symbolic reasons: as the heroic mother and as *Liberté*, embodied in the baby girl.[78] The female heroic ideal, wrote Michelet, "comes from the will to be *mothers*, in every extension and in all the seriousness of the word...in women's hearts, in mothers' bosoms, two sparks are brought together: *humanity, maternity*."[79] In this way, he displaced the corporeal reality of women's relative position in society with an ideological, symbolic function.[80] Histories of Romania, at least in French and English, tend to perpetuate this, underplaying Maria Rosetti's actions while emphasizing her symbolic importance.[81] Further, I have yet to manage to discover Liby's fate. It seems hardly surprising then that at least one Michelet scholar suggests that the historian so glorified Madame Rosetti because his marriage was on the rocks and he "seems to have been considerably attracted to [her]."[82] Courbet, however, surreptitiously removes Madame Rosetti from the various constraints of Michelet's symbolic universe, to another realm, to play a role in his visual 'Realist Manifesto.'

The possibilities of this shift can be seen by returning to Herding's and Nochlin's analyses. While the substance of Herding's 'exhortation to the ruler' reading does not change once we include Madame Rosetti, the introduction of a woman into such an auspicious project would have seemed an absurd choice to Courbet's contemporaries. She is not some idealized version of *Liberté*, sensually classicized, with her chemise fluttering open, but a participant, like the other radicals, both in real events and in this imaginary summit. The point is that it would be automatically assumed that *men* would deliver the imagined message to the Emperor. Courbet lets women in on the game, and not merely as metaphors.[83] So when we insert Madame Rosetti's identity into Herding's allegorical reading, she plays a role for Romania that is equal to that of, for instance, the "Scytheman" representing Kosciuszko as the personification of insurgent Poland. She is not a mere woman, but part of a revolutionary display of power that makes her powerful. Perhaps this is not

evident to every viewer, but it would have been to anyone in Courbet's time who recognized the gambit, and should be evident now to the art historian. What is most important for this paper then is to examine the significance of Madame Rosetti's restored identity.

Tamar Garb describes the notion of 'woman' that has shrouded Madame Rosetti:

> In this metropolitan space [Paris] 'Woman' functions as a sign, a spectacle, an object of exchange. Icon of modernity, allegory of State, object of consumption, she is enshrined in the iconography of the city at all institutional levels, on the walls of the Salon, the pages of the news-sheets, the public statuary of the State. In such a narrative women are silent. They are spoken through, they are spoken of, but rarely heard. Their presence as image is dependent on their silence as subjects.[84]

This imperative to reduce woman to sign is at the center of Nochlin's analysis of "the all-important lesson about the gender rules governing the production of art...[and] about the origin of art itself in male desire."[85] Focusing on the central motif of the active artist, admiring model, and observing little boy, Nochlin argues that Courbet has "gendered" the production of art as definitively male. The nude model reiterates this in all her potential roles: mother, nature, truth, muse. She is passive and bound by patriarchy, dominated by the Oedipal formation of Courbet's active subjectivity and the boy's desiring gaze.

While Nochlin is focusing her analysis on the art-making allegory of *The Painter's Studio*, her argument provokes questions about the gendered construction of the rest of the composition, in all its ambiguity. As mentioned previously, Nochlin breaks down the solidity of Courbet's message of reconciliation with the notion of an "allegorical fumble" which reveals "the disjunctions between the things represented and their latent meanings."[86] In essence, Nochlin is arguing that the insertion of unexamined gender implications upsets the apple-cart of closed readings such as Herding's. The structure of allegory transforms character into sign, but attempts at decipherment also allow the possibility of identifying disparate, even contradictory readings of such signs. *The Painter's Studio* is flexible enough, for example, to consider the pair of lovers, who are said to represent "free love," within two radically different interpretations. In a Fourierist allegory, they would be part of the harmonious utopia of a perfect society; a Proudhonian reading would see them as obscene and destructive to society. Thus, following Nochlin's distrust of the neatness of Herding's conclusions, it is possible to examine almost any detail and arrive at several plausible explanations, some seemingly intentional on Courbet's part, others owing to deeper structures, but all adding texture to the artist's achievement.

A close scrutiny of *The Painter's Studio* divulges that each of the female representations wields a certain power in the relationships therein. The "society woman" completely blocks her "husband" and dominates the foreground of the right-hand side. She also represents private patronage, perhaps Courbet's strongest ally against the tyranny of state-sanctioned art. The two lovers occupy a place in front of the only apparent light source, yet while she is clearly visible, he is in dark shadow. The couple this paper is concerned with are hemmed in by the framing edge of the "lay figure" and the stark blackness of the "undertaker's mute's" top hat, making them compositionally connected, yet rhetorically at odds. The "worker's wife" is turned away from her husband, tending her baby

while he glowers. The Irish woman insinuates herself into the middle of the canvas, directly in front of Emperor Napoleon III and invading Courbet's space. The only female character to appear wholeheartedly sympathetic is the nude woman, but of course she is paid to be so, as is evident from the artfully and deliberately placed pile of clothes on the floor next to her, identifying her as a studio model. Why, with her formidable presence in Courbet's studio, he chooses a landscape instead for his easel, is one of the great idiosyncrasies of the painting.[87]

In the discussion of female stereotypes we are forced back to a Manichean formula of good or bad, housewife or harlot. Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, quoted at the beginning of this section, describe how these convenient binaries operate as values in the sign systems of visual culture, as inherently positive or negative. Madame Rosetti plays a mostly "prescriptive" role in Courbet's allegory, whether as mother, working-class woman, Romanian revolutionary, or even *Liberté*. Her negative-proscriptive quality comes from those subsequent art historians who intervene to transform her into a harlot, demoting her to a sign, powerless and silent. The small act of identifying Madame Rosetti subtly shifts the balance in favor of women who act as opposed to those who signify. She is the first female figure (out of six if you count the one in the tondo) to be named with any degree of certainty.[88] Naming distances her from the intrusion of artificially applied roles. She is symbolically clothed by the elimination of her ambiguous sexual availability. Her red scarf now stands for revolution. Her transgression and Courbet's is to defy Proudhon's dictum about harlots and housewives, even to escape definition as sign.

In her article, Nochlin asks the reader to visualize an imaginary "allegory of transgression" in *The Painter's Studio*. She reverses the genders and denies Oedipus by placing the most successful female painter of the period, Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899), in Courbet's place, surrounding her with other contemporary female figures to represent her supporters and stripping the male characters of both clothing and identity. This scenario allows the viewer to recognize the gender and power relations in *The Painter's Studio*, enacted both within its structure and through the ways it is read. Nochlin's strategy is designed to "make the painting speak" in order to reveal "what was hitherto invisible within the structure of the painting."[89] This exercise is enacted in real terms by the naming of Madame Rosetti. She is not imaginary, but is instead a real transgression from gendered norms.[90] From the depths of the painting comes the admonition that we must continually re-examine our own assumptions about the representational codes of nineteenth-century images, as well as the artist's power to manipulate them. Like Nochlin's prying open of Herding's neat reading, Maria Grant Rosetti speaks back to history and the way it is written. As historians, we are obliged to question the validity of even the most authoritative text and to second-guess every interpretation. Finally, Madame Rosetti confirms that the painting will remain as Courbet described it: "It's pretty mysterious."[91] Its secrets will continue to deliver riches.

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1. Quoted in HélèneToussaint, "Le dossier de 'L'Atelier' de Courbet," *Gustave Courbet, 1819-1877* (Paris: Grand Palais, 1977), 13; this dossier will herein be referred to as Paris 1977. Translation in Linda Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory: Rereading *The Painter's Studio*," in Nochlin and S. Faunce, *Courbet Reconsidered*, (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), 249 n. 14.

2. Peter Wollen, "Fashion/orientalism/the body," *New Formations* 1 (Spring 1987): 5.

3. Cf. Max Buchon: "As a means of education and study, Courbet has never had anything but his magnificent eyes, and this was certainly enough." Quoted in Linda Nochlin, *Realism and Tradition in Art 1848-1900* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1966), 47. For the ramifications of the perpetuation of this myth, see Linda Nochlin, "The Depoliticisation of Gustave Courbet: Transformation and Rehabilitation under the Third Republic," in *Art Criticism and its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France*, Michael R. Orwicz, ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 109-21.

4. The letter, written in November or December of 1854, is reprinted in Paris 1977, 246-47. For the English translation, see Toussaint, "The dossier on 'The Studio' by Courbet," in *Gustave Courbet, 1819-1877*, trans. P.S. Falla (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 255; herein referred to as London 1978. For annotations and further explanation of various details in this letter, see Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, ed., *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 131.

5. London 1978, 256.

6. London 1978, 256. According to Michel Cadot, x-ray examination revealed that the baby's profile was visible before Courbet made significant changes to the composition. Michel Cadot, "Courbet Illustrateur de Michelet?" *Romantisme* 8, no. 19 (1978): pp. 74-78. However, this information is not reported in the catalog analysis of the painting; see Lola Faillant-Dumas, "Etude (sic) au laboratoire de recherche des Musées de France," in Paris 1977. A psychological explanation for the infant's effacement—by a professional mourner no less, a *croque-mort* is an undertaker's assistant (mute) who mourns solemnly for each of his boss's clients—is tempting, given Courbet's real life loss of contact with his own son.

7. Chu, *Letters*, 131. Courbet contrasts this with the figures on the right-hand side, who represent "the shareholders, that is to say friends, fellow-workers, and art lovers," London 1978, 254.

8. Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet* (Paris: H. Floury, 1906), 126. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

9. Léonce Bénédite, *L'Art de Notre Temps-Courbet* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, J. Gillequin & cie, 1911), 66; and Bénédite, *Art of Our Times, Courbet* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Co., 1913), 66.

10. R. Huyghe, Germain G. Bazin and Hélène H. Adhémar, *Courbet, l'atelier du peintre, Allégorie réelle, 1855* (Paris: Éditions des Musées Nationaux, Librairie Plon, 1944), viii, fig.12.

11. Kenneth Clark, "Courbet: L'Atelier du Peintre," in *Looking at Pictures* (London: John Murray, 1960), 168.

12. Werner Hofmann, "The Artist's Studio," in *The Earthly Paradise: Art in the 19th Century*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: G. Braziller, 1961), 19.

13. Benedict Nicolson, *Courbet: The Studio of the Painter* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 87 n. 21.

14. In fact the composition does include a prostitute, if the identification of the "society lady" as Apollonie Sabatier (*la Présidente*), a high-class courtesan, is correct, as Toussaint suggests in London 1978, 266-67. Also, the nude model could be associated with prostitution, although I would argue that Courbet avoids portraying her as sexually available. The literature on prostitution and its representation is extensive. Some useful starting places are Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,1990); and Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

15. Théophile Silvestre, *Les Artistes Français* (Paris: Bibliothèque Dionysienne, 1856), 141.

16. Gerstle Mack, *Gustave Courbet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951); Youssef Ishaghpour, "Courbet, le portrait du peintre dans son atelier," *48/14: La revue du Musée d'Orsay* 4 (Spring 1997): 56-63; Ishaghpour, *Courbet, le portrait de l'artiste dans son atelier* (Paris: L'Echoppe, 1998); Pierre Courthion, ed. *Courbet raconté par lui-même et par ses amis*, 2 vols. (Geneva: P. Cailler, 1948-50).

17. "Courtisane ou ménagère (ménagère, dis-je, et non pas servante) je n'y vois pas de milieu." Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Systeme des contradictions economiques, ou, Philosophie de la misere*, vol. II (Paris: Guillaumin et cie, 1846), 197. The reader should note that it is not my intention here to dismiss outright any of the above analyses of Courbet's painting, each of which contributes to our overall appreciation of the work. I wish only to begin to unpack the received wisdom that would repeat the demeaning and stereotypical designation of whore, absent any visual or textual supporting evidence.

18. London 1978.

19. London 1978, 265.

20. Klaus Herding, "The Painter's Studio: Focus of World Events, Site of Reconciliation," in *Courbet: To Venture Independence*, trans. John William Gabriel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," as in n. 1.

21. Herding, "The Painter's Studio," 53, 57. Why Courbet may have inserted himself in so many layers of political intrigue will be discussed shortly in light of the government's overtures toward him.

22. Herding, "The Painter's Studio," 51.

23. Quoted in Robert Tombs, *France, 1814-1914* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), 399.

24. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 22.

25. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 23. The failure is not Courbet's per se, as intentionality is not at the heart of her argument.

26. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 23, 31.

27. Herding, "The Painter's Studio," 47.

28. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 25.

29. London 1978, 254.

30. James Henry Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in Courbet and Proudhon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 144 n. 11.

31. Cadot, "Courbet Illustrateur de Michelet?" See n. 6.

32. Jules Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques du Nord*, ed. Michel Cadot (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968). The three articles were *Pologne et Russie-Kosciuszko* in 1851, *Les Martyrs de la Russie* in 1852, and *Principautés Danubiennes: Madame Rosetti* in 1853. See Cadot's introduction to this volume for exact dates and sources of Michelet's articles. The French word *légende* most literally translates as "story" but can also be a direct cognate in English; given that the most common compound form is *légende héroïque*, the title's romanticism is likely no accident.

33. Cf. Michel Ragon, *Gustave Courbet* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 112. In this biography, Ragon names Bakunin (Bakounine) among the figures with no citation.

34. James Henry Rubin, *Courbet* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1997), 144.

35. Writing about Courbet's large unfinished canvas, *Départ des pompiers courant à un incendie* (1850-51, Paris, Petit Palais), Toussaint footnotes Cadot in a part of her text explaining Courbet's inclusion of exterior pictorial details (not art historical references) as clues or keys to reading the iconographic program. She makes no reference to the content of Cadot's article or how it relates to her "dossier" on *The Painter's Studio*. Hélène Toussaint, "Le réalisme de Courbet au service de la satire politique et de la propagande gouvernementale," *Bulletin de la Societé de l'histoire de l'art Français*, (1979): 244 n. 26.

36. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 223 n. 15.

37. Michelet's article was originally published in 1851 in *L'Evénement* (sic), then in 1853 in *Le Siècle*. John C. Campbell, *French Influence and the Rise of Roumanian Nationalism* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1971), 289 n. 8. The engraving is by Ch. Mettais and Sotain and appeared in a separate edition of "Madame Rosetti 1848" in brochure form in 1853, Cadot, "Courbet Illustrateur," 77; for a description, see Cadot, "Introduction" in Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques*, lviii.

38. A thorough accounting of the events of 1848 throughout Europe can be found in Dowe, Dieter, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Dieter Langewiesche, and Jonathan Sperber eds., *Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform*, trans. David Higgins. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001).

39. Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques*, 229.

40. Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques*, 216. Valaque, or Wallachia, is a region of Southern Romania between the Transylvanian Alps and the Danube.

41. For a concise description of the revolutionary events, see Lothar Maier, "The Revolution of 1848 in Moldavia and Wallachia" in Dowe et al., *Europe in 1848*, 186-209. Regarding the birth metaphor, Michelet was probably aware that only a few days later, C.A. Rosetti published the first issue of *Pruncul Român*, "Romanian Infant," or in French, *Le nouveau-né Roumain*, a journal which was "a champion of radical economic and social reform during its short existence." Keith Hitchins, *The Romanians, 1774-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 242.

42. Liberté, or in Romanian Libertatea-Sofia. Constantin called attention to the significance of Liby to their cause in a letter to Maria of September 1848: "Compliments and a kiss for *Liberté* from the Golescos, as for me—it goes without saying—you know that I adore liberty." Constantin Rosetti, *C.A. Rosetti către Maria Rosetti: Corespondent*, ed. Marin Bucur (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988), 31.

43. Mircea Anghelescu, "The Romanian Revolution of 1848: Moving Images," *New International Journal of Romanian Studies* 2 (1998): 47. These circumstances would play an enormous role in the events leading into the Crimean War.

44. T. W. Riker, *The Making of Roumania: A Study of an International Problem, 1856-1866* (New York: Arno Press,1971), 19.

45. Cadot, "Introduction," in Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques*, xiv.

46. Cadot, "Introduction," in Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques*, xviii.

47. Meyer Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery: An Essay on Realism and Naiveté," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* (April-June 1941): 164-91; Linda Nochlin, "Gustave Courbet's Meeting: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew," *Art Bulletin* 49 (September 1967).

48. Campbell, *French Influence*, 129.

49. Jules Michelet, *Cours au Collège de France, 1838-1851* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

50. The one indispensable source for analyzing Courbet's milieu is T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1973).

51. Courbet quoted in Rubin, *Courbet*, 35.

52. Linda Nochlin, *Gustave Courbet: A Study of Style and Society* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976), 99-100.

53. On art and the utopian socialists, see Neil McWilliam, *Dreams of Happiness: Social Art and the French Left, 1830-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). On Proudhon, see Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision*.

54. See Clark, *Image of the People*, 47-76.

55. Clark is explicit, and I second him, that Courbet did not set out to paint "political" pictures, but that political realities opened up new possibilities for an art of engagement. See "On the Social History of Art" in Clark, *Image of the People*, 9-20.

56. Nochlin, *Gustave Courbet: A Study*, 214.

57. See Courbet's "The Realist Manifesto" in Linda Nochlin, ed. and trans., *Realism and Tradition in Art 1848-1900: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 33-34. For a lucid explication of Courbet's Realist project during this period, see Rubin, *Courbet*, 103-32.

58. Chu, *Letters*, 115, (To Alfred Bruyas, October [?] 1853).

59. On this episode see Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

60. Chu, *Letters*, 115.

61. The best account of this is in Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire*, 57-61.

62. "The Realist Manifesto," as in n. 57.

63. Campbell, *French Influence*, 206. See also Doina and Nicolae Harsanyi, "The Discreet Charm of the Little Sister: France and Romania," *East European Quarterly* 28 (June 1994): 183-92.

64. Not wholly defeated though, Romania would eventually achieve what it sought. "All strategic goals the revolutionaries had set themselves in 1848—above all national unity, social freedom and the country's total independence—were gradually achieved during the second half of the 19th century." Ioan Aurel Pop, *Romanians and Romania: A Brief History* (Boulder: Eastern European Monographs,1999), 103.

65. Oscar Haac, *Jules Michelet* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 93.

66. Stephen A. Kippur, *Jules Michelet: A Study of Mind and Sensibility* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 202.

67. Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques*, v.

68. Haac, *Jules Michelet*, 92.

69. Kippur, *Michelet: A Study of Mind*, 208.

70. The circumstances which found France in hostilities against Russia and allied for once with Great Britain are too complicated to enumerate here, but Napoleon III was seen to be refighting the battles of his uncle and using belligerent

military adventurism to aggrandize and legitimate his newly-minted Second Empire. For a fairly concise account, see Tombs, *France, 1814–1914*, 403-7.

71. London 1978, 256.

72. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *Art Bulletin* 69 (September 1987): 338 n.26.

73. For the Fourierist reading, see Linda Nochlin, "'The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1839-1880," *Art News Annual* 34 (1968): 13-16. In her 'Dossier,' Toussaint offers evidence for a possible link to Masonic symbolism, see London 1978, 269-70; see also Hofmann, *The Earthly Paradise*, 12; and Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision*.

74. "C'est l'histoire morale et physique de mon atelier." Courbet to Alfred Bruyas, 1854, Petra Chu, *Correspondance de Courbet*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 119.

75. Letter to Champfleury, London 1978, 255. According to records, however, Virginie's death certificate listed her as unmarried. Chu, *Letters*, 134.

76. Jack Lindsay, *Courbet: His Life and Art* (Somerset: Adams and Dart, 1973).

77. Kippur, *Michelet: A Study of Mind*, 209. See Michelet's course of 1850, 'Éducation de la femme et par la femme,' in Michelet, *Cours au Collège de France*.

78. Madame Rosetti stood truly for *Liberté* in the eyes of at least one artist, C. D. Rosenthal. Of Hungarian birth and among Michelet's followers, the painter and sculptor Rosenthal fought on the Paris barricades in February 1848 and participated in the Wallachian uprising. The leaders of this revolution commissioned him to execute a statue of *Liberté* for public view in Bucharest (destroyed, illustrated in *Illustrierte Zeitung*, [28 July 1849]). Rosenthal accompanied Madame Rosetti on part of her journey, according to Michelet, *Légendes démocratiques*, 226. Later in exile in France, he painted the symbolic *Revolutionary Romania*, an allegorical figure modeled on Maria Rosetti. For an illustration, see Kurt W. Treptow, ed., *A History of Romania* (New York: Eastern European Monographs, 1996). On Rosenthal, see entry by Remus Niculesco in Jane Turner, ed. *Grove Dictionary of Art*, v. 27 (London: Macmillan Publishing, 1996), 165-66 and Ion Frunzetti, *Pictori Revoluţionari de la 1848* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1988).

79. Quoted in Jeanne Calo, *La Création de la Femme Chez Michelet* (Paris: Librairie Nizet,1975), 72. Italics in original.

80. On the ramifications of the symbolic use of the female figure to represent political concepts, see, for example, Linda Nochlin, "The Myth of the Woman Warrior," in *Representing Women* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 35-57. See also Janis Bergman-Carton, *The Woman of Ideas in French Art, 1830-1848* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). The author discusses the conflation of *Liberté* with the image of the "whore on the barricades," 12.

81. From the simplest Google search to an examination of numerous histories and biographical reference books for Scotland, France, and Romania, Maria Grant Rosetti has been difficult to find. One is most likely to find reference to her as the model for Rosenthal's painting (see note 78), the allegorical rather than historical, heroic figure. The scarcity of details of Madame Rosetti's life in the historical record seems to parallel her obscurity in Courbet's painting.

82. Arthur Mitzman, *Michelet, Historian: Rebirth and Romanticism in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 260. Mitzman asserts nothing untoward between the two, but the slippery slope toward Proudhon's binary seems dangerously trod here. It is also worth mentioning that although depicted in simple peasant garb, which she had donned for her dangerous journey, Maria Grant Rosetti was of upper class origins. Thus she is as unlikely a Wallachian peasant as she is a *femme d'ouvrier* in *The Painter's Studio*.

83. The "Irish woman" plays several roles as well. In addition to personifying poverty, wherein she powerfully reminds the Emperor of the uncompleted project outlined in his 1844 tract *De l'extinction du paupérisme*, she is also the representation of Great Britain. In the era of the Great Potato Famine, the arrogance and cruelty of the land-owning aristocracy of Great Britain was coming to light as more liberal Parliamentarians struggled to repeal the Corn Laws, while the Irish starved. (I thank Professor Linda Nochlin for this insight, which is also briefly discussed in London 1978, 256-57). For a possible source for this figure in Flora Tristan's *Les Promenades dans Londres* (1840), see Lindsay, *Courbet: His Life*, 129.

84. Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 1.

85. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 31.

86. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 23. An important aspect of Nochlin's argument is her examination of the painting's state of unfinish, an issue rarely dealt with in the literature. With its lack of overall unity, Nochlin finds meaning in fragments. Nochlin's focus on the Irishwoman informs my own on the "worker's wife." See Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 25-26.

87. Marcia Pointon makes an interesting reading of the model's clothing as the detail that destabilizes the notion of body as sign. The clothing offers "the link with the other figures in the studio, that which can reinscribe woman into the real." Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting, 1830-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 119-21. Sarah Faunce reads the nude/landscape contradiction as an invalidation of the "gendered hierarchy" that favors the

masculine "active world of culture" over the feminine "passivity of nature." Courbet's Realism privileges the Franche-Comté landscape as the real culture and links the nude model to this "highest possible value." Faunce, "Courbet: Feminist in Spite of Himself," in Art Gallery of New South Wales, *Body* (Australia: Bookman Schwartz, 1997), 98.

88. The only other definitively nameable figure, Baudelaire's lover Jeanne Duval, was painted over early in the work's history; her pentimento is clearly visible.

89. Nochlin, "Courbet's Real Allegory," 37.

90. Another fruitful imaginary exercise would be to picture Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* if Michelet had continued with his original idea of memorializing the "Women of 48," and Courbet had drawn his figures from this. What would my job be here today if I was reconsidering a century and a half of interpretations of a painting that depicted disguised female revolutionaries? They couldn't all be harlots, could they? Cadot, "Introduction," Michelet, *Légendes Democratiques*, vi.

91. Courbet to Louis Français, Feb. (?) 1855, Chu, *Letters*, 135.

Fig. 1 Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 243.8 x 233.7 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Acquired through the Lille P. Bliss Bequest. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2007 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

Fig. 2 Wifredo Lam, *The Jungle*, 1942–43, gouache on paper mounted on canvas, 238.8 x 229.9 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Inter-American Fund. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2007 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/ADAGP, Paris)

Translating *Vanguardia*: Wifredo Lam, Transculturation, and the Crux of Avant-gardism*

Nathan J. Timpano

> The unwritten history of the avant-garde is the history of...[non-Western] "peripheries."[1]
> —George Yúdice

As of late, postcolonial theory has been justly preoccupied with negotiating the implications and ramifications of a persistent center-periphery dichotomy, the likes of which has shaped current Latin American art history and the discourse surrounding avant-gardism in this particular field. It is likewise apparent that polarizing avant-gardist works from the traditional European "center" with those of a non-Western "periphery" has generated a number of studies concerning the interrelationships that existed between Latin American vanguards and their European counterparts.[2] Of particular interest are modernist paintings by Wifredo Lam, an Afro-Cuban artist whose very career negotiates the boundary between "center" and "periphery," and whose works consequently hold a marked position in this hotly-debated hegemonic paradigm. With regard to historiography, scholars have previously focused considerable attention on Lam's connection to European modernists, especially his association with Pablo Picasso, and the close rapport that existed between these two artists in Paris in the 1930s.[3] Given Lam's involvement with other Western painters at this time, it is understandable that his early artistic style would in large part be shaped by European formalism (namely, Cubism and Surrealism) and a shared awareness of the iconographies and symbolic meanings attributed to non-Western tribal masks.

Recent literature on Wifredo Lam has promulgated the notion that this interest in the aesthetics of African and Oceanic masks developed through his study of European Cubism and more specifically, by way of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (fig. 1).[4] This relationship has understandably led researchers to question whether Westerners like Picasso were attracted to Lam's modernist tendencies as an avant-garde painter, or simply drawn to his "exoticism" as a non-Western Afro-Cuban other. According to Lam scholar Lowery Stokes Sims, Picasso and other European modernists ostensibly, though perhaps inadvertently, positioned Lam as a "primitive" within the primitivism of white Eurocentric modernism.[5] Sims's contention appropriately highlights the discourse centered on ethnicity and authenticity (or as I will argue, authenticity *through* ethnicity) that has been constructed around Lam's direct exposure to and subsequent incorporation of African iconographies. In particular, Sims and fellow art historian Gerardo Mosquera respectively posit that Lam's use of "primitive" iconographies was a "more authentic" use of these visual elements than would have been possible for a European modernist like Picasso. This line of reasoning is therefore based on the assertion that Lam abandoned the Eurocentric formal use of non-Western masks by adopting a pictorial idiom based on the meanings inherent (to him) in these African objects.[6]

Specific figures and elements in Lam's best-known painting, *The Jungle* (fig. 2), have been particularly subject to a variety of interpretations and narratives that point to similarities with Picasso's early cubist forms. Simultaneously seen to reflect the stylistic composition and African

masks employed in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, as well as the iconographies of African, Amerindian, and Pacific Islander masks, *The Jungle* has generally been viewed as Lam's definitive "rupture" from Euro-cubism and the culmination of his personal style.[7] Given the visual evidence, it is certainly viable to contend that Lam's painting is a departure from his former experimentation with hybrid forms, even though I am compelled to read this work as a "borderline" painting, to use Homi Bhabha's terminology, or an image that is caught visually between two distinct artistic idioms.[8] In this regard, the commonality of European interpretations of "primitive" African masks, along with the referencing of specific Afro-Cuban gods from the Santería religion, situates *The Jungle* as a painting that openly incorporates syncretistic processes, but one that does not fully abandon its recognizable Euro-cubist or Afro-Cuban elements in favor of a unique stylistic formulation.[9] Sims rightly identifies Lam's oeuvre as a synthesis of various elements, though she, like Mosquera, essentially concludes that Lam's racial heritage not only legitimized this more authentic experience of primitivism, but allowed him to interpret the meanings of these forms through his own Afro-Cuban heritage.[10] Building upon this faulty contention, current scholarship has tended to maintain that Lam's paintings, *The Jungle* included, attempt to recapture "the African element" in Cuban art or redefine notions of creole within a collectively-felt and nationalistic *cubanidad*.[11]

This study will conversely argue that Lam was less interested in criticizing or distancing himself from European interpretations of African art and more concerned with juxtaposing a myriad of multiethnic and multicultural iconographies, the result of which produced an artistic style fashioned from personal experimentation rather than deliberate subversiveness or a united sense of (Afro-)Cuban nationalism. By utilizing a number of postcolonial theories to conceptualize Lam's articulation of avant-gardism, I will address works from the artist's Cuban period (1942–51) alongside a revisionist approach to the Cuban *vanguardia* and conclude with an analysis of artistic similitude as it applies to the commonality of stylistic motifs visible in works by Wifredo Lam and European modernists.[12] Despite a substantial oeuvre spanning six decades, paintings from Lam's post-European Cuban period will remain the principal focus of my study, given that they, for the first time in the artist's creative output, visually dissolve cultural, religious, and racial binaries into a unique and wholly complex pictorial idiom. To clarify the position of this essay, it is important to recognize that Lam's interest in his Cuban heritage and his continuous dialogue with European painters, writers, and artistic styles become contradictions only when rooted in the rubric of primitivism. As such, I am offering that the extant literature has suffered from an over-reliance on the investigation of Lam's personal biography, his connections with Afro-Cuban religious practices, and his own racial heritage. Rather than mirroring the discourse surrounding a center-periphery dichotomy, I will re-examine the artist's personal "contradictions" in order to conceptualize Lam as an artist whose oeuvre complicates the overly-simplistic "European insider-Latin American outsider" paradigm, and one that equally refutes the notion that authenticity and legitimacy can be situated in the artist's race rather than artistic production. A brief examination of Lam's artistic development is therefore necessary (and useful) when attempting to evaluate how and why notions of race and nationality have misguided the present discourse surrounding Lam's avant-gardists works.

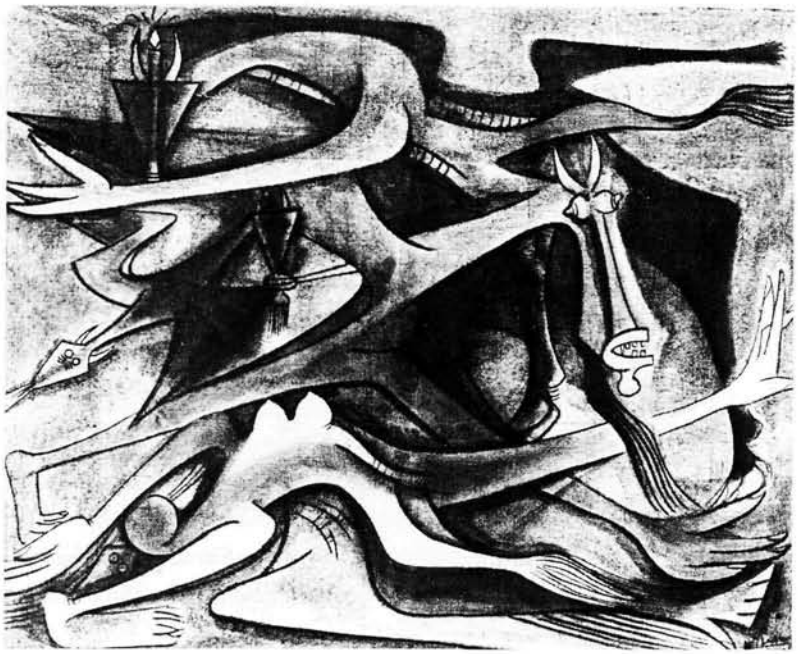

Fig. 3 Wifredo Lam, *Exodo*, 1948, oil on burlap, 128.2 x 157.5 cm. Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. (Image © 2007 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/ADAGP, Paris)

Otherness, or the Search for the "Primitive"

Born in Sagua la Grande, Cuba in 1902, Wifredo Oscar de la Concepción Lam y Castilla was the eighth and youngest child of Lam-Yam, a Chinese merchant who had immigrated to Cuba in the nineteenth century, and Ana-Serafina, a Cuban-born woman of Amerindian, African, and Spanish descent.[13] The specifics of Lam's godmother, an Afro-Cuban woman named Montonica Wilson, and a renowned healer-priestess in the cult of Shangó within the local Santería religion, have understandably appealed to scholars investigating Lam's oeuvre as an articulation of Afro-Cuban race and religious practice. The Parisian art critic and surrealist ethnographer Michel Leiris recounts that it was through Wilson's tutelage that the young Lam was initially introduced to "primitive" Afro-Cuban figurines associated with Santería.[14] At the age of fourteen, Lam moved to Havana to begin drawing classes at the Academia de San Alejandro and subsequently exhibited works in a one-man show in Sagua la Grande, as well as in the annual salons of the Associación de Pinturas y Esculturas (Havana Painters' and Sculptors' Association) between 1920 and 1923.[15]

At the age of twenty-one, Lam left Cuba to study painting in Spain and subsequently joined the Republicans at the inception of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. During hospitalization for food poisoning, he became acquainted with the Spanish sculptor Manolo Hugué, who eventually gave Lam a letter of introduction to Pablo Picasso. Lam subsequently traveled to Paris in 1938 and forged an immediate friendship with the renowned Spanish painter, who reportedly found

Lam to be quite the "intriguing" character.[16] Between 1938 and 1941, Lam exhibited paintings at Pierre Loeb's Paris gallery and at a joint exhibition with Picasso at the Perls Galleries in New York, both leading galleries in the promotion and commercialization of modern art.[17] His collaboration with Parisian artists and intellectuals was abruptly interrupted, however, when the city fell to Nazi occupation in 1940, forcing Lam to flee Paris for southern France.[18] During his stay in Marseilles between July 1940 and March 1941, Lam was joined by other exiled Surrealists, and it was here that the artist executed a series of illustrations for André Breton's fantastical poem *Fata Morgana*, which effectively introduced Lam's well-known *femme cheval* (or horse-headed woman) motif to the art world at large.[19]

Lam returned to Cuba toward the end of 1941 and eventually began work on *The Jungle* one year later.[20] Over the next forty years, Lam would paint in a primarily surrealist style, incorporating iconographies borrowed from Afro-Cuban deities, European Cubism, and non-Western tribal masks, all of which are visible in the painting *Exodo* (1948, fig. 3). Between 1942 and 1951 Lam showed paintings in five solo exhibitions at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York, and was also represented in one-man shows at London's National Gallery, the Centre d'Art Galerie in Port-au-Prince, and the Lyceum in Havana.[21] In 1952 the artist left Cuba and permanently relocated to Paris, although he would continue to visit his homeland as well as New York City throughout his lifetime. Four years later, Lam traveled to the Amazon rainforest before spending the winter of 1957 in Mexico City and subsequently settled for a year in Albisola Marina, Italy in 1959. He briefly returned to Italy in 1964 after winning the prestigious Guggenheim International Award, as well as the Italian Premio Marzotto prize.[22] Important retrospectives of his artwork followed two years later across Europe and the United States, and continued throughout the artist's career until his death in Paris in 1982.[23]

Given Lam's extensive undertakings in Europe and Cuba throughout his lifetime, it is easy to succumb to an ever-problematic pitfall in Latin American art history: the search for 'otherness' as a legitimizing tool in the debate over avant-gardist activities. The risk, of course, is the inadvertent undermining of postcolonial theories regarding primitivism and its adverse role in discourses surrounding the production of art. This approach is indicative of early revisionist theories regarding Lam's artwork, as typified by Gerardo Mosquera's categorical approach to the artist's oeuvre. In the mid-1990s, Mosquera chastised art critics and historians for failing to see Wifredo Lam as "the first artist to offer a vision from the African element in the Americas in the history of gallery art."[24] Although Mosquera maintained that a semiotic response to the Afro-Cuban elements in Lam's work cannot effectively explicate the artist's intended meanings, he ultimately concluded that this reclamation of meaning was achieved through Lam's Afro-Cuban heritage.[25]

Mosquera further hypothesizes that a crisis of identity exists in all Caribbean cultures—not just Cuba—due to the cultural pluralities that exist in this particular region of the world. Because these cultures have been fashioned by the historical acts of colonization, exploitation, miscegenation, and the mixing of disparate religions and traditions, Caribbean cultures are caught, according to the scholar, in a contemporary paradox. For Mosquera, a dilemma results when these cultures self-actualize their "dominated-side," or their indigenous and African roots, with their "dominator-

side," or their Spanish/European ancestry. In this regard, his theorization of Latin American identity could be seen to embody W.E.B. DuBois' notion of double consciousness—or the condition of always seeing one's self through a more dominant and external perspective—though Mosquera's conception arguably turns this critical gaze onto itself.[26] He thus argues that Lam's avant-gardist contribution is the artist's deliberate aversion from the Western aspects of his identity (and in particular, his early academic training in Havana and Europe) for a more fervent embrace of his African heritage.[27] As previously stated, Mosquera initially rebuked scholars for not examining the artist from a purely Afro-Cuban perspective—a methodology that has not only been adopted by art historians since the publication of Mosquera's seminal essay, but has also narrowed our present understanding of the artist's complex oeuvre given its adherence to categories of racial otherness.

To be sure, race plays an undeniable role in informing Lam's overall oeuvre. The problem with the concept of otherness, however, results when scholars, in attempting to elevate Lam's works, inadvertently participate in a further 'othering' (or primitivizing) of his paintings by overstressing his racial legitimacy. Limiting this investigation of primitivism solely to Lam and Cuba, I would argue that what scholars have construed as legitimacy through ownership of otherness is arguably a further commodification of Lam and his work based precisely on his assumed 'Afro-Cubanismo.'[28] I am therefore wholly reticent to conclude that Lam was utilizing primitivist or subversive strategies when appropriating Western and non-Western iconographies. Rather, it would appear that he consciously combined stylistic elements from his European counterparts in order to offer his own articulation of avant-gardism as an "outsider artist" on the inside.[29]

Translating *Vanguardia*[30]

Traditionally, the debate surrounding the "historical" avant-gardes of the twentieth century has revolved exclusively around European artists, and more specifically Pablo Picasso.[31] These Eurocentric models have consequently produced marginalized spheres that fail to enter the present discourse due to exclusion from an already-exclusive handling of avant-gardism, rather than a lack of originality or even the (albeit problematic) notion of artistic rupture. When approaching the concept of avant-gardism in Cuba, scholars confront the daunting task of reconciling this "-ism" with its unavoidable binary counterpart: the artistic avant-garde in Western Europe. Any articulation of a Cuban *vanguardia* is therefore subject to a plethora of Eurocentric positions that seek to destabilize its relegated position on the European "periphery." This dilemma is arguably a problem of semantics and value-laden terminology, but is equally evident in the lack of canonical Latin American artists being addressed outside of this "center." In addition to the challenge of always having to look beyond binaries, one is equally forced to tackle quandaries that arise when attempting to define culturally and racially-hybrid concepts like "Cuban" and "Cuban nationalism."

I therefore find fault with art historian Juan A. Martínez's assessment of a cohesive Cuban nationalism in Lam's oeuvre, particularly since Martínez frames this particular articulation of *vanguardismo* as a conscious and united aim to express a collective national identity.[32] To presuppose a nationalistic position is to deny the apparent ambiguity of constructed nomenclatures like "Cuban"

and to assume that this particular term is a single, cohesive, and collectively-understood expression within a disparate culture. With regard to Lam, it is viable to assert that his post-1941 works deftly defy a nationalistic reading, particularly since any one conceptualization of nationalism resists a consistent or definitive meaning.[33] Accordingly, I would argue that this nationalistic aim—that is, the need to express his Cuban nationalism—was not the underlying impetus for Lam's oeuvre throughout this period.[34] To limit his work to this reading further isolates the artist within the delimiting labels "derivative outsider" or "nationalistic insider." When coupled with the assertion that paintings by non-Western artists are typically regarded as derivative of (if not wholly influenced by) their European counterparts, this realization further denies their equality in an avant-garde constructed through hierarchies.

It is no surprise then that works from Lam's Paris period were historically classified as derivative variations of Picasso's cubist compositions and the fractured human forms visible in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.[35] These problematic notions aside, one must inevitably reconcile Lam's formal training in Spain and France with the idea that his post-1941 paintings are meant to recapture a purely Afro-Cuban element. Therefore, it may be beneficial to examine how European primitivism, in spite of its generally discursive connotations, provided a conceptual doorway for Lam, which he ultimately traversed in Cuba. In this regard, we can make a productive attempt to resolve Lam's connections to European culture *and* his articulation of local Cuban customs and traditions, since this binary collectively informs an oeuvre that refuses to be tied definitively to a European precedent or a sense of Cuban nationalism.

When addressing "borderline" artists such as Wifredo Lam, Homi Bhabha maintains that "what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of origin...and to focus on those moments of processes that are produced in the articulation of 'differences.'"[36] To read Lam's works through Bhabha's process of multicultural translation, it is clear that an examination of the artist's Afro-Cuban origins is only one aspect informing Lam's complex oeuvre. The more crucial aspect of his work alternately resides in the manner in which Lam (as an artist) and his paintings (as indexical signs) negotiate differences and pluralities between connected but heterogeneous cultures. Bhabha further posits that this act of translation is a process of necessity for borderline artists to be able to negotiate and rewrite histories, or at least be examined under new and critical lenses. His use of the term "borderline," however, carries its own limitations when applied to an artist like Lam. Despite the assertion that these artists are caught between two cultural dichotomies, Bhabha's designation is only a general theory of postcolonial processes and does not examine the specific translations that transpired in Cuba. Given this conundrum, it is necessary to examine an alternative means of approaching Bhabha's understanding of translation as it confronts cultural processes in Lam's visual language.

When read alongside Bhabha's generalized theory of multicultural translation and borderline artists, Fernando Ortiz's more localized conceptualization of transculturation—or the process he believed was inherent in Cuba's postcolonial cultural development—better explains how paintings from Lam's Cuban period are grounded in an avant-gardist idiom. Arguably Cuba's most prominent ethnographer and cultural essayist of the 1940s, Ortiz theorized transculturation as

> the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here [since the colonial period], and without a knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the evolution of the Cuban folk, either in the economic or in the institutional, legal, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual, or other aspects of its life. The real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturation.[37]

Unlike Gerardo Mosquera, who essentially views transculturation as the underlying paradox of all Caribbean cultures and *race* as the most critical aspect of this construction, Ortiz's conception attempts to account for all facets of Cuban culture and not its racial heritage alone. Cultural anthropologist Walter D. Mignolo has accordingly examined the origins of Ortiz's notion of transculturation by scrutinizing its current usage in defining transnational cultures. According to Mignolo, transculturation "has implied mutual transformation through continual interaction and negotiation among people of different cultural backgrounds...[which makes it] more amenable to a conceptualization of processes of identification (allocation and relocation) than to one of fixed identity states."[38]

In this respect, Lam, like Cuba, becomes an inevitable construction of transcultural processes through the intermingling of disparate cultures, religions, races, and political agendas. This process manifests itself through visual and linguistic conventions in paintings like *Exodo* or *Nativité [Annonciation]* (1947, San Juan, Private collection). In particular, the viewer is confronted with iconographies that are specific to Santería deities, as evidenced by Lam's use of Afro-Cuban masks and *femme cheval* figures, along with titles that allude to prominent biblical themes explored throughout the history of (Spanish) Catholic painting. Lam therefore reconciles his connection to Afro-Cuban religion *and* the history of Western art through a deliberate combination of cultural differences. In this regard, Lam's race cannot solely account for the articulation of transcultural forms, nor can it can be separated into a binary of African-versus-Cuban, but must equally account for the artist's Chinese, Amerindian, and European heritage.[39]

In filtering the theory of translation through transculturation, it is apparent that these two processes each rely on synthesis as an underlying impetus for their creation, a notion that Lam readily admitted was present in his own "synthetic style."[40] Differences within a painting like *Exodo* are therefore not reconciled through a fixed definition of cultural hybrids, but rather, as disparate elements in constant dialogue with one another. More specifically, the appearance of Afro-Cuban deities in the painting compliments and simultaneously contrasts the central *femme cheval*, since the latter borrows iconographies from tribal masks but was a motif developed in France, not Cuba. Notably, the eyes of the *femme cheval* have been replaced with the gourd and/or breast-like objects affixed to the hybrid figures in Lam's early painting *The Jungle*. Afro-Cuban deities in *Exodo*, as represented by the four mask-like heads on the left side of the canvas, equally distinguish themselves from the angelic wings supporting the reclining figure in the lowest register of the painting. The title of the work further implies a spiritual theme (in this case, a religious exodus), although it is unclear whether this journey is that described in the Old Testament or if it references Santería's presumed exodus from Catholicism's hegemonic tenets. To confine a reading of Lam's cubist and surrealist elements to the symbols of Santería alone would thus restrict this work

from articulating the processes of transculturation and translation, particularly in terms of Catholic visual themes and the reality of religious syncretism in (post)colonial Cuba. To assert that Lam was *re*-appropriating the Eurocentric African mask is also misleading since he was clearly a member of the "insiders' circle" with Western European figures like Picasso and Breton. Alternatively, I maintain that the artist was employing a strategic use of artistic similitude as a means of articulating his own *vanguardia* through the strategies involved in translation and transculturation. In this way, Lam's so-called "contradictions" become processes of personal allocation and relocation, rather than binaries opposing one another.

Similitude, or the Act of the Trojan Horse

In her book *Avant-Garde Gambits, 1888–1893: Gender and the Color of Art History*, Griselda Pollock identifies avant-gardism as a trilogy of maneuvers defined as "reference," "deference," and "difference," asserting that

> reference ensured recognition that what you [the artist] were doing was part of the avant-garde project. Deference and difference had to be finely calibrated so that the ambition and claim of your work was measured by its difference from the artist or artistic statement whose status you both acknowledged (deference) *and* displaced.[41]

According to Pollock, articulating avant-gardism cannot be relegated to a simplistic master-follower binary, but must be understood as a system of one-upmanship in which one artist is in dialogue with another in order to displace his or her recognized style. Pollock's theory advocates an avant-gardism that restores intentionality to the so-called "secondary" agent and reciprocally problematizes the notion of artistic influence. Her rather broad conceptualization of reference, however, allows for a multitude of interpretations, particularly when read alongside works from Lam's Cuban period and their negotiation of transculturation. More specifically, one must question what Lam is precisely referencing in *Exodo* since he seemingly alludes to a multiplicity of artistic statements which include, but are not limited to, the African masks in Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the Afro-Cuban deities in *The Jungle*, and the *femme cheval* in the *Fata Morgana* suite. I therefore propose that an understanding of Pollock's reference is better explained through the notion of artistic similitude, or the process by which a visual likeness to a known work of art is deliberately recognizable, but strategically altered in all subsequent images created by an autonomous artist. Formally speaking, similitude of stylistic motifs may imply appropriation or pastiche, though this process should be understood as a dialogue between equals rather than a burglary or mimesis of style.[42]

In an interview with Max-Pol Fouchet published in 1976, Lam indirectly addressed this process of similitude and Picasso's purported influence on his work. With respect to artistic allusion, Lam argued that

> Picasso was the master of our age. Even Picasso was influenced by Picasso! ... Rather than an influence, we might call it a *pervasion of the spirit*. There was no question of imitation, but Picasso may easily have been present in my spirit, for nothing in him was alien or strange to me.[43]

Fig. 4 Wifredo Lam, *Portrait en bleu*, c. 1943, gouache on paper mounted on canvas, 107 x 86.5 cm. Collection Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (Image © 2007 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/ ADAGP, Paris)

Fig. 5 Pablo Picasso, *Femme au chapeau assise dans un fauteuil*, 1941-42, oil on canvas, 130.5 x 97.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel (Photo © Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin Bühler. © 2007 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

In this assertion, Lam openly admits that the pull of Picasso's style was inevitable, though rather than categorizing this maneuver as "influence," it would appear that Lam's artistic output was, in actuality, the result of a profound understanding of Picasso's formal elements.

Regarding deference and difference, or the shift away from an allusion to European elements to a style that retained artistic similitude while synthesizing (Afro-)Cuban iconographies, Lam further maintained that his paintings

> would never be the equivalent of that pseudo-Cuban music for nightclubs. I refused to paint cha-cha-cha. I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the negro [sic] spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the blacks. In this way I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters. I knew I was running the risk of not being understood either by the man in the street or by the others. But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work, even if it takes time.[44]

This statement is particularly intriguing in that Lam refers to himself as a Trojan horse, that is, as an object that looks like one thing, but is (and contains) something utterly different. Rather than concealing the power to destroy, or conceiving of himself as an artistic warrior sent to reclaim the African element from Picasso and other European artists, his express desire is to produce "hallucinating figures with the power to surprise."[45] To reach this end, Lam integrated the style of "the exploiters" (European modernism) into the figuration of his own country (as represented by the iconography of Santería deities) so as to create a personal style that juxtaposed multiethnic and multicultural pictorial elements into a single, transcultural oeuvre. This concept is clearly articulated in Lam's belief that his artistic intention would not be fully understood by the average Cuban ("the man in the street") or "the others"—either a reference to his fellow Cuban artists or, in a paradoxical twist, to Europeans residing on the periphery of Caribbean culture. This realization implies that paintings from the Cuban period were not simply grounded in a synthesis of European and Afro-Cuban elements, but created through a deliberate act of similitude that openly referenced European Cubism—and particularly Picasso's formalism—in order to reinvent Western iconographies as transculturated images.[46] Lam's personal musings maintain that he readily understood the cultural differences inherent in his "Cuban context" and accordingly produced artwork that was deliberately not colonial, not definitively *creole* and separate from all other forms of "pseudo-Cuban" artistic expressions. In line with Ortiz's conception of transculturation, Cuban culture must account for a plethora of constituent factors and not simply the binary between Afro-Cuban and Euro-Cuban races. This contention further suggests that Lam saw little conflict in his own artistic "contradictions," which arguably never really existed for the artist.

Lam's articulation of similitude through transculturation is best expressed in an examination of stylistic motifs employed by Lam and Picasso during the 1940s, and particularly those discernible in Lam's *Portrait en bleu* (fig. 4) and Picasso's *Femme au chapeau assise dans un fauteuil* (fig. 5). In terms of iconography and reception, the viewer confronts both portraits frontally, as each figure is seated on a caned chair tilted slightly toward the observer. Both sitters clasp their hands in their

respective laps, and although the facial physiognomies are wholly unrelated, the cubist rendering and shading of the bodies, along with the blue-gray palette of each painting, share a common articulation. These analogous motifs are additionally visible in more than a hundred paintings and sketches of seated women executed by Picasso between 1938 and 1941 (many of which exhibit clasped hands), and in approximately sixteen paintings produced by Lam throughout his Cuban period.[47] In *Portrait en bleu*, Lam's figure retains the clasped hands of the woman in *Femme au chapeau assise dans un fauteuil*, but has morphed into a transculturated figure by way of her *femme cheval* head. The end result is a visually harmonious, though physically unlikely, juxtaposition of a non-Western head (reminiscent of an Afro-Cuban mask) appended to a Western-style, Euro-cubist body. Given this reading, I would argue that *Portrait en bleu* deliberately fails to abandon its recognizable cubistic *and* Afro-Cuban elements in order to reveal its allusion to, but difference from, Picasso's earlier painting. By incorporating forms from the latter's work, Lam, in keeping with Pollock's theoretical framework, seems to assert that he was not only capable of participating in a cross-cultural avant-gardism, but had ultimately usurped the style of the "master" through his intentional use of artistic similitude.

In Lam's *Autel pour Yemaya* (fig. 6), the distinct Afro-Cuban/Euro-cubist masks of *The Jungle* have dissolved into a synthesized blur of forms that collectively defy a specific semiotic reading based

Fig. 6 Wifredo Lam, *Autel pour Yemaya*, 1944, oil on paper mounted on canvas, 148 x 94.5 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (Photo Credit: CNAC/ MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY © 2007 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/ADAGP, Paris)

Fig. 7 Wifredo Lam, *La silla*, 1943, oil on canvas, 131 x 98 cm. Collection Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (Gift of A. Carpentier. © 2007 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/ADAGP, Paris)

on their (indistinguishable) cultural referents. Instead, the blurry iconography hints at the "exotic" form of an Afro-Cuban deity, complete with tiny heads and plant-like bodies, without expressly materializing as the actual embodiment of a Santería god, a *femme cheval* head, or a *Demoiselles* mask. Unlike figures in *The Jungle*, which emerge as visibly distinct entities, objects in *Autel pour Yemaya* do not immediately surface as recognizable Afro-Cuban ritualistic objects—a maneuver that ultimately permits these forms to persist as disguised cultural signifiers. Analogous to the processes of translation and transculturation, Lam's differences, as articulated in *Autel pour Yemaya*, become apparent when one compares the political, religious, racial, and economic differences of France and Latin America alongside the disguised and embedded differences of his transcultural Cuba. In terms of political difference, non-colonial Spain forms a binary with formerly-colonial Cuba; in terms of religious difference, Spanish Catholicism is paired with Cuban Santería; and in terms of racial and economical difference, a predominantly white, middle-class European population is contrasted with a multiplicity of races in a less than affluent Cuban economy. Rather than offering a further articulation of borderline processes evident in the specific iconography of works like Picasso's *Demoiselles* and in Lam's earlier paintings, *Autel pour Yemaya* presents a visual example of Lam's unique experimentations within modern art, as manifest through an avant-gardist exploration of *transcultural* similitude that finds no need for such specific cultural referents.

In perhaps his ultimate use of artistic similitude, Lam seemingly draws upon the historical avant-garde(s) of the nineteenth century for his point of reference and consequently offers one of the few deviations from his dialogue with European Cubism and Surrealism. Uniformly neglected by scholars in the extant literature, Lam's *La silla* (fig. 7) exists as an intriguingly enigmatic painting that reveals a commonplace wooden chair set within a jungle of dense palm fronds and colorful foliage. Although this work is oddly situated among other paintings from Lam's mid-Cuban period, given its emphasis on a non-figurative inanimate object, rather than an Afro-Cuban mask or a surrealist *femme cheval*, *La silla* ostensibly alludes to the iconographies employed by Vincent van Gogh in his well-known companion paintings, *Gauguin's Chair* (fig. 8) and *Van Gogh's Chair* (fig. 9). Analogous to the viewer-subject relationship established by Van Gogh, Lam positions the observer slightly above the skewed perspective of a solitary chair, but readily abandons the interior space of Van Gogh's works for an exterior space brimming with vibrant vegetation and the segmented palm trunks of *The Jungle*. The rails of Lam's chair cleverly mirror the surrounding plant stalks, while the decorative carvings on the front and back of the chair (just beneath the seat) purposefully emulate leaf patterns from the nearby flora. Unlike other works from Lam's mid-Cuban period, definitive forms in *La silla* fail to dissolve into the background of the painting and thus provide a contrast to the blurry iconography of *Autel pour Yemaya*.

Given the strong iconographic similarities that exist between the three chair paintings, it is all the more surprising that art historians have overlooked Lam's image in relation to Van

Fig. 8 Vincent van Gogh, *Van Gogh's Chair*, 1888, oil on canvas, 91.8 x 73 cm. The National Gallery, London. Photo © The National Gallery, London.

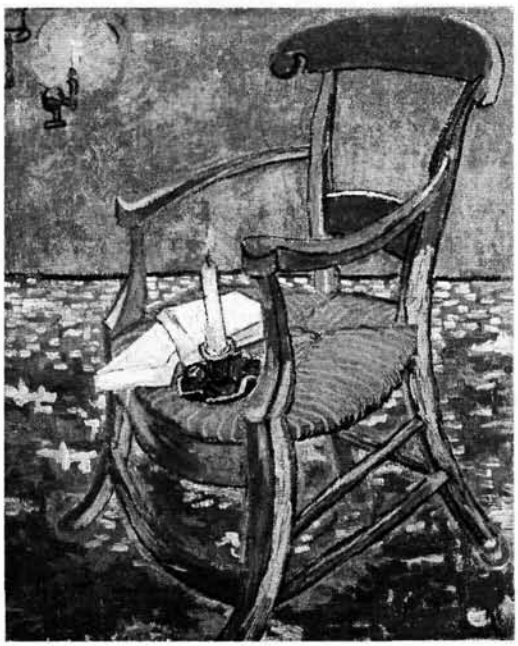

Fig. 9 Vincent van Gogh, *Gauguin's Chair*, 1888, oil on canvas, 110 x 92 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. © Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).

Gogh's works.[48] As previously stated, the extant literature on Lam tends to focus on paintings that synthesize notions of race, culture, and religion—an explanation that may account for the minimal attention paid to a work executed in a non-signature style. A considerable amount of scholarship, by contrast, has been devoted to Van Gogh's paintings of everyday wooden chairs.[49] Building upon this literature, Jan Hulsker interprets the chairs in Van Gogh's paintings as symbolic representations of Van Gogh himself and fellow painter Paul Gauguin. More specifically, the objects placed on each chair—a candlestick with books and a pipe with tobacco—are seen to reflect the individual characteristics of each man as filtered through Van Gogh's artistic musings, or even more literally, the absence of the implied sitter.[50] The chair in Lam's painting similarly contains an object; in this instance, a vase filled with vibrantly-colored leaves that, like the decorative woodwork on the chair, echo the dense vegetation of the surrounding jungle. This stylistic choice may suggest that Lam was referencing the practice of object portraiture as employed in Van Gogh's works, or at least the use of this convention in the history of painting. More importantly, this reading proposes that the contents of the vase do not merely replicate the nearby scenery or serve as a purely decorative/compositional purpose in the work of art, but visually articulate the artist's metaphorical presence in a painting devoid of human figuration.

When the style and iconography of *La silla* are compared to the chair in *Portrait en bleu*, the object in the former painting is not only more clearly articulated and less cubistic than the one occupying the latter, but it has equally replaced the transculturated figure as the focal point of the painting. As in Van Gogh's chair paintings, the absent figure has been replaced by an inanimate object, and it is here that Lam's painting may highlight a potential danger in the process of transculturation. That is to say, the foliage and vase could equally signify a more generalized Afro-Cuban presence in the work, which would likewise generate an obvious contrast with the painting's non-Afro-Cuban element: the Western-style chair. In this regard, the non-Western aspects of the transculturated individual, as represented by the colorful foliage, risk being consumed and dominated by the individual's Western attributes as represented by the chair. The individual is thus positioned as a commodity (perhaps a deliberate reference to tobacco leaves, Cuba's colonial cash crop), rather than an autonomous person occupying the painting. By drawing upon the emblematic nature of the objects in Van Gogh's works, we can ultimately surmise that Lam envisioned his own artistic persona as a transculturated individual caught between the stylized elements of Western modernism (exemplified by the commonality of the Western-style wooden chair) and the organic forms of the Cuban jungle (as epitomized by the vivid leaves). We should not dismiss, however, that this iconography also situates Lam as a deliberate manipulator of style and content and moreover, as an artist utilizing artistic similitude as filtered though his own transcultural experiences. Lam's *vanguardia* can therefore be said to theoretically culminate in a painting like *La silla*, since the central figure is no longer the synthesis of a Westernized body with a *femme cheval* head or Santería headdress, but rather, a symbolic representation of the Afro-Cuban artist who, in a self-referential maneuver, acknowledges that all aspects of his oeuvre are informed by the processes at work in his own intermeshed transculturation.

As revealed by this study, binaries of avant-gardism can be identified as the often conflicting

spheres of Lam's early training in Europe and his racial/cultural heritage as an Afro-Cuban individual. Contrary to the current discourse, the interrelating of cultural dichotomies—or differences articulated through translation, transculturation, and the allocation of various idioms—has paradoxically produced the uniqueness implicit in Lam's avant-gardist works. As such, Lam's exploration of *vanguardismo* throughout the Cuban period is better explained through a process of transcultural similitude, as opposed to an analysis of artistic agency through racial legitimacy or Cuban nationalism. It is clear that any conceptualization of similitude unavoidably produces binaries fashioned from cultural differences, though ones that arguably construct lateral maneuvers rather than hierarchical structures. This model therefore proposes that Lam's negotiation of avant-gardism was not predicated on a disapproval of Eurocentric appropriations of non-Western art or a need to rescue the Afro-Cuban element from European contamination, but on a *vanguardia* that was possible precisely because of Lam's movement within, around, and apart from the ambiguous center/periphery constructions of his artistic career.

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1. George Yúdice, "Rethinking the Theory of the Avant-Garde from the Periphery," in *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, eds. Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monleón (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 54.

2. I am here referencing texts that propose a postcolonial re-evaluation of the Eurocentric privileging of white, European "centers" and the consequent marginalization of non-white, non-Western "peripheries." This terminology, which results from institutionalized concepts initiated through the colonization and commodification of the "other," has invariably impacted the language and theories employed in studies examining the relationship between European avant-garde artists and their non-European contemporaries. For a sampling of these arguments, see Yúdice, "Rethinking the Theory of the Avant-Garde from the Periphery," 52-80; Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community," in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 183-93; Gerardo Mosquera, "Modernity and Africania: Wifredo Lam on His Island," in *Wifredo Lam* (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 1993), 173-75; and Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monleón, "Modernism and Its Margins: Rescripting Hispanic Modernism," in *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, eds. Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monleón (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), xvii-xxxv. In addition to these studies, Lowery Stokes Sims provides a good summary of arguments offered by other scholars addressing this paradigm. See *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923–1982* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 231-41.

3. Lam's biographer Michel Leiris recounts that Picasso and Lam had become so close that the former jokingly referred to the latter as his "nephew." See *Wifredo Lam* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970), 4.

4. The following is a review of the more recent theoretical literature on Lam. For analyses offered by Sims, see *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*; "Wifredo Lam: From Spain Back to Cuba," and "Myths and Primitivism: The Work of Wifredo Lam in the Context of the New York School and the School of Paris, 1942–1952," in *Wifredo Lam and His Contemporaries, 1938–1952*, ed. Maria R. Balderrama (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992); and idem. "From Concept to Style: Lam and his Geography of the Marvelous," in *Wifredo Lam: Catalogue Raisonné of the Painted Works, Volume I, 1920–1960*, ed. Lou Laurin-Lam (Lausanne: Sylvio Acatos, 1996), 118-64. In addition to "Modernity and Africania: Wifredo Lam on His Island," Gerardo Mosquera examines Lam's work within the discourse of Latin American modernism. See "Modernism from Afro-America: Wifredo Lam," in *Beyond the Fantastic:*

Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 121-32. For a discussion of identity in Lam's work, see Michele Greet, "Inventing Wifredo Lam: The Parisian Avant-Garde's Primitivist Fixation," in *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Studies* 5 (Winter 2003): n.p. Charles Merewether offers an analysis of Lam's paintings through postcolonial theory and introduces his notion of refraction (or refracted reflection) in the artist's oeuvre in "At the Crossroads of Modernism: A Liminal Terrain," in *Wifredo Lam: A Retrospective of Works on Paper* (New York: The Americas Society, 1992), 13-36. For an analysis of Lam's artistic production, with particular attention paid to the role of Santería and his Afro-Cuban heritage, see Julia P. Herzberg, "Rereading Lam," in *Santería Aesthetics: In Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 149-69; idem, "Wifredo Lam: The Return to Havana and the Afro-Cuban Heritage," *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts* 37 (January-June 1987): 22-30; idem., "Wifredo Lam," *Latin American Art* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 18-24; and Julia P. Herzberg, "Wifredo Lam: The Development of a Style and World View, The Havana Years, 1941–1952," in *Wifredo Lam and His Contemporaries, 1938–1952*, ed. Maria R. Balderrama (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 31-51. Although Lam is not the sole focus of Juan A. Martínez' examination of Cuban modern art, the scholar does frame the artist within notions of Cuban nationalism (*cubanidad*) and the Cuban avant-garde (*vanguardia*). See Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity: The Vanguardia Painters, 1927–1950* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 139-50.

5. See Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 5-6; and idem., "From Concept to Style," 118. In utilizing the term "primitive," I, like Sims, am calling attention to its late nineteenth and early twentieth-century denotation in which non-white Europeans residing on the "periphery" of Western society were considered more "primitive" and less-civilized than their "more rational" and technologically-advanced Western, white counterparts. In terms of modernism and artistic production, primitivism has tended to seek out and appropriate the art, culture, and "authenticities" of "primitive" people and/or the tribal "other." Although numerous scholars have offered anti-racist/anti-imperialist views of primitivism in works of art, Hal Foster remains at the forefront of art historians concerned with analyzing the polemics of this particular discourse. In his essay "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," Foster directly criticizes William Rubin's and Kirk Varnedoe's treatment of the other (i.e., the "primitive") in their 1984 exhibition catalogue *"Primitivism" in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, and astutely reminds his readers that "the primitivist incorporation of the other [in art] is another form of conquest (if a more subtle one than the imperialist extraction of labor and materials)." See Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," *October* 34 (Autumn 1985): 60. For a further art-historical debate on primitivism, see idem., "Primitive Scenes," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Autumn 1993): 69-102; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native," *Art in America* 77 (July 1989): 118-29, 161; and Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits, 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992). Solomon-Godeau identifies primitivism as a gendered discourse centered around "a white, Western and preponderantly male quest for an elusive object whose very condition of desirability resides in some form of distance and difference, whether temporal or geographical." "Going Native," 120. For readings that specifically discuss primitivism alongside Cuban (and/or Lam's) art, see texts by Sims and Martínez cited in n. 3.

6. For Sims' argument, see *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 5-6. For Mosquera's discussion of authenticity in Lam's work, see "Modernism from Afro-America," 123-24. In addition to literature offered by current scholars, Max-Pol Fouchet, who was another of Lam's French biographers, believed that the artist utilized African iconographies as a means of silently protesting and thus manipulating the Western European treatment of "primitive" art. See Max-Pol Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam*, trans. Kenneth Lyons and Richard-Lewis Rees, second ed. (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, S.A., 1989), 271. For literature that theorizes the Eurocentric formal use of tribal masks, see Robert J. Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002); William Rubin, ed., *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, 2 vols. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984); Rosalind Krauss, "No More Play," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Reprint ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986), 42-86; idem., "The Motivation of the Sign," in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 261-86; Yve-Alain Bois, "Kahnweiler's Lesson," *Representations* 18 (Spring, 1987): 33-68; and idem., "The Semiology of Cubism," in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 169-208.

7. Sims provides a good summation of scholarship on *The Jungle* in *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 40. I use the term "rupture" in quotes to suggest that Lam's oeuvre is not literally a modernist rupture, as posited by Krauss for Picasso's collages that incorporate newsprint, but a reworking of artistic themes (whether Cuban or European in origin). For Krauss' argument, see "The Motivation of the Sign," 261-86.

8. For Bhabha's postcolonial conceptualization of borderline artists, see "Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation," in *The 1993 Whitney Biennial Exhibition*, ed. Elizabeth Sussman (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art), 62-63.

9. Regarding the referencing of specific Santería gods in Lam's paintings, see Herzberg, "Rereading Lam," 149-69; and Merewether, "At the Crossroads of Modernism," 13-35. Drawing on Herzberg's analysis of Lam's work, cultural historian Marta Moreno Vega equally suggests that Lam was interested in expressing the iconography of Santería and did so as a result of his friendship with Fernando Ortiz, who had popularized the imagery of Afro-Cuban traditions and religions in Latin America and the United States in the early 1940s. See Marta Moreno Vega, "Interlocking African Diaspora Cultures in the Work of Fernando Ortiz," *Journal of Black Studies* 31 (September 2000): 46-47.

10. For Sims' ideas concerning synthesis in Lam's oeuvre, see *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 1; and idem., "From Concept to Style," 118. For Mosquera's contributions to this debate, see "Modernism from Afro-America," 124. Martínez equally posits that when Lam returned to Cuba, "he had arrived at a personal synthesis of cubist form and surrealist content aimed at expressing his own and Cuba's African heritage." Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 26.

11. For example, Mosquera and Herzberg have both argued that Lam's paintings should be understood in terms of "reclaiming the Afro-Cuban element" within his Cuban works. Herzberg specifically situates his work alongside the iconographies associated with the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería. For these arguments, see Herzberg, "Rereading Lam," 150; and Mosquera, "Modernism from Afro-America," 123. A more recent reading of Lam's work within the Cuban *creolite* movement has been offered by Maria Bermúdez, who examines Lam's participation in this largely nationalistic style. See María Clara Bernal Bermúdez, "Latin America Beyond Lo Real Maravilloso: Lam, Surrealism and the Creolite Movement" (Ph.D. diss., University of Essex, 2004). As previously mentioned, Martínez equally maintains that Lam's works can be understood within a discourse centered on Cuban "national cohesion" among *la vanguardia*, or "the most prominent painters who initiated the modern movement in Cuban art." It is interesting that Martínez ultimately concludes that Lam's works participate in *la vanguardia*'s shared *cubanidad*, given that his own analysis of Lam's oeuvre is mainly focused on the artist's use of synthesis, as well as his dialogue with European modernism. See Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 2, 26, 139-50.

12. Merewether likewise applies postcolonial theory to Lam's works from the Cuban period, but rather than attributing Lam's hybrid forms to similitude, he concludes that they result from a process of mimesis. I am reluctant to concur with Merewether's analysis since any understanding of mimesis is generally constructed around hegemonic tenets. As I will explore later in this essay, my conceptualization of artistic similitude differs from mimesis (as well as the rhetoric of this conception), in that the latter seeks to render a separate copy or "imitation" of an "original" work of art, while the former borrows and alters features of the "original" artwork in order to create a similar but disparate second "original." For Merewether's conception of mimesis in Lam's oeuvre, see "At the Crossroads of Modernism," 26. Although her analysis of Latin American vanguards does not specifically focus on Lam's oeuvre, Vicky Unruh contends that it was the general aim of these vanguards (including those in Cuba) to employ "antimimetic strategies, among a range of vanguardist activities, precisely in order to turn art toward experience in more provocative ways." *Latin American Vanguards*, 22. On a separate note, Herzberg has variously termed what I am calling Lam's "Cuban period" as the "Havana Years." See "Wifredo Lam: The Development of a Style and World View," 31.

13. "Chronology," in *Wifredo Lam: Catalogue Raisonné of the Painted Works, Volume I, 1920–1960*, ed. Lou Laurin-Lam (Lausanne: Sylvio Acatos, 1996), 172.

14. Leiris, *Wifredo Lam*, 8-9. According to Leiris, Lam first encountered African masks and motifs in Cuba rather than in Spain.

15. Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam*, 271.

16. Ibid. See also "Biographical Notes," in Leiris, *Wifredo Lam*, n.p.

17. Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam*, 272.

18. Ibid.

19. Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 29-30.

20. Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam*, 272.

21. See "List of Exhibitions: One-Man Shows," in Leiris, *Wifredo Lam*, n.p.

22. "Biographical Notes," in ibid.

23. Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam*, 272-73.

24. Mosquera, "Modernism from Afro-America," 123. For an interesting analysis of African- and Latin American modernism in the context of Cuba and New York, see Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, "New World Primitivism in Harlem and Havana: Constructing Modern Identities in the Americas, 1924–1945" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001).

25. Mosquera, "Modernism from Afro-America," 124.

26. See W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, rev. ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 6. For a discussion of DuBois's double consciousness, see Doris Sommer, "A Vindication of Double Consciousness," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000), 165.

27. Mosquera, "Modernism from Afro-America," 123.

28. Contemporary Mexican artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña has addressed this notion of otherness in relation to Latin American artists working in the current art market. Building on Gayatri Spivak's handling of otherness, Gómez-Peña writes, "according to...Spivak: 'Otherness has replaced postmodernism as the object of desire.' We [Latinos] are indeterminate 'objects of desire' within a metalandscape....What the [contemporary] art world wants is a 'domesticated Latino' who can provide enlightenment without irritation, entertainment without confrontation." Gómez-Peña, "The Multicultural Paradigm," 189-90.

29. I am grateful to Edward Sullivan for highlighting that my theorization of Lam's *vanguardismo* is similar to the aim of Brazilian avant-gardists working in the 1920s, as articulated by Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto antropofago* of May 1928. In this work, Brazilian intellectuals (humorously and paradoxically) become cannibals who devour and neutralize

foreign/Western influence. For an English translation of the manifesto, see Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820–1980* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 312-13.

30. In order to clarify my use of specific terminology throughout this essay, it should be noted that *vanguardia* is the Spanish equivalent of "avant-garde," while *vanguardismo* literally translates to "vanguardism" in English. While most historians of Latin American vanguardism employ either of these terms to describe the artists and artworks associated with avant-garde movements throughout Latin America, Martínez can be identified as the foremost scholar attributing the term *vanguardia* to Cuban modern art. See *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 2.

31. In utilizing the descriptor "historical" to describe European avant-garde movements of the early to mid-twentieth century, I am referring to Peter Bürger's terminology in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 15. For studies promulgating the notion that Picasso was the definitive avant-gardist of the early twentieth century, see Krauss, "The Motivation of the Sign," 261-86; and Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," 169-208.

32. Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 2, 150.

33. In stating that the concept of nationality resists a single denotation, I am calling attention to the fact that various races, religions, genders, classes, cultural origins, and languages construct hybrid nations and thus complicate any *one*, cohesive understanding of what it means to be "Cuban," "American," etc. Furthermore, historian Paul A. Shackel argues that the elements that construct a sense of nationality—that is, traditions, meanings, and memories—are all factors deliberately invented by groups and individuals who hold the power to control historical consciousness. See *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2003), 2, 21. With Shackel's analysis in mind, it is certainly viable to assert that the meaning of nationality is a multidimensional and fluid entity given its place in a hierarchy of identity politics. Cultural theorist David Miller explores nationality/nationalism within the context of pluralism and the problems that arise when two conflicting cultural groups (within a single country) attempt to promulgate their particular form of nationalism. See *On Nationality*, Reprint ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-16, 119-54.

34. This non-nationalistic assertion is not to be confused, however, with Lam's desire to express something of the Afro-Cuban "spirit" that he experienced during his years in Havana. For Lam's musings on this subject, see Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1976), 188-89. Merewether likewise states that Lam's contribution to modernism was to challenge primitivist images of Cuban national pride. See Merewether, "At the Crossroads of Modernism," 25.

35. For a historical example of this derogative reading, in which an anonymous art critic discusses Picasso's "influence" on Lam's work, see "Wifredo Lam," *Cahiers d'Art* 14, no. 5-10 (November, 1939): 179.

36. Bhabha, "Beyond the Pale," 62-63.

37. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 98.

38. Walter D. Mignolo, "Human Understanding and (Latin) American Interests—The Politics and Sensibilities of Geohistorical Locations," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000), 186.

39. Although Lam was certainly less European than Chinese or Cuban-Amerindian, I am arguing that his European roots (i.e., his mother's Spanish ancestry) not only informed Lam's biology, but also call attention to the miscegenation that took place under colonialism, the product of which was subsequent generations of Spanish-Cubans.

40. Wifredo Lam quoted in Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam* (1976), 118. In addition to Lam's personal musings, it is interesting to note that Ortiz would also address these processes in Lam's oeuvre, stating in 1950 that the artist's visual language was derived from "pictorial synecdoches and metaphors." Quoted in Leiris, *Wifredo Lam*, 13.

41. Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits*, 14. In addition to positing a revisionist theory of the avant-garde, Pollock has written on the importance of scholarship that scrutinizes difference and identity (themes important to Lam's oeuvre) within the fields of art history and visual culture. See "Visual Culture and Its Discontents: Joining in the Debate," *Journal of Visual Culture* 2 (August 2003): 253-60.

42. Although the language of similitude may be somewhat analogous to that surrounding appropriation, pastiche, and mimesis (the term Merewether employs), I am reticent to utilize these particular terms given their often pejorative connotations when applied to artists from different cultural backgrounds. Sims suggests that works from Lam's Paris period incorporate "visual punning" in order to call attention to artistic motifs in paintings by Picasso and Matisse. Although Sims does not offer further analysis of these puns, or how they precisely operate, her understanding of "visual punning" is seemingly akin to Pollock's "reference." See *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 30. My use of similitude alongside Lam's oeuvre should not, however, be confused with Michel Foucault's theorization of "the four similitudes" in *The Order of Things*, or his definition of *similitude* in *This is Not a Pipe*. With regard to this latter definition, I concur, as Foucault states, that similitude relates the "similar to the similar," but would argue that similitude (my definition) unavoidably acknowledges a "model," though one that does not have to exist through hierarchies. This conceptualization of similitude thus borrows from and simultaneously refutes Foucault's distinction between *similitude* and *resemblance*. See Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, a translation of *Les Mots et les Choses* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 17-25; and Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California

Press, 1983), 44.

43. Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam* (1976), 118.

44. Ibid., 188-89. While Lam's statement clearly shows his interest in "the drama of his country," I would argue that Lam's desire to express his personal feelings regarding his native country should not be confused with wanting to express a *shared* nationalistic agenda or *collectively-felt* national Cuban identity, which never seemed to be present in Lam's artistic agenda.

45. Sims alternatively posits that Lam's use of the term "Trojan horse" was meant to highlight his deliberate subversiveness. See "From Concept to Style," 121.

46. Regarding Lam's act of subversion, Sims notes that "Lam went so far as to subvert the geometry of Cubism." Ibid. Though I do not disagree with her assessment, I must clarify my position since I do not believe Lam's use of similitude was meant to criticize European Cubism, but was simply a means of creatively manipulating this style for his own *vanguardismo*.

47. A review of Picasso's oeuvre revealed that seated women (with or without hats and clasped hands) was a common compositional theme for Picasso between 1938 and 1941, the years that Lam first resided in Paris. In addition to the sixteen works created during the Cuban period, Lam would likewise employ this motif of a seated figure (often a woman with clasped hands) in a number of other paintings created throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

48. To my knowledge, Sims is the only scholar to specifically discuss *La silla*, although she devotes only two sentences to the painting. Specifically, Sims notes that the work has "a more ponderous and ornate character" than the artist's more spare compositions. See *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 50.

49. For literature addressing Van Gogh's chair paintings, see Jan Hulsker, *The New Complete Van Gogh: Paintings, Drawings, Sketches*, Second ed. (London: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1996), 376, 378. Adopting a psychoanalytic methodology, Albert J. Lubin suggests that the painting known as *Gauguin's Chair* was "Vincent's symbolic portrayal of his comrade." See *Stranger on the Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 167. Humberto Nagera and Daniel E. Schneider have offered similar psychoanalytic claims that respectively explore the psychosexual nature of the objects placed on the two chairs. See *Vincent Van Gogh: A Psychological Study* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1967), 132-42; and "The Psychic Victory of Talent (A Psychoanalytic Evaluation of Van Gogh)," *College Art Journal* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1950): 333-34, respectively.

50. Nagera posits that the lack of sitters in Van Gogh's chair paintings symbolically represents the absent person who would otherwise occupy them. See *Vincent Van Gogh*, 132-34.

David Blackwood's Broken Windows

Luke Nicholson

David Blackwood, born in Wesleyville, Newfoundland in 1941, is an artist whose works have conjured the lost world of Newfoundland's outports, remote fishing villages usually only accessible from the sea. His works have become the site of a crossing-over of past and present where the legendary dead of outport folklore and the living mingle in a shared symbolic world. Some works emphasize the present and the immediate. The 1989 painting *Ephraim Kelloway's Green Door* (fig.1), for instance, is a meticulously studied, texturally-detailed painting of the door of his neighbor's boat-shed. Yet even in this extremity of the local, Blackwood finds a motif that unsettles the picture's fixity in its own location. The door frame, central and emphasized by its own evocation of the picture's frame, recalls this 'window' and negates it. It is firmly shut and locked, a mysterious portal, both compelling and forbidding, and a scene of what may not be seen. Blackwood uses this *mise-en-abîme* to implicate the viewer's reality in a suggestion of possibly endless portals, a universe of thresholds through which all subjective experience is at once framed, emphasized, and blocked. This framing motif has appeared in Blackwood's work for over forty years, but never so forcefully as on two occasions. In this paper, I will examine these two instances and, using a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, expose the ghostly view they afford of human subjectivity. This discussion will involve concepts drawn from the aesthetics of the sublime, as understood by Immanuel Kant, as well as an aspect of the nature of the subject, which I shall call the "liminal I," discussed by Jacques Lacan in his paper on the 'mirror stage.' Additionally, I will make use of Slavoj Žižek's concept of "the void," as an absence within the subject that is also constitutive of the subject, that I see as represented by the physical void of the great spaces seen in sublime imagery such as vast horizons or mountain-country abysses.

The two prints I shall discuss here are *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island* (fig. 2) and *Gram Glover's Dream*, (fig.4). Both works are views out through the broken windows of deserted houses, and they stand at the beginning of a series of interiors featuring prominent, framed windows that eventually included predominantly female figures. However, the making of these two prints also overlapped with the last of Blackwood's *Lost Party* series (1963–1973), in which the artist drew from a Northern European Romantic tradition, including influences from Caspar David Friedrich and Edvard Munch, and explored themes of exposure and death through grueling depictions of men lost in an iceworld of sub-arctic cold. Blackwood's subject in the *Lost Party* series was the Newfoundland Sealing Disaster of 1914, in which a party of 137 seal hunters became lost on the ice in a spring storm, seventy-eight of them perishing.[1] The *Lost Party* series, *Abandoned Ancestors*, and *Gram Glover's Dream* are not the only works in which Blackwood seems preoccupied with death, mourning, and loss. In so many of his later prints, such as *Beautiful Young Mummer in Margaret Feltham's House* (1982) or *Gram Glover Home on Bragg's Island* (1976), the women are widows or portrayed as widows-to-be.[2] In these images, the mood of loss and separation is most powerfully located in the window-frame itself, the boundary between the hostile outside and an inside against

Fig. 1 David Blackwood, *Ephraim Kelloway's Green Door*, 1989, oil on canvas, 84 in. x 48 in. (213 x 122 cm). Private collection (Photo courtesy of David Blackwood)

which and through which it is portrayed. As the embodiment of the division between the external, dangerous world and an interior world characterized by worrying and by waiting, the window frame becomes a kind of talisman, an assurance of safety. While it thus provokes a mood of gentle anxiety and sadness, it also affirms the security of the interior space. Between the terrifying exterior world of the ice-fields of the *Lost Party* series and the safe, if anxious, outport world of these later prints, Blackwood made *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island* and *Gram Glover's Dream*. In them, the frame brings the strategy of containment and the theme of uncontainability right up against each other and, in so doing, it indicates the sublime.

In contrast to the effect of the intact window scenes of the later prints mentioned above, in *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island* and *Gram Glover's Dream*, the broken windows frame a danger that they cannot contain. The bulwark of the intact window is here replaced by an uncanny portal, dangerously edged by shattered glass. A strategy of containment has failed but what has escaped? An unbroken window both reflects the person looking out from it and permits that person to see through it. Although it affords a certain measure of a specular integrity, it provokes doubt as to the location of any image seen in it. Meanwhile, a broken window seems to afford us at least this certainty: what we see through it is truly out there. In the broken windows of these two prints, Blackwood gives us outside and inside, past and present, and they become collapsed in a way we apprehend as threatening. The world we see may be more certainly real, but the reality of the seer

is now called into question, because Blackwood reveals our anxious dependence upon that dubious image normally lurking in the window's reflective integrity.

Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island is organized around an opposition between the broken window and the aging portrait of ancestors. The two frames mirror and contrast each other; the rectangular window and the oval picture stand opposed even while they demand to be equated. The portrait of the ancestors is filled with the bodies of the absent, while the broken window nearly lacks the present: a tiny figure is only barely discernible in it (fig.3). Most of the cracks in the shattered pane point to the tiny figure in the window, either in direct, straight lines or else along curving ones; the figure becomes the center of a vortex. Its tininess contrasts with the wide, square space framed by the open window, just as its blackness stands out starkly against the dominant white field of snow and the frosty landscape. The figure walks towards the window, and thus locates motion in the center of the shattered window pane, a motion which also resides in the swelling dark water and windy sky. The figure becomes the embodiment of this landscape, even while it remains very small. Meanwhile, the two abandoned ancestors, large in their oval portrait, nearly fill their enclosure. The ancestors' picture is framed in unbroken glass: we can see it reflect the light. The window, on the other hand, is shattered. A chiastic structure is thus established where the 'absent' figures fill their space—they are present—whereas the 'present' figure is all but absent, tiny amid a vast space. Blackwood has composed the scene so as to emphasize this. The picture is divided between the window, on the right, printed in very dark blue and white, and the wall and portrait, on the left, printed in gradations of madder alizarin. The wallpaper even has a grid-like character, suggesting a planar background across which the oval portrait could be imaginatively moved. The viewer is invited to bring these two frames together, as if seen through a stereoscope, but cannot do so, owing to the mutual incommensurability of their shapes.

Any framed picture can serve as a model for its viewer's subjectivity, as the frame itself is the exemplar of containment and thus of subjective unity. When, however, by means of formal or thematic undermining, this subjective model is compromised, an uncanny effect is produced. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan understood subjectivity's relationship to a model as originating in what he called the "mirror stage." In his 1949 essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan explains the model's function as that of a gestalt: "the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in contrasting size."[3] According to Lacan, the infant finds a "mirror," an exterior form with which it identifies, in order to overcome the fragmentation resulting from the unintegrated state of its various sense perceptions.[4] The human infant is remarkably incomplete as an organism and is only able to achieve mastery over itself by borrowing the perceived ontological integrity and self-sameness of the mirror-other. While it thereby achieves this mastery symbolically by being able to formulate the "I," this subject-identity forever becomes a signification which, in the very act of being signified, bars any access to the desired, *real* "I":

> The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—

Fig. 2 David Blackwood, *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island*, 1971, etching, 20 in. x 32 in. (51 x 81 cm). Private collection. (Photo courtesy David Blackwood)

> and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image...to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity...Thus, to break out of the circle of the *Innenwelt* into the *Umwelt* generates the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verifications.[5]

"Inexhaustible quadrature" refers to the impossibility of squaring a circle in geometry. The ego, whose task it is to delineate what is external from the organism such that it may act effectively in this environment (*Umwelt*), must constantly seek assurance of its own existence, forever denied because it is constituted in alienation. The act of trying to signify "I" is akin to fitting a square peg into a round hole, where the pressure of the mis-fit is the sensation of alienation.

Blackwood's chiastic oval and rectangle equation reveals this Lacanian dilemma, the fundamental paradox of identity, because no convenient mirror can be found here even while the viewer is invited to search for one. The division of the work into irreconcilable oppositions cancels any figure with which the viewer may identify. We cannot identify with the abandoned ancestors: they are dead and of another era, and more importantly, there is one too many of them. Moreover, they are too snugly contained in their surrounding space while we feel exposed. Nor can we identify with the figure in the window: scarcely more than a point, it is too small to constitute a gestalt. Although the viewer would be framed inside the room by the window just as the small figure is framed outside by it, we are separated by a great abyss. And yet, this correspondence of the viewer's position, vis-à-vis the window frame, to that of the tiny figure nevertheless implies an identification. The point-like figure is in the same position as the viewer but at the same time unknowably distant. The outlines of the

shards of glass all indicate the tiny figure, as if directing the viewer's attention to it. We are left with a haunting impression of presence, and in the absence of any other possibility, this presence can only be that of the viewer. The alienating but reassuring "mirror" of Lacan's developmental model is replaced by—and revealed to be—an alien actuality. The chiastic structure implies that if we haunt this room, it in turn haunts us. Like a ghost, we cannot satisfactorily enter into the picture's world. This suggests that we may be imperfectly located even in our own.

Lacan notes that the "I" has a tendency to picture itself in dreams represented by either a stadium or fortress, both excluding and surrounding an emptiness, a void. According to Lacan, the inner emptiness and the outer emptiness are not only alike, but they are to be identified. These are "two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle whose form ...[also] symbolizes the id in a quite startling way."[6] The symbolic castle slips quite effortlessly from being a bastion for the ego to being one to which the ego lays siege. The "I" is not a substance contained by the fortress. Rather, it is the act of containment itself. Prior to the mirror stage, a child lacks integrity as a psychical and bodily unit, and it experiences reality within a continuum of self and world; after the formation of subjective identity, the subject constantly seeks to define an artificial boundary.[7] As the dream of the fortress demonstrates, implicit in the very formation of the subject is a sensed "slippage" between what it contains and what it excludes.

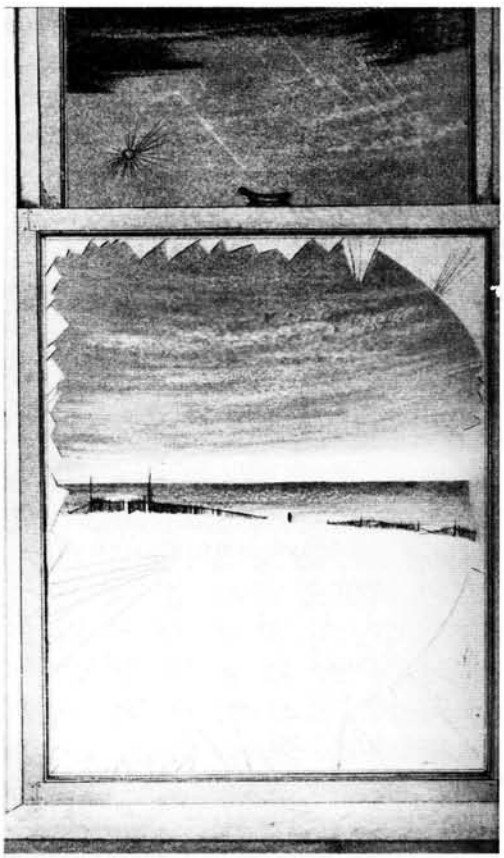

Fig. 3 *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island*, detail of fig. 2 (Photo courtesy David Blackwood).

Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, reveals that there is no slippage at all: what is within and what is without are one and always were, defining in the negative an artificial faculty of definition, the liminal "I."[8] Blackwood's framed, broken window reveals one aspect of the ongoing program of identity construction—the constant apprehension of its failure. What is now but a threshold, the window frame, succeeds only in defining itself, its own failed function as a barrier. Similarly, as the artificial principle of limitation and delineation within what is otherwise an unbounded world, the "I" is that to which all things are transcendent.

Lacan's model is one of childhood development, albeit one that leaves a structure of experience that remains throughout our lives. The Slovenian psychoanalyst and theorist Slavoj Žižek expands upon the "imaginary," as Lacan terms this order of experience grounded in the mirror stage, by relating it to the philosophy of subjectivity. In "Cogito: The Void Called Subject," Žižek develops Lacan's account of the subject in the direction of Immanuel Kant's account of reason and the sublime.[9] Žižek argues that the German philosopher's subject fits in with Lacan's understanding of it insofar as they both characterize the "I" as impossible to grasp: for Kant because the "I" is transcendental, constantly slipping out of the conceptual frame that gives rise to it; for Lacan because it is "barred," meaning that the "I" may never be effectively signified, only "imagined."[10] Kant's view, according to Žižek, is that René Descartes, in framing the formula *cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am"), mistakes the act of thought, *cogito*, for an essential and unproblematic "I." *Cogito*, in its Latin formulation, displays its bias as a first person subject that begs the question of the identity of the thinker in a way consistent with standard grammar but that is hardly necessary philosophically. Descartes unduly reifies the subject by moving from *cogito* to *sum* without questioning the self-sameness of the first person subjects. He thereby assumes the existence of a *res cogitans* (a thinking thing) identical to both. Kant reformulates Descartes's sentence to correct these errors: "through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts…[w]hich is recognized only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and about which, in abstraction, we can never have even the least concept."[11] For Kant, what separates us from an infinite being (and for Kant this is God) is our finitude. Specifically, finitude is constituted in our division of intuition (that is, sensory perception) from concept. A gulf lies between the phenomenal world of perception and the world of thought, such that any object in the world is split between the sensible and conceptual aspects of its reality. Žižek understands this as a void, which is closely linked to the issue of ungraspable subjectivity.

> The Kantian gap…forever separates intuition from intellect: for an "object" to emerge in the field of what we experience as reality, the multitude of sensible intuitions which provide its content must be supplemented by the "sensuously unfulfilled conception" of [it]…qua…the void which no empirical, positive feature can fill out, since it is a correlative, a "reified" effect, of the subject's synthetic act of apperception.[12]

The perception of any thing is simultaneously the self-perception of the subject perceiving not a whole object but a collection of diverse sensual data. We must then construct the totality of such an object by thought, or apperception. Thus, it is not possible to "see" an object; it is only possible to

see ourselves manufacturing one out of our sensible impressions. The manufactured object reflects our own manufactured selves. Thus, in every perception (that is also an apperception) we summon our self-difference automatically.

Žižek brings Lacan together with Kant (and his tradition, originating in Descartes's ontological argument) and accepts that their conceptual systems and vocabularies are compatible. But for Kant there are two orders of reality the *phenomenal* world of sense perception and the *noumenal* world of thought. For Lacan, a psychoanalyst, rather than a philosopher, who is not primarily concerned with the question of reality, experience is divided among three orders: the *imaginary*, the *symbolic* and the *real*. What Kant would call the phenomenal world is, according to Lacan, primordially undifferentiated for the infant. It predates the child and becomes divided among unstable significations in what Lacan terms the "symbolic order," which the child comes to inhabit only in time. This order is that of language but also of kinship ties and social rules.[13] Each child's original, organizing contribution to this preexisting order is the unsuccessful signification "I." The void within the subject, which *is* the subject in that we designate this gap as the signified of "I," corrupts other significations. Every thought or speech act is riddled with the instability of the thinker or speaker. The world of infantile perception is unbounded; limitations only enter our perception with the apperception of the perceiver. The "imaginary" unity of the subject in the mirror inaugurates a cascade of separations elsewhere in the phenomenal world, shattering perceived reality along the lines of distinctions such as "self" and "other," or "inside" and "outside." All these oppositions are artificially made through signification, and thus, intuitively, we sense that they could collapse. Experiences which overwhelm us threaten to negate some or all of these comfortable but unstable distinctions. In the realm of aesthetic experience, such experiences are called sublime.

For Kant the sublime is incompatible with beauty: "Beauty depends upon the (necessarily limited) form of an object in nature, where the sublime is provoked by 'limitlessness.'"[14] In apprehensions of the sublime we again encounter a symbolic failure. Like the "I," the sublime has nothing behind it that may be known. According to Žižek, "the sublime is the site of the inscription of pure subjectivity."[15] There is no experience of sublime things, no sublime phenomena; rather, there are only "phenomena which arouse in the subject the sentiment of the sublime."[16] The sublime is not a category that works within symbolic signification; in fact, it is only present as its negation. Žižek writes that "[t]he problem with the sublime object (more precisely: with the object which arouses in us the feeling of the sublime) is that it *fails* as a symbol; it evokes its Beyond by the very failure of its symbolic representation."[17] Central to the experience of the sublime is the intimation of the void. The sublime is that aesthetic experience that suggests to us what is true of subjectivity itself.

The tiny figure in *Abandoned Ancestors* is at the point of dissolving into the huge space around it. In Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (1808–1809, Berlin, Schloss Charlottenburg), a painting frequently associated with the sublime,[18] a similar effect is at play. As with Blackwood's lithograph, the extreme contrast in scale between the figure and the surrounding space indicates that the small figure and huge ground are to be identified. This identification becomes the sign of the sublime. The figure becomes equated with sublime landscapes elsewhere in Friedrich's work,

too. In his famous *The Wanderer above the Mists* (1817–18, Hamburg, Kunsthalle), the painter likens the figure to the peaks among which he is standing. But here he also takes care, through the sizing and framing of the scene, to limit the extent to which the figure is dwarfed by the landscape. As in the window of Blackwood's *Abandoned Ancestors*, Friedrich's figure is located dead center, implying in the vastness of space a relationship between the figure and the picture frame. But there is only enough space around this figure to reveal the loftiness of his eyrie; it does not diminish the figure but almost inflates his stature by means of the peaks with which he is compared. In *Monk by the Sea*, by contrast, the figure is not in the center of the scene and not so effortlessly at one with the landscape. This may be explained by the mood of spiritual ecstasy that modifies the sublimity in this case. In *The Wanderer above the Mists* or in Blackwood's *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island*, the perfect centrality of the figure emphasizes the identity of that figure with the ground by placing it, in its own instance, at the center of a void which is, therefore, equally endless in all directions. *Monk by the Sea* leaves the scene uncentered, which suggests the possibility that there is an unseen center: God. The conceptual opposition of tininess and vastness in *Abandoned Ancestors* and *Monk by the Sea* and their compositional co-implication leads to that failure to maintain order and proportion that Žižek identifies so particularly with the sublime.[19]

Abandoned Ancestors engages and juxtaposes many such oppositions: life and death, past and present, emptiness and presence. While in many ways the suggestions within Blackwood's lithograph should be reassuring—that the past continues to inhabit and inform the present, that even the abandoned are not entirely alone, that death, life, the vast exterior world, and every particular place belong to one greater unity—the implied threat to the viewing "I" still delivers its uncanny frisson. The viewer is like that tiny, distant figure after all. The vast space around the small figure corresponds to the apprehended void *within* the viewer. The coldness of the world beyond the window-frame, which also has filled the abandoned room, even now chills the space of the viewer's contemplation. The image of the small figure, almost lost in an immense landscape, reflects the situation of the liminal "I": the point defines the immensity just as the immensity does the point. At first we may covet this figure's singular, "punctual" integrity. But it is rather our inner void and its surrounding one that become identified. We can achieve, as if by sleight-of-thought, an identification of "our" void with the huge space around the figure and then, backing away from this identification, we may try to use the window frame as a container for this outwardly projected void. But the window is shattered. The void flows back. The sublime, undifferentiated world extends in all directions.

Hitherto, I have discussed the question of Blackwood's use of the broken window in *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island*. In that instance, it is most clearly organized along lines that reveal the psychological structures underlying the motif. *Gram Glover's Dream* is less clear in terms of psychological construction, but it reveals much more clearly the poetic importance of the broken window. The scene in this print shares similarities with and differences from the former one. In both works, an icy outer world is seen through the broken glass of an abandoned house, and shards of glass block this portal. But now the abandoned house has ice forming inside, the wallpaper is torn, the window's upper sash is fully visible and, although it is crisscrossed with cracks and is lacking certain pieces, there is an upper pane that is substantially intact. Despite these signs

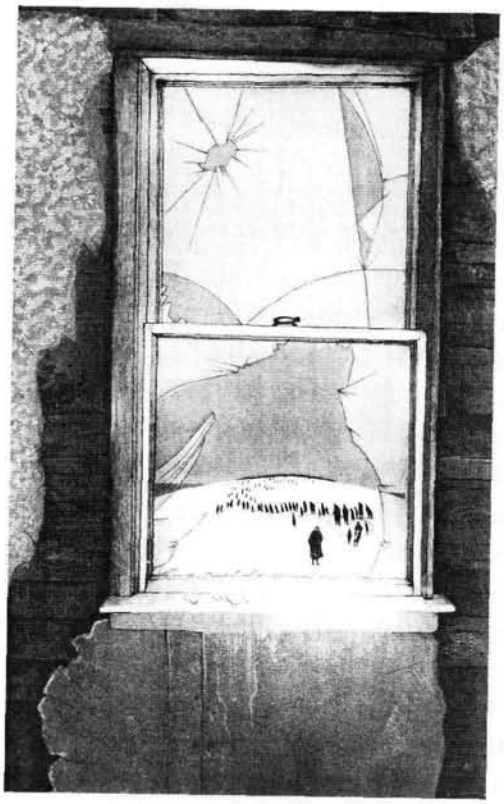

Fig. 4 David Blackwood, *Gram Glover's Dream*, 1969, etching, 32 in. x 20 in. (81 x 51 cm). Private collection (Photo courtesy David Blackwood).

of decay, a square portal is still emphasized. It stands out from the scene, emphasizing its own liminality. As in *Abandoned Ancestors*, the outside scene is populated; but instead of one figure, there is a multitude. A single larger figure in the front serves as an intermediary, linking the viewer to the line of other figures trailing away up a snowy hill to a large crowd at its crest. The window frame is a less passable threshold here: the jagged character of the broken window is more forbidding. It works as a barrier—not to keep out a dangerous external world but to hold the viewer within a dangerous interiority. The sharper physical division from the figures outside only adds to the urge to join them. We are trapped in this room, and so we can much more readily identify with the figures outside. Our identification is wishful: free and not trapped, in company and not alone, they are where we long to be.

The title of this work further complicates the viewer's identifications, because we are told that it is another's dream, yet we are seeing it. Gram Glover (Blackwood's own grandmother) appears in some later lithographs and drawings of women looking out through windows.[20] This picture is a more pressing presentation of that anxiety and uncanny dread that was so carefully articulated in *Abandoned Ancestors*. *Gram Glover's Dream* heightens the anxiety about the collapse of the "I" in such a way as to imply that the collapse is imminent (rather than merely immanent). Here it seems that something is just about to happen. The title produces an uncomfortable identification with both the absent, dreaming Gram Glover and the nearest, isolated figure who could be Gram Glover

herself, looking back at us. The group trails up the hill into the distance, its number indeterminate, and it may be an allusion to the Great Lost Party. Created in 1969, this is the earliest of Blackwood's window pictures. At this point, the artist had just spent eight years on a series illustrating the sealers of the Great Lost Party. Throughout this earlier work, his mythological version of the Great Lost Party has come to stand for what could be called a legion of the dead. The line of figures trailing up the hill suggests a serpentine and indirect movement back, deep into the space of the picture. A similar indirect motion through the window would be necessary in order to avoid the hazard of the glass shards. The viewer is trapped between an urge to move forward, out of the disintegrating room, and the experience of being held back by the barrier of the broken window. This mood of imminence and anxiety reflects the human fear of death. Indeed, we might well expect Gram Glover to be dreaming about it in just such a way. Yet at the same time, the viewer is taking her place at the window while she may be outside, already past the threshold. The legion of the dead outside, possibly with Gram Glover herself as the last in their queue, beckons to us to join them and leave a decaying, collapsing house. Gram Glover is an old woman whose death is imminent. The disintegrating room, with its peeling wallpaper revealing the clapboards underneath recalls flesh peeling back as it decomposes, exposing bone. The lithograph is a strange kind of *memento mori*, a frigid *danse macabre*, with the dead leading Gram Glover to her grave. It reminds us of the brevity of all life, the temporal counterpart to the one-dimensional threshold of the liminal "I." Just as the subject is a fragile illusion, dividing an exterior world of "objects" that is really at one with an interior world made up of the sensible intuitions that constitute them, so the subject is also contingent in time. Transitory and limited, it is poised on the threshold between past time, stretching unknowably back behind us, and the endless void of death, boundless before us.

Only *Abandoned Ancestors on Bragg's Island* and *Gram Glover's Dream* reveal the full implication of the framing motif found in David Blackwood's work. But the frame is present, if only latently, in much of his subsequent work. The motif informs his works as a subterranean rock formation might influence the lay of the land above, while only once or twice emerging into full view. *Ephraim Kelloway's Green Door*, for example, presents a foreclosed threshold. It is adorned with talismans of its own: a horseshoe and the miniature of a boat are ritually affixed to this boatshed in order to bring good luck at sea. Yet we do not seek to know what is behind this door. The fact that it is so firmly shut and securely bolted is a reassurance; the closed door is a comforting suggestion of wholeness. Perhaps we rather suspect that there is nothing of interest inside it, or perhaps we even fear that there is nothing at all behind the door. The primordial stage that Lacan describes in his essay on the mirror stage is experienced predominantly along lines of tactile sensation, and Blackwood almost always produces works with carefully-rendered tactile effects. *Ephraim Kelloway's Green Door* recalls, with its wooden textures, the tactility of this continuum. However, this intimate world of whatever is nearby, close enough to touch, always retains within itself its obverse character of boundlessness. Actually, it is an uncanny truth that there is nothing behind this door, in the sense that it is, after all, no door but a picture of a door. Yet again, and in another sense, something does very definitely lie behind the threshold. Behind the painting, behind its frame and backing, behind the wall against which it hangs – as indeed behind all framed spaces and signified localities – there is the unbounded

world. The shed door's two talismans are for moving safely on the sea. In remaining located in so intimate a space, it is possible to deceive ourselves that there will be better luck when next we go in search of a substantive "I." But apart from the haven of the framed space, apart from this hesitating on the threshold, there is but the endless ocean of the void.

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1. Patricia Grattan, *David Blackwood: Prints 1962-1984* (St. John's: Memorial University Art Gallery, 1985).

2. In fact, the artist develops an uncanny imagery of veils. In his occasional wedding scenes, the bridal veil recalls, in advance, the widow's veil which it ultimately will become.

3. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of The I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 2.

4. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, *Lacan and Language: A Reader's Guide to Écrits* (New York: International Universities Press, 1982), 38-39.

5. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 4.

6. The id is one of three aspects of the psyche, according to Sigmund Freud, which also includes the ego and the superego. The id is largely, though not necessarily, unconscious and is the seat of most (but not all) libidinal drives. The id, however, is understood somewhat differently by different psychoanalysts and differently by Freud himself at different times over the course of his career. Ibid., 5.

7. Muller and Richardson, *Lacan and Language*, 40.

8. Lacan uses the term "I" in place of "ego" (it is "je" in French) to stress the difference between his conception of the subject and that of the school of Ego Psychology, centered in America. Freud himself used the term "das Ich." Lacan implies that the subject is like a threshold, but the phrase "the liminal 'I'" is my own.

9. Slavoj Žižek, "Cogito: The Void Called Subject," in *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). For Immanuel Kant, the sublime begins in the failure of cognition but ends, by means of repetitive failure, in a triumph of reason through "the extreme exertions of our capacity to represent." Ibid., 50. Žižek's own account builds from and uses this Kantian conception, but includes, in tension with it, an alternative and indeed precise opposite possibility: the Christian sublime event, the crucifixion. Kant's sublime is a concept rationally constructed in a reading of Edmund Burke, among others, in the comparative tranquility of eighteenth-century Königsberg. Žižek interprets the Kantian sublime but relates it to cultural representations where the destructive potential of sublime experience is more directly sensed.

10. Žižek, "Cogito: The Void Called Subject,"14.

11. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 414.

12. Žižek, "Cogito: The Void Called Subject," 39.

13. Muller and Richardson, *Lacan and Language*, 19. The imaginary is the individual, pre-symbolic encounter with the phenomenal world. For Lacan, the real is a largely transcendent order that organizes experience but does not belong to it normally. Only in events which will become traumas, or else in psychosis, is the real encountered head-on.

14. Alan Bleakley, "Sublime Moments in the Body of the Double Pelican," in *On the Sublime in Psychoanalysis, Archetypal Psychology and Psychotherapy*, edited by Petrushka Clarkson (London: Whurr, 1997), 58.

15. Žižek,"Cogito: The Void Called Subject," 46. See also n. 9.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 47.

18. See Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 142.

19. Žižek, "Cogito: The Void Called Subject," 46. See also n. 9.

20. For instance, *Gram Glover Home on Bragg's Island* (1976).

Judd on Phenomena

Adrian Kohn

Judd as critic

Donald Judd's 1964 essay "Specific Objects" probably remains his most well-known.[1] In it, he described new artworks characterized by, among other features, "a quality as a whole" instead of conventional "part-by-part structure," the "use of three dimensions" and "real space" as opposed to depiction, "new materials [that] aren't obviously art," and the unadorned appearance and "obdurate identity" of materials as they are.[2] Judd held that the "shape, image, color and surface" of these objects were more "specific," that is to say, "more intense, clear and powerful," than in previous art.[3] While these positions demonstrate Judd's subjective preferences as an artist and art critic, they also convey some of the wider debates driving American avant-garde practices in the 1960s, such as the supposed "insufficiencies of painting and sculpture" as mediums.[4] Art historians tend to find such breadth appealing of course—sweeping statements bring retrospective order to what was actually haphazard and unruly. But Judd knew that you lose much in eliminating complexity for the sake of clarity. He emphasized this point in his earlier essay "Local History" so as to qualify the more general of his own arguments. "The history of art and art's condition at any time are pretty messy," he declared. "They should stay that way."[5]

The hundreds of exhibition reviews and dozens of articles Judd wrote between 1959 and 1994 make up the sort of messy history he proposed. He saw things others missed when analyzing pieces by Lee Bontecou, Kazimir Malevich, Barnett Newman, Claes Oldenburg, and Jackson Pollock. Some of the other artists Judd favored contradict today's emerging canon of mid-twentieth-century art. For example, in 1963 he proclaimed that "[Al] Jensen is great [and] is one of the best painters in the United States," as well as expressing his high regard for the work of Nina Kogan, Verena Loewensberg, Richard Long, John Wesley, and others who often do not show up in the postwar survey texts.[6] And Judd sometimes changed his mind. His esteem for Roy Lichtenstein's paintings and John Chamberlain's sculptures grew, while his early enthusiasm for Robert Rauschenberg's assemblages and Jasper Johns's paintings waned.[7] Although Judd's empiricist worldview and concept of specificity recur throughout his writings, he appreciated many very different works of art.[8]

On the whole, Judd's critical essays and reviews document the diverse trajectories of contemporary art. In "Local History" he identified two trends in particular, suggesting that "three-dimensional work . . . approximating objects, and more or less geometric formats with color and optical phenomena are a couple of the wider categories of new and interesting work."[9] Judd positioned paintings with so-called phenomena by Larry Poons, Ad Reinhardt, Frank Stella, and Neil Williams as a grouping parallel to the objects of Bontecou, Chamberlain, Oldenburg, and others. But this division was "hardly definitive," as Judd made clear.[10] He addressed Stella's works twice in "Local History" since they fit both tendencies: the paintings are "slabs [that] seem like objects" and yet their successive painted angles create phenomena in the form of optical illusions,

Fig. 1 John Chamberlain, *Miss Lucy Pink*, 1962, painted and chromium-plated steel, 47 in. x 42 in. x 39 in. (119.38 x 106.68 x 99.06 cm). Private collection (Photograph courtesy of the artist. © Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

Fig. 2 Claes Oldenburg, *Floor Burger*, 1962, canvas filled with foam rubber and cardboard boxes, painted with latex and Liquitex, 52 in. high x 84 in. diameter (132.08 x 213.36 cm). Collection Art Gallery of Toronto, Toronto, Purchase 1967 (Photograph courtesy of the artist. © Claes Oldenburg)

"ambiguous, lively bands across the fairly impassive fields of parallel lines."[11] The following year, Judd's article "Specific Objects" examined the provisional category of the same name in full detail. He never compiled an analogous summation for the category of optical phenomena, however. Organizing Judd's scattered references and considering art on the basis of this tentative classification might seem to clean up the mess he endorsed, but in fact the opposite is true. There is more to Judd's art criticism than specific objects. Reconstructing his analysis of phenomena offers one way to complicate how a major artist and critic understood art of the 1960s and after, which, above all, helps restore to postwar art history some of the variety and intricacy of the artworks themselves.

Specificity, multiplicity, phenomena

A unique lexicon distinguishes Judd's writing. The best art is the most "interesting," and the most interesting art tends to be that in which the form, color, surface, space, and other "aspects" are "polarized" and "specific"—that is, jarring with but not counteracting one another.[12] "To state the idea a little too simply," Judd ventured, "the better the work, the more diverse its aspects."[13] In accordance with this art-critical framework based on aspects, specificity, and interest, Judd named Pollock and Chamberlain among the best artists of their time. The multiple attributes in their works are as specific as possible since either at odds or incommensurable. "Elements and aspects...are polarized rather than amalgamated," Judd remarked about Pollock's paintings. "A point of sensation, the immediacy of the dripped paint, is opposed to a volume of structural and imagistic forms."[14] He discerned a similarly stark multivalence in specific objects such as Chamberlain's crushed metal constructions (fig. 1):

> [There is a] three-way polarity of appearance and meaning, successive states of the same form and material. A piece may appear neutral, just junk, casually objective; or redundant, voluminous beyond its structure, obscured by other chances and possibilities; or simply expressive, through its structure and details and oblique imagery.[15]

Pollock's paintings are at once immediate, structural, and imagistic; Chamberlain's sculptures are neutral, redundant, and expressive. In these works, Judd's concept of specificity entails multiplicity.

Beyond disparate visual and physical properties, Judd also appreciated referential aspects of specific objects. As long as such associations stayed polarized from other features, he commended the additional layer of possible interpretation, as with suggestions of "war [and] sex" in Bontecou's pieces and the unusually "extreme [...] anthropomorphism" of Oldenburg's works (fig. 2).[16] But traditional illusionism, the depiction of and allusion to actual entities and space through pictorial devices such as perspective and modeling, remained too corrupt for contemporary art in Judd's opinion.[17] Even so, he knew giving up illusionism was risky. Imitation of real things and spaces amounts to an entire realm of meaning in painting and sculpture, no matter how false Judd and other artists and art critics thought it.[18] To preserve complexity and sustain interest without illusionism,

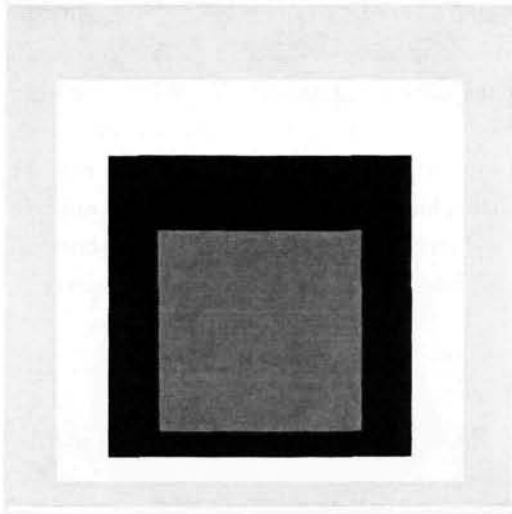

Fig. 3 Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square, New Gate*, 1951, oil on fiberboard, 24 in. x 24 in. (60.96 x 60.96 cm). Collection of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, Connecticut. (Photograph courtesy of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. © Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

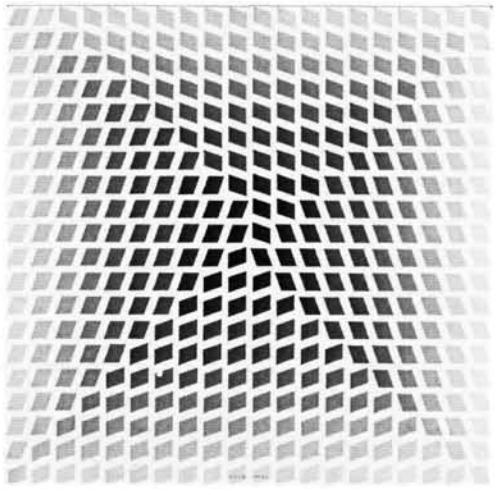

Fig. 4 Victor Vasarely, *Illik*, 1965, oil on board, 31 ½ in. x 31 ½ in. (80.01 x 80.01 cm). Private collection. (Photograph courtesy of Fondation Vasarely, Aix-en-Provence. © Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York / ADAGP, Paris, Fondation Vasarely)

Fig. 5 Larry Poons, untitled, c. 1968, acrylic on canvas, 125 ¼ in. x 89 ¾ in. (318.14 x 227.97 cm). Private collection (Photograph courtesy of Jacobson Howard Gallery. © Larry Poons)

he recognized "a need for something complicated and ambiguous but, unlike imitated space, actual and definite."[19] Bontecou's violence and carnality and Oldenburg's gross simulacra filled the void for Judd. Another possibility he considered was "color and optical phenomena."[20]

Defining phenomena is tricky. Judd seems to have meant real optical illusions that everyone sees, such as retinal afterimages, one hue modifying those adjacent, the chromatic depth of pushing and pulling colors, and many other puzzling perceptions. Judd called these illusions "absolutely objective" and "perfectly matter-of-fact" since they occur through direct visual experience.[21] Unlike illusionism, illusions are not pictorial artifice.[22] In a 1993 talk, for example, Judd cited Josef Albers's 1963 volume *Interaction of Color*: "Albers says to paste a red circle and a white circle on a black sheet of paper and then stare at the red circle. Then, look at the white circle: it is green or blue-green, the complementary of red."[23] The reality of the white belies the illusion of green and yet the sensation of hue is real too, a physiological effect of the human eye that is neither imagined nor mistaken. The phenomenon of white appearing green met Judd's criteria—complicated and ambiguous, but actual and definite.

Phenomena in painting: Josef Albers, Larry Poons, Victor Vasarely

Albers's works demonstrate how phenomena fit into Judd's art-critical model. Illusions in the *Homage to the Square* paintings (fig. 3), such as "one color altering another" and other kinds of "actual change in a color throughout an area," constitute one of several specific aspects in these pieces.[24] Judd described how *Homage to the Square: At Sea B 1964* (1964) has a central square of "more or less zinc yellow" surrounded by a band of "light-yellow-green gray," itself encircled by another band of "light gray."[25] He noticed that the inner yellow causes the adjacent light-yellow-green gray to appear simply gray. The outermost light gray looks yellow-green. The center changes too. "[Each] color varies according to the colors surrounding it and it also has an identity as a changed color," Judd observed.[26] These phenomena modify the sequential transition between hues, a second attribute Judd recognized, which produces a wholly optical and non-imitative space. As he explained, stepwise modulation in "either color or value or both at once" introduces undulating illusions of surface "flatness and stability [but then] recession and projection."[27] Albers initiated a third aspect, which Judd called variable color "texture" and "luminosity," by scraping some of the painted bands to expose the underlying coarse and bright white fiberboard.[28] And the paintings' geometric layouts function as a fourth quality. Judd noted that each band's single hue diverges into "three different colors" through its shifting dimensions, intensity, and position—narrowest and most brilliant at the bottom, wider and more moderate along both sides, and broad and subdued on top.[29] It is a "lambent geometry," he announced.[30] Contradictory characteristics such as the "unbounded color" and "rigid...geometry" vivify rather than compromise one another, and this makes for multifaceted, interesting art.[31] Albers's color phenomena of fluctuating yellows and grays coexist with contrasting chromatic ranges, oscillating surface frontality, and assorted textures and opacities, all within a fixed format. Or, in Judd's sometimes elliptical language, "the work...presents a conception of multiple distinctions within a single context, itself in turn manifold."[32]

Curator William C. Seitz heralded this new art of phenomena with The Museum of Modern Art's 1965 blockbuster exhibition "The Responsive Eye." He selected for display 123 pieces by ninety-eight artists and collectives from nineteen countries, anchored by "best-known masters" Albers and Victor Vasarely (fig. 4).[33] Judd complained that this breadth collapsed separate categories of phenomena. Seitz was "gathering everything at all allied, from [Neil] Williams' work, which is somewhat involved, through Stella's, where optical effects are occasional and not great, to plain hard-edge, in which color may vibrate along a juncture."[34] Judd insisted on upholding these distinctions. "Optical effects are one thing, a narrow phenomenon," he maintained, "and color effects are another, a wide range."[35] Albers's paintings exemplify the wide variety of aspects originating from color effects. Narrow optical effects include illusions that may not rouse much curiosity when presented alone. For example, Judd compared pieces by Larry Poons and Swiss artist Karl Gerstner (figs. 5, 6). Afterimages from Poons's paintings "are a phenomenon . . . but they are much besides"; the wavy distortion of moiré patterns in Gerstner's works remain just a phenomenon, which was not enough for Judd.[36]

Further examination of the differences between color effects and optical effects clarifies Judd's praise for Poons's work in contrast to his dismissal of most Op art.[37] He asserted that Poons's painting was "the only thing new [because] it's more than afterimages" and so located its "affinities . . . with the best American art and not with optical art."[38] Only works with several attributes, some broader than visual phenomena and requiring interpretation, seemed to keep Judd interested. Reminiscent of his meticulous description of Albers's *Homage to the Square*, Judd studied the "definite [...] polka dots" in Poons's pieces, then their "transitory [...] afterimages," both one by one and as a "whole pattern"; next he considered the dots' "sparse and somewhat casual and accidental, and yet seemingly controlled" arrangement; finally, he contemplated wider philosophical propositions in the conflicting "senses of order, relative order and chance."[39] "It takes quite a while to look at Poons' paintings," he affirmed.[40]

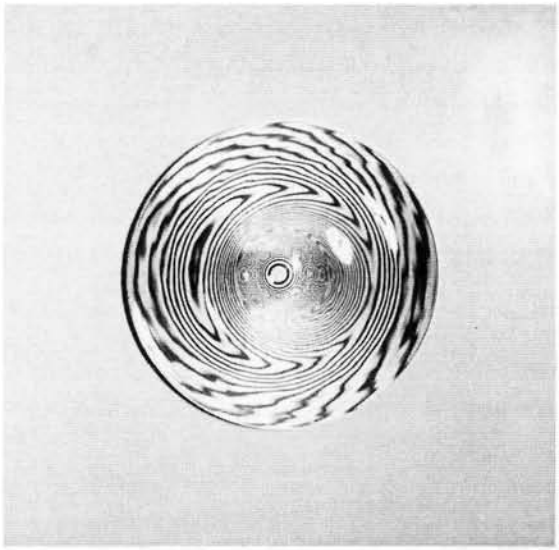

Fig. 6 Karl Gerstner, *Lens Picture No. 15*, 1964, Plexiglas lens mounted on painted Formica, 28 ⅜ x 28 13/16 x 7 ¼ in. (72.07 x 73.18 x 18.41 cm). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1965 (Photograph courtesy of Albright-Knox Art Gallery. © Karl Gerstner)

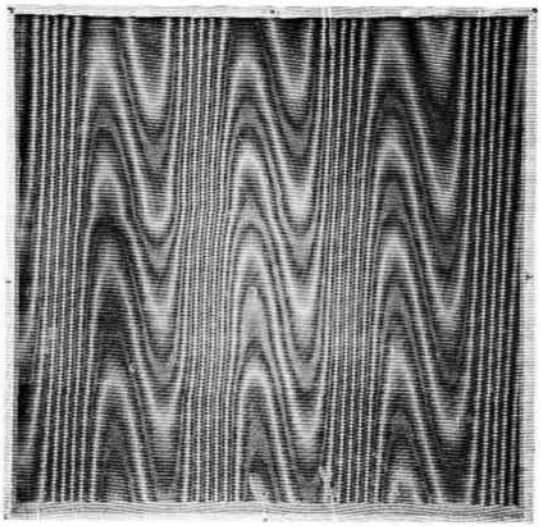

Fig. 7 Gerald Oster, *Sine and Rotated Sine*, 1964, silkscreen on Plexiglas, 36 x 36 in. (91.44 x 91.44 cm). Private collection (Photograph courtesy of Rago Auctions, Inc. © Gerald Oster)

Whereas Poons used phenomena well in Judd's opinion—as one specific aspect among others—Vasarely did not. Conventional easel techniques such as part-by-part balancing restrict phenomena in his paintings. "The color effects are interesting," Judd acknowledged, but for Vasarely "they're never enough, and he has about three or four squares, one slanted or tilted inside the other and this is all arranged. [That] is about five times more composition and juggling than he needs."[41] An overall equilibrium and uniformity prevail and, in Judd's estimation, the work suffers. Again, Poons served as the standard of comparison. "Vasarely's paintings are full of interesting effects but they usually cancel out," Judd objected. "Any one of them, used powerfully and complexly, as Poons uses his means, would be enough."[42] Judd felt that, unlike Poons, Vasarely tinkered with, composed, and in so doing depleted his phenomena.

Waning confidence in the very practice of painting underlay Judd's account. In an otherwise favorable review of pieces by Kenneth Noland, whom he rated "one of the best painters anywhere," Judd faulted the medium itself. "Painting now is not quite sufficient," he declared, "although only in terms of plain power. It lacks the specificity and power of actual materials, actual color and actual space."[43] While Judd wrote in 1965 that Poons's paintings attest to a powerful and complex handling of optical effects, he tempered this earlier praise in a 1966 symposium. "I believe something of the order that Larry has in his paintings, but I disbelieve the kind of illusionism," Judd stated. "If you are going to use just an optical effect, it has to be made so definite that you don't have an illusionistic surface[,] so that you don't somehow destroy the surface you are working on."[44] But according to Judd no painter had ever eliminated all spatial illusion. Art critic Barbara Rose asked him during the same roundtable, "Do you think there is such a thing as a flat painting?" He answered, "No, there isn't, so far. I think it's probable that someone will manage to make one...but so far, no one has."[45] Judd confirmed that his opposition to painting was not "retroactive," as he put it; he still thought of Barnett Newman as "one of the world's best artists" and regarded Pollock "a greater artist than anyone working at the time or since."[46] And while Judd posited that paintings by Vasarely did not make the most of phenomena, those of Albers and Poons by and large did. Beyond these

exceptions, however, Judd's wider criticism of painting implied that new phenomena required new mediums.

New phenomena: Karl Gerstner, Gerald Oster, Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel

Judd made striking predictions about phenomena in reviews from early 1965. Assessing optical effects created by the constructions of Karl Gerstner, American artist-physicist Gerald Oster, and the Parisian collective Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV), he asserted that "something may be done with the phenomena which will replace present art [and] start . . . what will be an important kind of art."[47] Experimental materials yield unusual sensations in these artists' works. Concave and convex Plexiglas lenses alter the appearance of black and white concentric circles in Gerstner's "lens pictures." The compound curvature of each lens gives rise to moiré distortion, which Judd detailed:

> One sequence produced by an indented lens over the concentric lines, seen dead on, is, from the center, a band of fine, progressively wider lines, a colored moiré pattern, a spiral set of larger, also progressively wider lines, another and larger moiré, and around the circumference, a third moiré, still larger and, like the first one, colored.[48]

Oster's pieces bring about similar illusions (fig. 7). A pane of glass with radiating concentric rings superimposed over another pane with thin horizontal stripes causes "vertical moiré" while a complementary work's rings and verticals generate "horizontal moiré."[49] Reporting on GRAV's first exhibition in the United States, Judd wrote that a wall piece with plastic tubing by Yvaral "produces a moiré haze . . . [that is] dizzying, impenetrable, recondite" (fig. 8).[50] A "four-foot ball of aluminum rods" by fellow member François Morellet "opens and closes according to the angle from which it is seen" (fig. 9).[51] For Judd, the moiré and other real optical effects made possible by these mediums had the potential to surpass the complication, ambiguity, actuality, and definiteness of painted color effects.

Gerstner, Oster, and GRAV fabricated pieces with much promise in Judd's opinion, though also many shortcomings. New phenomena did not guarantee innovative art. In his review of Oster, Judd maintained that "oil paint and description are at least obsolescent. Obviously the old painting is being replaced by the use of specific materials, forms and phenomena."[52] In spite of the alleged obsolescence of illusionistic painting, Judd granted that the most advanced abstract painting still outstripped works by Gerstner, Oster, and GRAV. They had not mastered their medium or maximized its visual possibilities as Albers and Poons had theirs. "The use of this kind of phenomena, the way in which it will be good art, is going to be one of the big problems," Judd warned.[53] Plastic works by GRAV member Francisco Sobrino, for instance, retained "too much of the old compositional structure."[54] Both Gerstner's and Oster's constructions were too small, suggesting defunct easel painting rather than vying with large avant-garde canvases. "One thing necessary is size, scale," Judd insisted.[55] As with Vasarely's paintings, he determined that features borrowed from older art

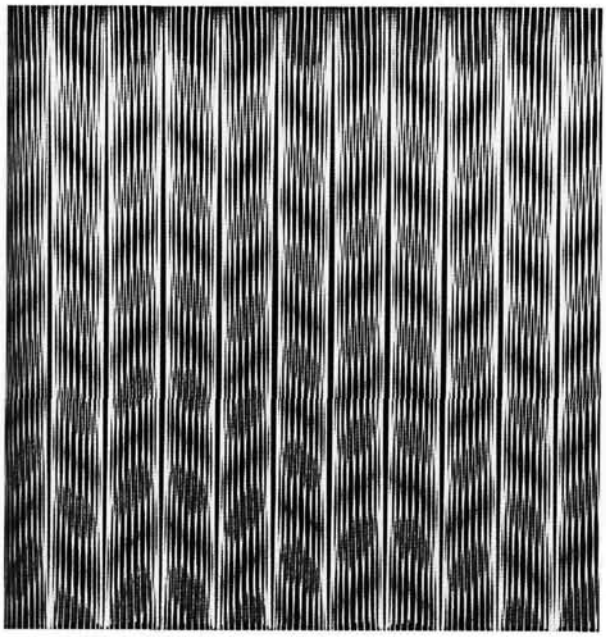

Fig. 8 Yvaral, *Cylindres en accélération*, 1961, wood, plastic, vinyl wires, 23 ⅝ x 23 ⅝ x 3 ⅛ in. (60 x 60 x 8 cm). Private collection (Photograph courtesy of Fondation Vasarely, Aix-en-Provence. © Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York ADAGP, Paris, Fondation Vasarely)

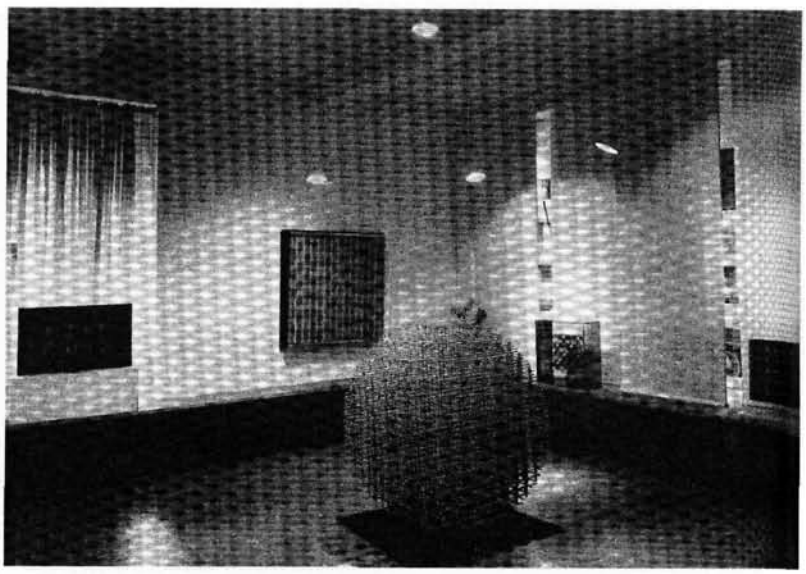

Fig. 9 Exhibition view of works by Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) at The Contemporaries, New York, November 11–December 15, 1962 (Photograph courtesy of O. E. Nelson Estate. © Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York / ADAGP, Paris and O. E. Nelson Estate)

lingered on, generalizing distinct qualities and undermining new phenomena.

Because they exhibited their creations as visual art, Judd believed Gerstner, Oster, and GRAV were obligated to contend with prior pioneering sculpture and painting. In his judgment, they neglected this responsibility. "Oster is presenting the phenomenon [of moiré]," Judd acknowledged, "but otherwise his work doesn't have much to do with the problem, which especially involves what has been done so far, and the best art generally. [This] means mostly that the art is old."[56] He noted a similar flaw in GRAV's pieces. "The primary fault of the group is that they consider themselves to be working within a certain tradition and philosophy, one which is self-contained," Judd stated. "Their work, however . . . is necessarily measured against anything that is art, that is interesting to look at."[57] To emphasize his point, Judd compared GRAV to both Piet Mondrian and Yves Klein, the sort of juxtaposition with the best previous art that he felt the group had overlooked. Judd found the implications of Klein's blunt and uncomposed monochromatic blue paintings more credible than the "idealistic, rationalistic[,] universalizing" philosophy and "fixed platonic order" invoked by Mondrian's balancing of regular forms and primary colors.[58] GRAV, in Judd's view, ignored Klein's advance and returned to Mondrian's "universality," now untenable and obsolete.[59] He criticized them for it: "The group is seeking too wide a generality for the present, a generality claiming an objective validity."[60] The metaphysical order seeming to underlie GRAV's compositional balancing convinced Judd that their works did not progress beyond the foremost painting of the time. "Klein, claiming less, overpowers them," he concluded.[61] In Judd's final estimation, Gerstner, Oster, and

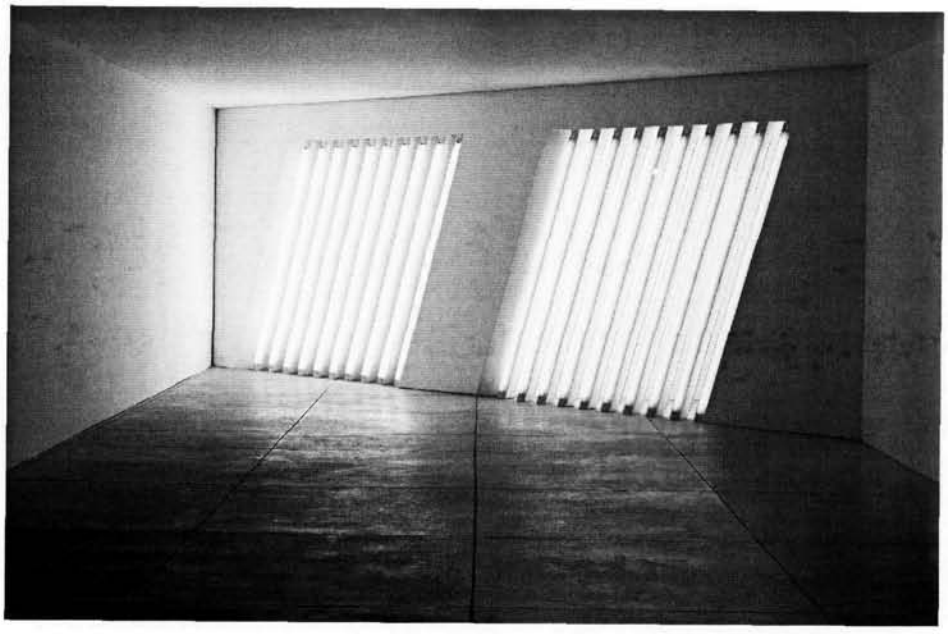

Fig. 10 Dan Flavin, untitled (Marfa project), 1996, pink, green, yellow, and blue fluorescent light, six buildings, two sections each: 8 ft. (244 cm) long on the diagonal in corridors with walls measuring 8 ft. (244 cm) long on the diagonal and spaced 5 ft8 in. (170 cm) apart. The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. (Photograph courtesy of The Chinati Foundation. © Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York.)

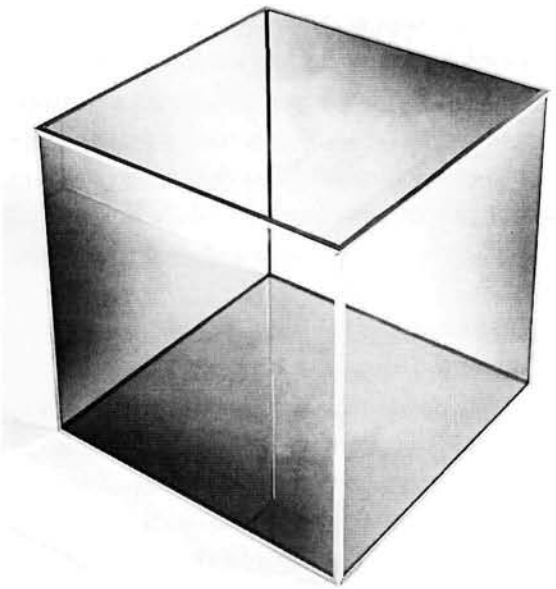

Fig. 11 Larry Bell, untitled, 1968, vacuum-coated glass and chromium-plated brass, 20 in. x 20 in. x 20 in. (50.8 x 50.8 x 50.8 cm). Private collection. (Photograph courtesy of the artist. © Larry Bell.)

GRAV failed to solve the principal challenge posed by their new phenomena—how to cultivate an original and important kind of art by extending beyond familiar practices.

Single phenomena: Dan Flavin, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin

Judd recognized in Dan Flavin's fluorescent light constructions what he thought previous phenomenal art lacked: an "immediate means...used for an immediate purpose" (fig. 10).[62] He recorded the elaborate color and optical effects of four vertical lamps placed side by side:

> The two outside tubes are [so-called] "Cool" white and the inner ones are [so-called] "Daylight" white, which looks blue in this context. A line of light is thrown along each tube by the adjacent ones. The space between the two central tubes is blue, bluer than the bulbs. The two other spaces are less blue because of the [outer Cool] white.[63]

Additional discussion of these perplexing phenomena clarifies Judd's account. Flavin's two tightly aligned colors become four. Both retain some of their original hue, but beside one another the Cool white appears more cream-colored than it does on its own and the Daylight white appears bluer. Compounding this initial doubling, the light mixes and multiplies in actual space. The creamy white and bluish white blend in the outer left and right gaps between lamps, resulting in a tertiary color both bluer than creamy white and creamier than bluish white. The central gap, however, remains tinted a pure blue, even bluer than the two central lamps since untouched by the creamy white of the outer lamps that saps their hue. "The lit tubes are intense and very definite[,] very much a particular visible state, a phenomenon," Judd reported in summarizing these complexities.[64]

The creamy and bluish glow of Flavin's white lamps recalls the color effects Judd discerned in Albers's *Homage to the Square*, except for the added brilliance of cast fluorescent light. "Two juxtaposed painted whites are subtle," he commented, "two juxtaposed white tubes are pretty obvious."[65] Judd documented this overall strengthening of phenomena throughout the 1960s. Color and optical effects at first constituted one property among others of comparable specificity and interest in Albers's and Poons's paintings; then, more potent illusions arose from the modern materials of Gerstner, Oster, and GRAV only to diminish alongside traditional techniques; and finally, phenomena began to exceed all other qualities in the art of Flavin, Larry Bell, and Robert Irwin (figs. 11, 12).[66]

The evolution of Judd's thinking on Flavin's work in particular clouds the distinction drawn in "Local History" between objects and phenomena. Judd made no mention of Flavin's phenomenal features in "Specific Objects." Instead, he predictably accentuated the objectness of fluorescent lamps and housings and their status as "industrial products."[67] This reading soon changed. In a 1964 *Arts Magazine* review, Judd examined one of Flavin's *alternate diagonals of March 2, 1964 (to Don Judd)* (1964).[68] Phenomena such as the "spaces between the red tubes [appearing] rose" coexist with a variance in how far the fixtures jut out, the work's "very open" relationship to the wall, the "disproportion" of the four short red lamps and one long yellow lamp, and the "four-and-one relationship" itself.[69] Phenomena seem to constitute one attribute of a multifaceted specific object in this account, thereby collapsing the two categories as the latter subsumes the former. This balanced multiplicity then gave way to the primacy of phenomena in a 1969 catalogue essay for the National Gallery of Canada. Here Judd identified "three main aspects" in Flavin's art, all somewhat phenomenal: "the fluorescent tubes as the source of light, the light diffused throughout the surrounding space or cast upon nearby surfaces, and the arrangement together or placement

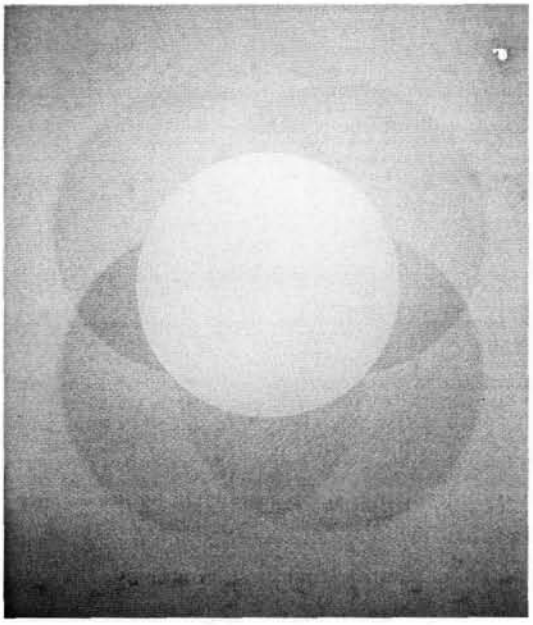

Fig. 12 Robert Irwin, untitled, c. 1966–67, sprayed acrylic lacquer on shaped aluminum, 60 in. (152.4 cm) diameter disc. Private collection (Photograph courtesy of the artist. © Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

upon surfaces of the fixtures and tubes."[70] For Judd, Flavin's lamps transformed from specific objects with insignificant phenomena, to specific objects with noteworthy color and optical effects, to phenomena above all else.

Although Judd wrote very little on either artist, his brief analyses of Bell's vacuum-coated glass cubes and Irwin's painted aluminum and acrylic plastic discs reestablished some disparity between objects and phenomena. "Most art, including mine, involves several things at once, none developed toward exclusivity," Judd observed. "Usually there is a comparative balance between the few main aspects."[71] Contrary to this broader multivalence characteristic of specific objects, "single" phenomena predominate in pieces by Flavin, Bell, and Irwin. "The singleness or isolation of phenomena is new to art and highly interesting," Judd remarked on Flavin's works. "Irwin and Bell and a couple of others in Los Angeles are also interested in developing single phenomena."[72] A difference of degree separates the three artists. Judd argued that single phenomena in the cubes and discs surpass other qualities even more than in Flavin's constructions. "The dominance as an aspect of the fluorescent tubes is not as great as that of single phenomena in Bell's and Irwin's work," he explained.[73] Nevertheless, all three investigate phenomena so fully that Judd felt their color and optical effects could sustain interest alone, unlike Gerstner's and Oster's moiré. Judging from his enthusiastic response, pieces by Flavin, Bell, and Irwin seem to have fulfilled Judd's 1965 prediction of an important phenomenal art capable of replacing present practices.[74]

At first Judd considered Bell's glass cubes to be specific objects, but as with Flavin's lamps, he revised this 1964 account in 1969.[75] By turns reflective and translucent, the coated glass gives rise to single phenomena. When opaque and lustrous like a mirror from one viewpoint, a 1968 cube's twenty-inch panels seem to dematerialize into radiating light; when transparent like a windowpane from another angle, an iridescent sheen modulates through pink, yellow, ocher, purple, and violet from the center of the glass plates to their corners. Judd mentioned a second feature of Bell's works along with Oldenburg's droopy sculptures in his last essay, from 1993. Oldenburg's objects interested Judd for their "soft [and] flexible" space, which exists unseen inside a canvas or vinyl skin. Bell's cubes, on the contrary, contain "a visible space."[76] Their glass shell reveals a sealed interior, four cubic feet available to visual scrutiny but cut off from tactile experience. Phenomena confound any inspection, however. Peering down into a cube and to the left, you see what is outside it to the right. Reflections off the inner glass surfaces seemingly double space in every direction as you crouch to look up, crane to look down, and otherwise circle around. Judd regarded the impact of these and other optical illusions on one's perceptual capacities as a third property of Bell's glass cubes and subsequent pieces, "a phenomenological aspect . . . [that] modified" their visible inner spaces.[77] For Judd, the multivalence of Bell's works derived from the intricacies of single phenomena, a narrower overall scope than the several distinct attributes of specific objects.

Irwin's discs also create acute phenomena. Suspended twenty inches from the wall by a rear brace, an untitled 1966–67 work has a circular white face faintly tinted with pink, violet, blue, green, yellow, and grayish purple in successive rings from center to rim. These chromatic fluctuations generate optical effects that exaggerate the camber of the shaped aluminum surface. Looking at the disc head-on, you see a sphere instead, mistakenly construing five feet of nonexistent

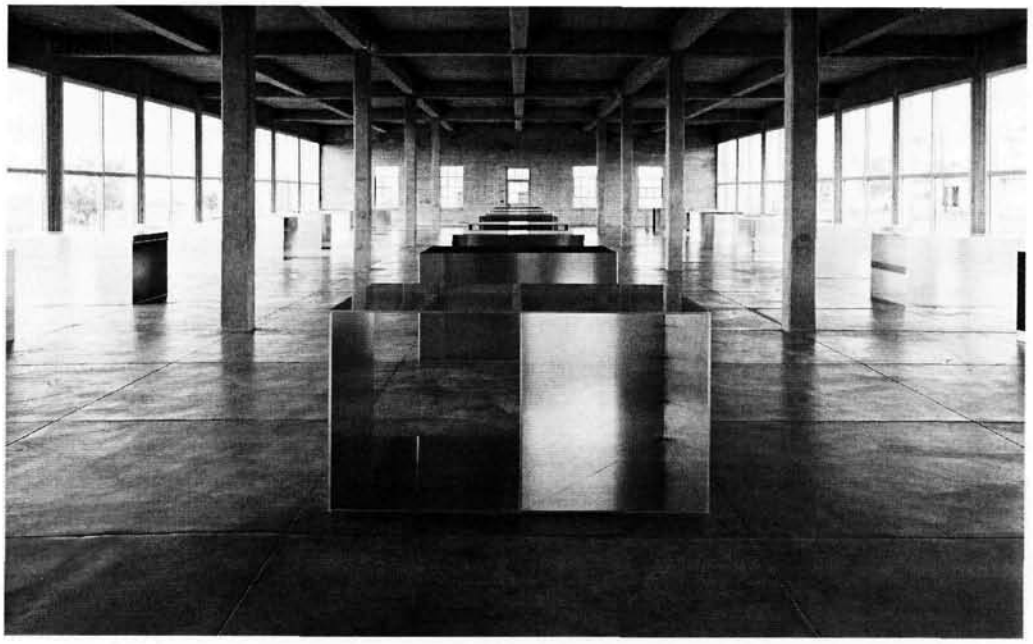

Fig. 13 Donald Judd, 100 untitled works in mill aluminum, 1982–86, each unit 41 in. x 51 in. x 72 in. (104.14 x 129.54 x 182.88 cm). The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas (Photograph courtesy of The Chinati Foundation. © Judd Foundation. Licensed by VAGA, New York)

depth to correspond with its real five-foot diameter. If you continue to stare straight ahead, illusions abound as the eyes begin losing focus and retinal fatigue sets in. Shadows gleam and emerge rather than withdrawing. Pulses of light race around the lip. Large swathes of the disc, shadows, and wall disappear and reappear every so often as your visual acuity slumps and recovers. Intriguing in themselves, such remarkable phenomena also alter one's bodily experience of space. The gallery lighting seems to dim then brighten in a flash, compacting and distending the room in turn. As with Bell's work, Judd saw these features of Irwin's art as "a phenomenological aspect that has become an important new aspect."[78] In Judd's assessment, phenomena make up only one attribute of Albers's and Poons's multifaceted paintings; yet "developed toward exclusivity" by Flavin, Bell, and Irwin, single phenomena manifest their own kind of multiplicity—a primary quality's numerous qualities.[79]

A phenomenal art history

Judd distinguished his goals from those of Dan Flavin, stating, "I think Flavin wants, at least first or primarily, a particular phenomenon. [...] I want a particular, definite object."[80] Nevertheless, the reassembled category of phenomenal art draws attention to the color and optical effects of Judd's own works. In one hundred aluminum objects at the non-profit Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, phenomena interact with space, volume, proportion, formal variation, and other aspects (fig. 13). The units, each measuring forty-one by fifty-one by seventy-two inches, sit in

two rectangular buildings with over 250 feet of glazing on both long sides. Sunlight floods over and into the works. Some channel light through their partitioned interiors, tempering its intensity. Afternoon brings forth a range of luminosities from the uniform aluminum—blazing lateral surfaces, glimmering corners, and darkened crevices. Each piece takes on tints from its location, such as the red of the buildings' brick walls, yellow from prairie grass outside, and blue from the sky. Judd also demonstrated the rich effects of natural light at Chinati with fifteen outdoor concrete works fabricated from immense units measuring two and a half by two and a half by five meters (fig. 14). Throughout the day, the rising sun and passing clouds change the size, shape, hue, and chromatic saturation of shadows inside and outside the open forms. In the northernmost work, one unit's shadow cuts a notch into another's lit interior, resulting in a radiant band running around its inner surfaces. The light gray concrete appears surprisingly different in the pale yellow glow of early morning, the blinding white afternoon, and under the deep orange setting sun. Like the art with phenomena that interested Judd, color and optical effects in his aluminum and concrete objects are complicated and ambiguous while also actual and definite.

Phenomena adjust current understandings not only of Judd's art and criticism, but perhaps also of art history. In 1983 Judd broadened the scope of his term. "The dripped paint in most of Pollock's paintings remains dripped paint as a phenomenon," he observed. "It's that sensation, completely immediate and specific, and nothing modifies it."[81] By extending the word beyond definite illusions to encompass other kinds of sensations, Judd licensed his subsequent assertion of phenomena's major role in postwar artmaking. He declared that, "at the same time as Pollock and since, almost all first-rate art has been based on an immediate phenomenon."[82] He went even further in 1993. In his final essay, Judd expanded phenomena to include one of the most basic properties of visual art. "Color," he proclaimed, "is an immediate sensation, a phenomenon."[83] Judd viewed the continuous strengthening of color as "the most powerful force" behind painting's evolution

Fig. 14 Donald Judd, fifteen untitled works in concrete, 1980–84, each unit 98 ½ in. x 98 ½ in. x 196 ⅞ in. (250 x 250 x 500 cm). The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas (Photograph courtesy of The Chinati Foundation. © Judd Foundation. Licensed by VAGA, New York)

during the twentieth century, and accordingly recast the "conventional history of recent painting" as "a history of color in art."[84] "Color is the dominant aspect [in pieces by] Matisse, Mondrian, Malevich, Léger," he contended, and in the paintings of "Pollock, Newman, Still, and Rothko . . . color is amplified beyond anything seen for centuries."[85] Intense color led to color effects and other phenomena in painting and, in the end, to altogether new mediums. Albers's *Homage to the Square* pieces and *Interaction of Color*, for example, "undoubtedly made color and optical phenomena familiar" to painters such as Poons but also to Flavin, Bell, and Irwin.[86] Put to diverse uses by numerous artists in countless works, much twentieth-century art manifests phenomena in line with Judd's later and wider definition.

In 1963 Judd noticed "an increasing use of optical and color phenomena."[87] When he wrote on Flavin in 1969, art with phenomena was maturing. Two decades later, Judd stated that "in general I think the future of art lies in stressing phenomena more, but you can also make too much of that."[88] The stakes are high, his reserve notwithstanding. If Judd was right that phenomena comprise an aspect of some or most of the twentieth century's best art, historical analysis has to catch up. Scrutiny of phenomena spurs new ways of seeing and thinking about art of the 1960s, work before and after this decade, and pieces yet to come. Familiar artworks begin to look a lot different than they do now in the survey textbooks. Judd would have approved. Restoring phenomena to his art, to his art criticism, and to art history helps make things messy again.

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This essay develops analysis from an earlier book review. See Adrian Kohn, "Judd on Politics, Judd on Phenomena," *Art Journal* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 131-33.

1. See Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965): 74-82. Judd authored all sources unless noted otherwise. In his 1975 collected writings, Judd indicated that he completed "Specific Objects" in 1964 and that it "was published perhaps a year after it was written." See "Introduction," *Complete Writings, 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), vii.

The many reprints of "Specific Objects" in exhibition catalogues and in several art-historical anthologies provide some evidence of its significance and continuing relevance to scholarship. See, for example, James Meyer, ed., *Minimalism* (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2000), 207-10; Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 114-17; Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1993), 809-13; and Ellen H. Johnson, ed., *American Artists on Art from 1940 to 1980* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), 105-11; and Barbara Rose, ed., *Readings in American Art, 1900–1975*.

2. "Specific Objects," 74, 78-80 (phrases reordered).

3. "Specific Objects," 78 (phrases reordered).

4. "Specific Objects," 74. Judd argued that "now [in 1964] painting and sculpture are less neutral, less containers, more defined, not undeniable and unavoidable. They are particular forms, circumscribed after all, producing fairly definite qualities. Much of the motivation in the new work is to get clear of these forms."

5. "Local History," *Arts Yearbook* 7 (1964): 26. Judd railed against organizing art into styles since doing so means ignoring differences between individual pieces. "I've expected a lot of stupid things to reoccur—movements, labels," he claimed, "but I didn't think there would be another attempt to impose a universal style. It's naive and it's directly opposed to the nature of contemporary art." See "Complaints: Part I," *Studio International* 177, no. 910 (April 1969): 183. For related discussion, see also the previously unpublished "(Claes Oldenburg)," *Complete Writings, 1959–1975*, 191; a letter to the editor in *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 6 (March 1964): 7; "Local History," 26, 28, 35; and "French Masters of the Eighteenth Century," *Arts*

Magazine 37, no. 7 (April 1963): 54.

6. "Al Jensen," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 7 (April 1963): 52. See also *Richard Paul Lohse, 1902–1988* (Marfa, Tex.: The Chinati Foundation, 1988), 9; "Ausstellungsleitungsstreit," 1989, in Marianne Stockebrand, ed., *Donald Judd: Book One*, unpublished manuscript (Marfa, Tex.: Archives of Judd Foundation), 309; and "John Wesley," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 7 (April 1963): 51.

7. Compare "Roy Lichtenstein," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 7 (April 1962): 52-53 and "Roy Lichtenstein," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 2 (November 1963): 32-33; "John Chamberlain," *Arts Magazine* 34, no. 5 (February 1960): 57 and "John Chamberlain," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 6 (March 1962): 48; "Robert Rauschenberg," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 4 (January 1962): 39-40 and "Robert Rauschenberg," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 3 (December 1963): 60; and "Jasper Johns," *Arts* 34, no. 6 (March 1960): 57-58 and "Six Painters and the Object," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 9 (May–June 1963): 108-9.

8. For a sense of the assorted art and designed objects Judd owned, see the reproductions of Todd Eberle's photographs in Renate Petzinger and Hanne Dannenberger, eds., *Donald Judd: Räume Spaces* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Museum Wiesbaden, 1993).

9. "Local History," 28. In this article, Judd's phrase "optical art" (35) overlaps but is not coextensive with Optical or Op art. See related discussion in the "Phenomena in painting" section below.

10. "Local History," 35. Judd persistently qualified his classifications. "The two categories, objects and optical art, . . . are far from being all of what is happening—and are hardly definitive," he affirmed. "A person could select other common elements which would make other groups. The proportion of things not in common far exceeds the things that are." See "Local History," 28, 35 (phrases reordered).

11. "Local History," 32, 35. Judd's various discussions of Stella's optical illusions remain ambivalent. Noticing that the adjacent angles in the stripe paintings seem to cohere into diagonals, Judd commented that "the sensation is optical and definite. The diagonals are free and electric in a static field." Two years later, though, Judd posited that Stella's "optical effects are occasional and not great." See, respectively, "Frank Stella," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 10 (September 1962): 51; and "Julian Stanczak," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 1 (October 1964): 68.

12. On Judd's specialized use of the term "interest" in the behaviorist tradition of philosopher Ralph Barton Perry, see David Raskin, "Judd's Moral Art," in Nicholas Serota, ed., *Donald Judd* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 81-92. See also the discussion of multiplicity in Benjamin G. Paskus, "Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975*," *Art Journal* 36, no. 2 (Winter 1976/1977): 174; and the analysis of polarization in Richard Shiff, "Donald Judd, Safe from Birds," in Serota, 48-58.

13. "Yale Lecture, September 20, 1983," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 7/8 (Spring/Autumn 1984): 153.

14. "Jackson Pollock," *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 6 (April 1967): 34; and "Chamberlain: Another View," *Art International* 7, no. 10 (January 16, 1964): 39. Judd praised Chamberlain's sculpture in part by describing similarities to Pollock's paintings. In an earlier review, Judd argued that "Pollock achieves generality by establishing an extreme polarity between the simple, immediate perception of paint and canvas, a reduction to unexpandable sensation, and the complexity and overtones of his imagery and articulated structure. Such diverse elements combined under tension produce a totality much greater and unlike any of the parts." See "Helen Frankenthaler," *Arts* 34, no. 6 (March 1960): 55.

15. "Local History," 31. See also "Specific Objects," 82. Earlier, Judd wrote that "the work is in turn neutral, redundant and expressively structured. . . . Initially and recurrently the metal is neutral, pretty much something as anything is something. [Also,] the sculpture is redundant. There is more metal and space than the structure requires. [And yet,] when the structure is analyzed, much of that metal becomes expressive detail." See "Chamberlain: Another View," 39.

16. "Lee Bontecou," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 4 (January 1963): 44; and "Specific Objects," 82 (phrase reordered). On Bontecou, see also "Lee Bontecou," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 7 (April 1965): 20. On Oldenburg, see also "(Claes Oldenburg)," 191; and Richard Shiff, "Judd through Oldenburg," *Chinati Foundation Newsletter* 9 (2004): 33-44.

17. Judd asserted that "the depiction of [a] volume requires a unified, illusionistic space [that] signifies a unified and idealistic world." See "George Segal," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 10 (September 1962): 55. For related discussion, see also "Walter Murch," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 5 (February 1963): 46; and "Malevich: Independent Form, Color, Surface," *Art in America* 62, no. 2 (March–April 1974): 57.

Judd could appreciate works with recognizable imagery by Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, George Segal, and John Wesley because they diverge from traditional illusionism. Lichtenstein, by depicting comics, "is representing this representation—which is very different from simply representing an object or a view." Rosenquist's subjects are "not depicted in a representational way, but are painted in a billboard technique." Segal's plaster figures "seem both dead and alive, and the specificity of both aspects comes from the real space they occupy, their real size, their real appearance, their artificial material and the real furniture." And Wesley's paintings do not show how things appear, "but what some bumpkin made of appearances for some unartistic reason. This is a big difference and is interesting—it is a sort of meta-representation." See, respectively, "Roy Lichtenstein" (1963), 32; "Young Artists at the Fair and at Lincoln Center," *Art in America* 52, no. 4 (August 1964): 117; "Local History," 32; and "John Wesley," 51. (Philip Johnson seems to have composed the introduction to the "Young Artists" article, but Judd, uncredited, wrote the brief entries for each participant. See *Complete Writings, 1959–1975*, 130-31.)

18. Judd even proposed that illusionistic representation is painting's primary mode of significance, an indefensible

compromise in his opinion: "Anything placed in a rectangle and on a plane suggests something in and on something else, something in its surround, which suggests an object or figure in its space, in which these are clearer instances of a similar world—that's the main purpose of painting." See "Specific Objects," 77.

19. "Local History," 34-35.

20. "Local History," 35.

21. *Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular* (Sassenheim, Netherlands: Sikkens Foundation, 1993), 16; and Judd in Barbara Rose, et al., "Is Easel Painting Dead?" symposium transcript, November 1966, New York (Washington, D.C.: Barbara Rose Papers, Archives of American Art), 33.

22. Richard Shiff reintroduced this distinction: "Illusion [is] a natural condition of vision, a physiological fact; illusionism [is] a constructed effect for the pictorially indoctrinated. . . . Illusion is the way things are. Illusionism is the way things are not." See Shiff, "Donald Judd, Safe from Birds," 41-42.

23. *Some Aspects of Color*, 16. See Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 30 of the "Text," 18 of the "Commentary," and Plate VIII-1. Judd also claimed in *Some Aspects of Color* that "color as knowledge is very durable. I find it difficult, maybe impossible, to forget" (16). Indeed, he had used the same example thirty years earlier in his review of Albers's study. "When you look at the white circle after staring at the red one, it flushes a light, intense cerulean blue," he reported. See "*Interaction of Color* by Josef Albers," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 2 (November 1963): 67. Judd's library, housed in the west building of The Block in Marfa, Texas, includes the 1963 first edition of Albers's *Interaction of Color*.

24. "Josef Albers," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 7 (April 1963): 54; and "Josef Albers," *Josef Albers* (Marfa, Tex.: The Chinati Foundation, 1991), 25. Judd owned a number of works by Albers, including two *Homage to the Square* paintings from 1958 and 1963, another 1958 oil on fiberboard painting, artist's proofs of two 1964 prints *Midnight and Noon III* and *Midnight and Noon VI*, a 1967 set of screenprints titled *Ten Variants*, a 1971 screenprint *I-S LXXI a*, a 1971 set of inked aluminum plates called *White Embossings on Gray: Seven Plates*, and a 1972 two-volume portfolio of prints titled *Formulation: Articulation*. Craig Rember, Judd Foundation, statements to author, March 10, 2007. See also *Prints and Multiples, Tuesday 26 September 2006, Wednesday 27 September 2006* (New York: Christie's, 2006), 45-46, lots 240, 243; and *Prints and Multiples, Monday 1 May 2006, Tuesday 2 May 2006* (New York: Christie's, 2006), 155-56, lots 374, 376.

25. "Josef Albers," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 2 (November 1964): 60.

26. "Josef Albers" (1991), 24.

27. "Josef Albers" (1963), 54.

28. "Josef Albers," *Arts* 34, no. 3 (December 1959): 57; and "Josef Albers" (1991), 23-24.

29. "Josef Albers" (1991), 24; and "Josef Albers" (1963), 54.

30. "Josef Albers" (1959), 56. See also "Josef Albers" (1963), 54. Thirty years later, Judd acknowledged that "I always admired Albers's paintings; I've never otherwise used the word 'lambent.'" See "Josef Albers" (1991), 21.

31. "Josef Albers" (1959), 56. Summing up his first review of Albers's pieces, Judd wrote that the "unbounded color and the final disparity [of each colored area] belie the apparent rigidity of the geometry and provide the central lyric and exultant ambiguity of the painting."

32. "Josef Albers" (1959), 57.

33. William C. Seitz, "Acknowledgements," *The Responsive Eye* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1965), 3.

34. "Julian Stanczak," 68. Judd himself grouped Stella and Williams along with Larry Poons and Ad Reinhardt in "Local History," yet took care to emphasize the many differences between their paintings and the provisional nature of his categories. See "Local History," 35. Presumably, The Museum of Modern Art had released a list of exhibiting artists ahead of time since Judd criticized "The Responsive Eye" months before the show opened on February 23, 1965.

35. Ibid.

36. "Karl Gerstner," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 6 (March 1965): 60; and rephrased in "New York Letter," *Art International* 9, no. 3 (April 1965): 77.

37. Judd believed that the possibility of "doing first-rate work sometime . . . is beyond ninety-five percent of the optical artists." See "New York Notes," *Art International* 9, no. 4 (May 1965): 65. In repudiating "optical art" here, Judd seems to defer to the popular usage of that term with which he disagreed elsewhere: "There have been a lot of shows of optical work lately, at least ones called that by the galleries." See "New York Letter," 75; and n. 9 above.

38. "New York Letter," 75 (phrases reordered).

39. "Local History," 35 (phrases reordered); and "New York Letter," 75.

40. "New York Letter," 75.

41. "The Classic Spirit in Twentieth-Century Art," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 7 (April 1964): 28; and Judd in Bruce Glaser, "New Nihilism or New Art," audio recording, February 15, 1964 (North Hollywood, Cal.: Pacifica Radio Archives, Archive Number BB3394), at track 2, 8:25. See also "Victor Vasarely," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 9 (May–June 1964): 31. Caroline Jones first cited the audio recording of Glaser's interview in *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 415, n. 152.

42. "New York Letter," 75. Judd made the same comparison a year earlier: "[In] two paintings by Vasarely . . . the color effects are interesting and certainly not classical. The classical composition, the tilted squares and their relation to the straight ones, is a nuisance. Larry Poons's painting is an alternative; the optical effects are more independent." See "The Classic Spirit in Twentieth-Century Art," 28. These two reviews from 1965 and 1964, respectively, demonstrate that Judd changed his thinking from a January 1962 account, in which he concluded that "Vasarely's work has an immediacy and rigor much needed now." See "Victor Vasarely," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 4 (January 1962): 33. While Judd had several works by Albers, he owned nothing by Poons or Vasarely. Craig Rember, Judd Foundation, statements to author, February 8, 2007.

43. "Kenneth Noland," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 10 (September 1963): 53. Judd also held that most paintings amalgamate different attributes rather than keeping them specific and polarized. "There's a gradation or evening out of the parts and aspects," he argued. "The quality always has something of moderation, the long view and the unity of all things. By now this kind of resolution seems easy and also untrue." See "Jackson Pollock," 34.

44. Judd in Rose, et al., "Is Easel Painting Dead?" 31-32 (phrases reordered).

45. Rose and Judd in Rose, et al., "Is Easel Painting Dead?" 30. Judd's response differs from and presumably rectifies earlier comments on Al Jensen and Yves Klein (which also seem contradictory in themselves). He had claimed that "many of Jensen's paintings are thoroughly flat . . . . There are no other paintings completely without space," but also that "almost all paintings are spatial in one way or another. Yves Klein's blue paintings are the only ones that are unspatial." See "Al Jensen," 52; "Local History," 34; and "Specific Objects," 76.

46. "Specific Objects," 75; "Barnett Newman," *Studio International* 179, no. 919 (February 1970): 67; and "Jackson Pollock," 34. Although first published in 1970, Judd completed his essay on Newman in November 1964. See "Barnett Newman," 67.

47. "New York Letter," 77; and "Karl Gerstner," 59-60 (phrases reordered). Judd did not own works by Gerstner, Oster, or GRAV. Rember, statements to author, February 8, 2007.

48. "Karl Gerstner," 60; and repeated in "New York Letter," 77.

49. "Gerald Oster," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 6 (March 1965): 65; and repeated in "New York Letter," 77.

50. "New York Letter," 77; and "Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 5 (February 1963): 45.

51. "Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel," 45.

52. "Gerald Oster," 65; and rephrased in "New York Letter," 77.

53. Ibid.

54. "New York Letter," 77.

55. "Karl Gerstner," 60. See also "Gerald Oster," 65; and "New York Letter," 77.

56. "Gerald Oster," 65; and rephrased in "New York Letter," 77.

57. "Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel," 45.

58. Judd in "Abstract Expressionism," BBC Television program for The Open University, 1983, at 3:26; and "Barnett Newman," 69.

59. "Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel," 45.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. "Dan Flavin," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 7 (April 1964): 31 (supplemented for clarity). Judd did not name the particular work he was describing and Tiffany Bell and David Gray list no such configuration in their catalogue raisonné of Flavin's fluorescent lights. See Tiffany Bell and David Gray, "Catalogue of Lights," in Michael Govan and Tiffany Bell, *Dan Flavin: The Complete Lights, 1961–1996* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2004). Judd probably saw *daylight and cool white (to Sol LeWitt)* of 1964 with its lamps reversed (T. Bell and Gray, 228, no. 39). Tiffany Bell suggests two explanations for this: Judd

may have seen an early version of the piece that Flavin later changed, or the exhibited work could have been a variation. Tiffany Bell, statements to author, September 18–19, 2006.

64. "Aspects of Flavin's Work," in Dan Flavin, *fluorescent light, etc. from Dan Flavin* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969), 27.

65. "Aspects of Flavin's Work," 28. Judd examined several kinds of illusionary color effects in Albers's paintings, one of which was how "the color varies according to the colors surrounding it." See "Josef Albers" (1991), 24. Judd mentioned the same arrangement of dissimilar white lamps when discussing the independence of Malevich's color from form. "Autonomous color is still full of possibilities," he wrote, "for example, Flavin's use of two adjacent tubes of contrasting white." See "Malevich: Independent Form, Color, Surface," 57.

66. Judd owned several works by Flavin, including *icon III (blood) (the blood of a martyr)* of 1962, *icon VI (Ireland dying) (to Louis Sullivan)* of 1962–63, one of the *alternate diagonals of March 2, 1964 (to Don Judd)* of 1964, an untitled 1970 modular barrier, and *Untitled (to Véronique)* of 1987, as well as two 1986 screenprints called *Untitled [for Rento]* and six 1987 lithographs titled *To Don Judd, Colorist 1-4* and *6-7*. See *Post-War and Contemporary Art (Afternoon Session), Wednesday 10 May 2006* (New York: Christie's, 2006), 18-19, lot 409; *Prints and Multiples, Monday 1 May 2006, Tuesday 2 May 2006*, 177-78, lots 432, 433; and T. Bell and Gray, 211-13, 226, 292, 365, nos. 3, 6, 36, 255, 497.

Judd was the first artist to buy a piece from Larry Bell. He collected several works including glass cubes, two 1979 vapor drawings titled *PFBK 24, Vapor Drawing* and *SMMSHFAK 3A, Vapor Drawing*, and the 1962 painting *Lux at the Merritt Jones*. See *First Open: Post-War and Contemporary Art, Wednesday 13 September 2006* (New York: Christie's, 2006), 170, lots 194, 195; and Larry Bell, statement in *Artforum* 32, no. 10 (Summer 1994): 73.

Judd also had a 1965–67 aluminum disc by Irwin. See "Una stanza per Panza, part II," *Kunst Intern* 5 (July 1990): 8; and *Post-War and Contemporary Art (Afternoon Session), Wednesday 10 May 2006*, 24-25, lot 412.

67. "Specific Objects," 80. Judd included Flavin in discussion of objects rather than phenomena in "Local History" based on the early icons, which preceded works with fluorescent lamps alone: "Dan Flavin has shown some boxes with lights attached." See "Local History," 32; and T. Bell and Gray, 211-14, nos. 1-8.

68. Flavin commonly dedicated his works to friends; thirteen include Donald Judd's name. See T. Bell and Gray, 225-26, 362-64, nos. 35-38, 483-91. Judd owned a variation of *alternate diagonals of March 2, 1964 (to Don Judd)*, but with Daylight white and Cool white lamps rather than the red and yellow lamps of the variation he reviewed in the April 1964 issue of *Arts Magazine*. See "Dan Flavin," 31; T. Bell and Gray, 225-26, nos. 35, 36; and note 66 above.

69. "Dan Flavin," 31. As with *alternate diagonals of March 2, 1964 (to Don Judd)*, no properties dominated in Judd's analysis of Flavin's *the diagonal of May 25, 1963* (1963). He studied the "very different white[s]" of the lamp and the enameled metal housing, the "definite shadow" of the fixture, the light "cast widely" on the wall, and the "familiar" industrial nature of the lamp and housing. See "Black, White and Gray," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 6 (March 1964): 38.

70. "Aspects of Flavin's Work," 27.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid. Both Bell and Irwin began experimenting with new kinds of work in 1969, the year Judd's reference to their art appeared in his catalogue essay on Flavin. Bell was making fewer cubes and instead constructing glass walls and other installations. Irwin painted his last disc around 1969 and started a series of acrylic plastic columns that informed later adaptations of existing spaces. The timing of Judd's article makes it likely that he had in mind Bell's cubes and Irwin's discs, although his discussion also remains accurate for their subsequent investigations of phenomena.

Judd made only brief mentions of Bell and Irwin, but he admired their work and insisted that it merited more attention. He noted dryly in 1969 that for most art critics "Bell and Irwin hardly exist." See "Complaints: Part I," 184; and "A Long Discussion Not About Master-Pieces but Why There Are So Few of Them, Part II," *Art in America* 72, no. 9 (October 1984): 10. In a 1993 interview, Judd also said that he hoped Bell and Irwin would install pieces at his non-profit Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, along with Flavin's planned conversion of six army barracks. See Judd in Todd Eberle, "Donald Judd: The Interview," *Interview* 24, no. 4 (April 1994): 98.

73. "Aspects of Flavin's Work," 27.

74. See "Karl Gerstner," 59-60; and related discussion in the "New phenomena" section above.

75. See "Specific Objects," 78; and "Aspects of Flavin's Work," 27.

76. *Some Aspects of Color*, 7.

77. Ibid., (phrase reordered). Larry Bell built experimental interior architecture that further investigated this phenomenological feature. Judd planned to allocate space at the Chinati Foundation for the two darkened rooms that Bell constructed in his Venice Beach studio and in The Museum of Modern Art in 1969. See "A Portrait of the Artist as His Own Man," *House & Garden* 157, no. 4 (April 1985): 220; and "The Chinati Foundation," *The Chinati Foundation* (Marfa, Tex.: The Chinati Foundation, 1987): unpaginated (fourth page).

78. Ibid.

79. "Aspects of Flavin's Work," 27.

80. Ibid., (phrases reordered). Judd also remarked that, "as far as light goes I think that Flav[i]n is the best artist around. [My not focusing on light is] just a case of my not understanding it[,] not being able to use it. [. . .] Flavin and I have certain things in common, but we also have wide and different things not in common. We are friends, but couldn't be more divergent." See Judd in Richard Stankiewicz, "Judd Sculpture," microfilmed interview transcript, undated (Washington, D.C.: Richard Stankiewicz Papers, Archives of American Art), roll 3750, frame 1191; and Judd in Angeli Janhsen, et al., "Discussion with Donald Judd," *Donald Judd* (St. Gallen, Switzerland: Kunstverein St. Gallen, 1990), 50.

81. This citation combines two similar passages on Pollock's dripped paint. See "Jackson Pollock," 34; and "Yale Lecture," 154. For related discussion, see also "Abstract Expressionism," at 15:28.

82. "Yale Lecture," 154. See also "Abstract Expressionism," at 14:44.

83. *Some Aspects of Color*, 16.

84. *Some Aspects of Color*, 13, 15-16 (phrases reordered).

85. *Some Aspects of Color*, 16 (phrases reordered).

86. "Local History," 35. "Color is an immediate sensation, a phenomenon," Judd argued, "and in that leads to the work of Flavin, Bell and Irwin." See *Some Aspects of Color*, 16.

87. "*Interaction of Color* by Josef Albers," 75.

88. Judd in David Batchelor, "A Small Kind of Order," *Artscribe International* 78 (November–December 1989): 65.

An Interviw with Vernon Hyde Minor

Yelena Kalinsky and Kandice Rawlings

Vernon Hyde Minor is a professor emeritus from the Departments of Art & Art History and Comparative Literature & Humanities at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he taught for thirty years. He is currently a Research Scholar at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Professor Minor is also editor of the Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome *and Associate Member of the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton. A scholar of Italian baroque art, specifically the sculpture of Filippo della Valle, Professor Minor is widely known as the author of the popular texts* Baroque and Rococo: Art and Culture *and* Art History's History, *a guidebook to the methods and historiography of the field.*

The editors of RAR *conducted the following interview with Professor Minor on the campus of Princeton University on June 26, 2007.*

Rutgers Art Review: So, we thought you might begin by telling us how you got into art history and about your training.

Vernon Hyde Minor: I was a literature major as an undergraduate and thinking about going on to graduate school in English. But I needed to get away from school for a while. So I went and lived in Washington, D.C. and taught fifth and sixth grade for two years in the southeast section of the town. It was a wonderful experience, but it was tough, because where I taught was very much a declining neighborhood. When not teaching, I would go to the National Gallery and listen to lectures, and I would go to see films. Kenneth Clark came and spoke at the National Gallery as well one time. Then I had one of those experiences that I always ask students, artists, and art historians if they've had, and that is, have you ever been in front of a work of art and suddenly you feel like you might fall down? It's like something hits you and you don't know what it is, exactly. I had one of those experiences, and so I switched my idea of going into graduate school in English, and thought I'd look at art history, which is what I did.

RAR: What was the work of art that you saw?

VHM: It was an eighteenth-century landscape painting, British. I've never been able to find it again, which makes me wonder how much of this I imagined. It was a beautiful landscape painting of a ruined castle, or part of a castle. Something about it, obviously—Romantic, pre-Romantic, late-eighteenth-century, picturesque, having to do with sensibilities and so on—it worked. It just hit me. It's like putting your finger in an electric outlet; it was that strong. Not every art historian that I've asked has had such an experience, interestingly enough. But that's what got me into art history. And it seems to me this is probably why I have always thought I might be able to figure out what caused that. Of course, you can't. Because there's nothing necessarily theoretical, critical,

pedagogical, or instructive about repeating that experience, except for the fact that it is the essence, I think, of why we do this, why we're interested in art history.

RAR: Did you go immediately to a graduate program after that?

VHM: After one year of working in a steel mill and two years working as a grade school teacher in Prince George's County, in this area I've described right next to Washington, D.C.

I realized that I would never get to read the kinds of things I wanted to read in order to find out some of the answers to these questions by being a school teacher. I started graduate school in the fall of 1970.

RAR: Could you describe the discipline when you first started?

VHM: I would talk about art history with one of my professors, one who eventually became my advisor, a man named Robert Enggass, a very good scholar of eighteenth-century Italian art. He had an idea about what art history is. It is a discipline, and there are procedures. You could actually write a book in the early '70s about what is art history (Mark Roskill published an excellent study in 1976 with just this title). Now it would be very difficult for anyone to write such a book explaining "what is art history," because I think it has, in a sense, been hit so strongly by so much theory in the last several decades. Whereas at that point art history was not theoretical, it was essentially programmatic. It was, in a sense, scientific.

It was about monographs. It was about information. My advisor said, "I'm going to give you the name of somebody, and you can write a dissertation about him." And I said, "Okay." He said, "Here it is: Filippo della Valle." And I said, "Is that with a 'ph' or an 'f'?" I had no idea. He said, "He's an Italian sculptor of the eighteenth century, and very little has been written about him—some articles. He's good. He's really good; that's important." That's what I loved about my advisor: he loved good art. But he also was practical. He said, "This would make a good dissertation. You go to the archives, go to the libraries in Rome, and you're going to find out something new about this person." So it's about new information. You're going to set the record straight. Nobody's ever written a book about this person. So I wrote my dissertation on della Valle and wrote a book about him much later on. [*Passive Tranquillity: the Sculpture of Filippo della Valle* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society,1997)]

In early 2001 I was a fellow at the Hertziana Library in Rome, which is run by the Max Planck Gesellschaft. And there I was a *wissenschaftlicher Gast*, a scientific guest. I have Italian friends who talk about '*il metodo scientifico*'—the scientific method of art history. It is basically a positivistic method of gathering information and of using certain established discourses.

Art history in England (when it wasn't Marxist) tended to be much more related to the museums, the museum world, and the collecting world. It was a gentleman's undertaking. That's like Kenneth Clark, in a way. As wonderful as he was, he wasn't interested in theory. He always said that his approach to art history was about great men. And I think he actually was really gender specific. It's individual artists, individual geniuses. I agree, the "greats" *were* individual geniuses. But I don't want to see art history that way.

I think in America, especially, we've finally opened ourselves up to various critical disciplines, and therefore we're not sure if there really is such a discipline as art history. I think art history is really at the crossroads of a lot of other disciplines, like history, philosophy, aesthetics, like literary theory, and so on. I still am one of those people who takes the object very seriously, just the same. It's not about history first, and art second. It's about art first and putting it in some historical and critical order.

I wonder about the nature of this thing we call a discipline. And I wonder why we get into it, and I've always asked myself lots and lots of questions about it. In other words, I've been always curious. My desires have not been to accumulate a lot of knowledge, which it is for some people—to get the information right—but for me I want to try to figure out why there is this "discipline," why it means so much, and why studying the history of art counts.

The literary theorists, really all the way back to World War II, the New Critics, were so sophisticated, and they were so interested in irony. Their way of reading texts was something that art historians haven't been especially good at, because I think we've been controlled too much either by a historical context or by notions of style or notions of iconography and subject matter.

RAR: Do you think that might also be a condition of the academic structure of departments?

VHM: It is. You get into the question of how did art history start in American universities? First it started with the Germans, the Jewish scholars who had to leave Germany in the 1930s and who came to the United States—all of whom were extremely well-versed in the humanistic studies, and many were neo-Kantians as well. They understood the difference between ontology and epistemology, which art historians in the United States maybe didn't. They came and settled in the East Coast schools.

But it was the great land-grant colleges, Iowa or Ohio State or Michigan or Wisconsin or Minnesota, where they were teaching art history before the Second World War. And who was teaching it but artists? And what were they interested in but style? So there's that, too.

Then, I think the implication of the question is: the world is not divided into departments, but universities are. I think art historians just couldn't help but overhear the literary critics talking

about texts. And then post-structuralism came along. Suddenly, people were terrified about Derrida, Foucault, and how things are getting supposedly turned upside-down. And meaning is not really there; it all escapes from the work of art (which of course makes for a superficial reading of post-structuralism), but that had a lot to do with how things started to change in art history. Art historians have been trying to catch up with all of this, and it's been hard for us.

RAR: When did you first get an inkling of this gap in art history?

VHM: Even in graduate school, as I say, I was convinced there were some questions that weren't being asked that I really wanted to ask. I've been trying to figure this stuff out my whole career. I've gotten to the point where I understand it won't be all figured out, but at least I'm comfortable with that. I really think a work of art is in fact something that is auric. The aura that Walter Benjamin talks about, somehow we've taken that away from art. It's not that we are attempting to practice *décryptage*, although I think some people do that. Nonetheless I think the work of art still remains something of a mystery, and I think some of us are trying to do hermeneutical work with it. We're trained to interpret it, but not in terms of *analysis*. I think these days we are trying to interpret by trying to come to terms with it, confronting it, writing about it.

And that gets me to my next hobbyhorse, which is how bad art history usually is written. One of the things I assign to my students is Paul Barolsky's 1996 essay in *The Art Bulletin*, "Writing Art History." It is a call for us to give up the bad writing. We really should be writing essays. It is the proper literary form for what we're doing. He says that people who have so much theoretical sophistication, so much philosophical sophistication, and so much knowledge, like Erwin Panofsky, don't write well. Interestingly enough, Panofsky was a beautiful writer. How did he learn to write English? Well he learned it in school, but he read Henry James, he loved Henry James. He believed English was a more ductile language than German for writing art history. So actually, his art history changed when he came to the United States.

Barolsky asks, why do we write about such wonderful things with such turgid, opaque, dead prose? After all, it's the object, so if we deal with an object we should behold the object. The word "behold" comes from the Greek word that means "to show." To behold, to see. The first English-language dictionaries of the seventeenth century say, "to behold, to study deeply." So, in other words, in this hermeneutic sense, we behold the works of art and try to write about them in an interesting way and not necessarily try to write defensively, something else that Barolsky warns against. You have a hunch. You can't prove it absolutely. This is not science. So write about it, make it interesting. Certainly get your information right, but don't make that the only end of art history.

I think art historians are too convinced that you have to "get it right." I just don't know what they mean when they say that. Get what right? Once you've got it right, then there's no reason to go back to it. Once you get Shakespeare right, you don't need to go back to Shakespeare. It's

done. You got it right. That's insane, it seems to me. Get your facts straight, I always believe in that, but the interpretation is always conditional. There is no absolute truth. I don't think it's even epistemological; in other words, I don't think it's trying to sort out and find truth. I think art is *ontological*, I think it deals with existence, and it does it in visual terms.

RAR: Besides writing, what do you think are other fields or disciplines that graduate students in art history should explore?

VHM: That's a wonderful question, and I'm hoping more and more graduate programs will encourage students to take courses in history. Historians deal with some very fundamental questions about the way things were at a certain time. Also, read some of the writers of those periods, what people were writing about. And I still think, go to a literature department and take a critical theory course and see what they say.

Read philosophy. Take an aesthetics course in a philosophy department, because they'll begin the early modern period with the Germans. They're the great thinkers. That's where art history begins. The greatest thinkers about metaphysics, about existence, about existential issues, and so on. So, go to a philosophy department if you can find one, that doesn't [just] do analytical philosophy.

RAR: What was it that inspired you to write this text on methodologies and historiography [*Art History's History* (Prentice Hall, 1993)], was it the challenge of teaching methods?

VHM: From teaching. There really wasn't anything that approached art history methodology as something that is problematical. Earlier books, such as Kleinbauer's *Modern Perspectives in Western Art History* or Roskill's *What is Art History?* figured art history is a given: here are the various methods, let me describe them for you. So they were, for all their intelligence and usefulness, discursive and descriptive texts on art history. My interest was to bring out the kinds of things that were going on in cultural theory, in literary theory, and to a certain extent in aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, that most students didn't know anything about and most art history books never got into. I wanted to write it in a way that would be of interest even to an undergraduate audience, not written necessarily for other art historians. When *Art History's History* came out, the first letters and e-mails and phone calls I got were from artists. Also my former teachers read it. They said, "I never understood what everybody was talking about with Derrida." They had no idea—they'd never heard of him in an art historical context. Even in the 1990s, it was still so new to art historians, interestingly enough.

And then we talk about all these theories and then go out and teach art history the good old-fashioned way, by period (let's talk about Renaissance), century (let's start with the fifteenth century or even the fourteenth century), artist (let's talk about Giotto). Wait a second! Theory suggests that we should be making all kinds of different approaches.

We still teach it that way, which I don't think is necessarily a bad thing. It's considered a *neutral* approach. But such an approach, by period, nation, artist has problems.

And on the other hand, theory is a difficult subject for many art history graduate students. I've taught methodology and theory many times at the University of Colorado, and it was like a wrestling match. I had students who were made angry by some of the theoretical texts we studied. And I sympathize in a sense—but if you do it right, I think that theory can help to open art—opening in the sense Heidegger used the word. Opening, a clearing, *Lichtung*. There's something wonderful about that.

RAR: That raises the question about audiences. What kinds of audiences are you trying to reach? What kind of audiences should we be trying to reach?

VHM: This is the same question that people in literature are asking these days too. There was something that did exist called the 'common reader' in literary studies. And I think when the New Critics were writing, they kept that in mind. In other words, what is the common reader? Someone who is educated, someone who is interested, and someone who reads. The person who reads *The New Yorker*, who would read *Esquire*. Not *People Magazine*. But as wide an audience as you can reach, I think you should try to reach. Anybody, I don't see any reason why not.

RAR: How do we do that?

VHM: I think art history books like Stokstad's do that. A lot of people read that who don't take art history courses. There's so much information in that book. Also, using the essay style. Trying to write like James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, E. B. White, people who with a beautiful writing style could reach a lot of people. We all need lessons in doing that. A good vigorous writing style, I think, would appeal to an educated public that's not specialized. Tony Grafton, who teaches here at Princeton in the history department, does this in books like *Bring Out Your Dead*—he's always got great titles. He writes about Renaissance humanism, making it come alive.

The other thing that happens in the United States is a kind of democratization of art history. It was first taught by studio people, because that's who could do it. And then more and more universities started offering the Ph.D. in art history, although it took until the 1960s and '70s. Before that, all my teachers either went to Princeton, or Harvard, or University of Michigan. There were very few other choices. Not just in art history, but almost in all the fields. The big land-grant schools, big state universities, started their own Ph.D. programs, and therefore they've turned out people too.

I've taught classes that had between three or four hundred students. And you just keep going after them. Just say, "This is why it's important. This is why art history is important." Either you imply it or you explicitly say it. And some of them get interested, because they watch TV, go to the movies,

they love visual stuff. And of course they automatically like art. You have to really work at it to make them hate it.

Museums operate that way, they try to popularize the visual arts, which upsets some people. I don't think it's upsetting. If you have good works of art, and you're trying to popularize them, fine. If you can do that with baroque art, do it. Don't concentrate only on modern and contemporary. It's not as if these earlier works aren't wonderful, but obscure texts. They're like novels, you want to unpack them and read them. Unpack them, open them. That's what art historians should do. And people realize these things are fascinating. It's like Shakespeare in the park or something. It's great.

I always tell my students, "If you want to know what baroque architecture is, look at MTV Cribs!" These guys live in baroque houses, because they're entertainers and people in sports. Flat screen TVs in every room and black leather furniture and huge spaces, and an Escalade and huge chandeliers. This is baroque, it's over the top stuff.

And I guess the next question might be then, "What about a history of images as opposed to a history of art?" What about visual studies as opposed to art history? I don't know if I'm comfortable with that. In other words, I still want to maintain the status of good art. And visual studies doesn't interest itself particularly in matters of quality. It just wants to see how visual systems work. I get a little concerned about that. I like quality. I do believe in the aesthetic dimension of Donald Judd, for instance. That's why he's good. I would argue aesthetically he's good. And I think Andy Warhol is aesthetically good. And so on, many modern artists—Jackson Pollock. I actually still believe that quality is not an idea whose time is gone. So that would put me on the conservative side of things I suppose.

RAR: You did recently write an article on images of 9/11 that seemed to deal with visual culture. ["What Kind of Tears? 9/11 and the Sublime" *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 14 (2001): 91-96.]

VHM: Yes, the methods of art history as applied to something else. Of course, I had to go and talk about Claude Joseph Vernet's paintings quite a bit. I taught a course on the sublime a few years ago in a comparative literature department. I thought, "well, 9/11 is the sublime. Maybe I should use it." I never did for that particular class, but I think you can.

RAR: So that would be, don't you think, an intersection of what we would call visual culture or visual studies and art history?

VHM: Yes, war photography and some paintings try to deal with such contemporary issues. So what critical methodologies or approaches can we take to those? Can we take it to watching the first-time video-tape broadcast by satellite was used to describe a war in Vietnam? Every night Walter

Cronkite would show us video from that particular day during the Tet Offensive (for instance), and it was *staggering* when that happened. And that is visual studies. Truly. And you can use the methodology of art history to talk about it. Nowadays people are so terrified of Iraq. You wonder how the visual arts will deal with this war. Very little has come out of 9/11 so far, in terms of visual arts, but it's starting to.

Take a Fragonard painting. You think of Fragonard as having nothing to do with anything besides the aristocracy, but there are clearly a couple of rape scenes in his work. Put them up against Abu Ghraib, and you start to wonder, can you do it? I bet you could. History of violence, the history of sexual violence. The feminist discourses have so much language for that, have come up with so many interesting approaches to that sort of issue. Everything is negotiated. Everything is about power distribution. Everything is about center and periphery. These are words that are used, but we need to make them a little more alive, not just apply them as jargon. I always advise that. Nonetheless, we are developing language. We're talking about these sorts of things. That's visual imagery. That's why Abu Ghraib became so powerful—the visual imagery put on the internet.

RAR: We've become desensitized to it in lots of ways.

VHM: Daniel Pearl's beheading was shown on the internet. Can an artist deal with that? Can you incorporate that into an exhibition, a work of art—something so powerful and so disturbing? Those are art historical questions.

RAR: Where's the outlet for that kind of writing?

VHM: Eventually there will be, you'll see. Somebody will write about that eventually. Where, I don't know. There aren't that many really avant-garde art journals out there anymore. Graduate student journals might take on some of these more difficult things.

RAR: In what kinds of professions do you think, outside of the museum and the university or college, can art historians reach people? Where do you see graduate students working in the more nontraditional fields?

VHM: What kind of work is there? It is difficult. There are somewhere in the neighborhood of 3,500 colleges and universities in the United States, and practically every one of them teaches art history. There are probably ten thousand jobs out there for teaching art history. There still *is* that. It just seems that there are only forty available in any one year. Museums, the usual things, working in art galleries. I always thought maybe working for a newspaper, because it's writing. High school teaching, which seems to some like a fate worse than death. But it's dealing with ideas, and it's dealing with history. Teaching high school is not a bad thing.

Another interesting thing about the United States—we have corporate sponsoring of the arts, which they don't have so much in Europe. Working for corporations that actually contribute money to the arts is a possibility; they want to hire people.

And that's another American skill: raising money. The one who understands this is in good stead. I always used to resent it, but then I realized that this is why my friends in Italy are having so much trouble—they don't know how to raise money. There's nothing like the Fulbright, they can't apply for the American Academy in Rome, the Guggenheim. They can't go out and raise money the way we try to do, because there's not that culture.

RAR: What do they do?

VHM: They take the train from Rome to Florence to Venice and teach at each of those places every day of the week. Then they come back to Rome at the end of the week exhausted. The government doesn't have enough money.

I'm sure at Rutgers the state of New Jersey probably supplies, if you're lucky, 14% of your budget, max. [*Editor's note: State appropriations will account for 27% of Rutgers' budget in FY 2008.*] At the University of Colorado, the state's support is in the single digits. So where does the money come from to run a university? Some from tuition, but the rest is just from raising money. Also indirect cost recovery, federal grants, science departments, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, things like that. You're getting all kinds of federal money with a medical school. The United States government puts fifteen or twenty billion dollars a year (the numbers may even be higher) into the sciences every year, and that money goes straight to the universities. I don't know the exact number. The art historians don't even touch that stuff. The National Science Foundation itself has ten or twelve billion dollars. That's not for us. Homeland Security has money.

RAR: We could tell them about the *metodo scientifico*.

VHM: That's right. We'll tell them we're investigating the *metodo scientifico* and they'll say, "Well, all right."

RAR: So do you think that the academy is still "protected and charmed," as you say in *Art History's History*?

VHM: Well, it is the last of the guilds. We have nearly absolute job security. We have the kind of protection that nobody else has. Doctors don't have it, lawyers don't have it, architects don't have it. They all used to have it, but no longer.

There is something about the charmed life and the sense of protection that we have. Academic freedom is a very important thing. Tenure is a very important thing. The question is, are people out

there doing things with it? If you've got that protection, you should be going to the edge on some of these things. I have gone a bit over the edge a few times. People said, "You can't say things like that." And I said, "Yes, you're probably right."

RAR: We're glad you did.

VHM: [*laughs*] There is certainly no such thing as absolute freedom of speech, of course.

RAR: Going back to what you said about Kenneth Clark defining art history as the genius of men—this gender-specific phrase would not be politically correct today.

VHM: No, and if I were to say that in a lecture class, I would expect hisses. If I didn't get them I'd be upset. I'd say, "Are you paying attention? Did you hear what I said? Let me say this one more time." [*pauses, as if to listen*] Ah, finally—hisses. [*laughs*]

RAR: Getting back to the question of audiences, you suggest in the preface to *Baroque and Rococo: Art and Culture* [New York: Harry Abrams, 1999] that art historians flinch from artistic manifestations of power. We're curious about your thoughts of art history's potential to change the political climate, to make us think critically about manifestations of power in the current political climate.

VHM: Can an art historian talk about things that would actually change a political culture? Feminism has changed things a lot.

Harvard was one of the first big places to teach art history—and John Ruskin was a friend of the president of Harvard, Charles Elliot Norton. Ruskin thought that art civilizes, so Charles Elliot Norton came up with the same idea: that art civilizes. When people took art history courses at Harvard at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, they were becoming gentlemen. It's elitism. So art history has that tradition of elitism. But I think it interests everybody. How can you teach something with a broad approach if you don't somehow eventually get into issues of capitalism, democracy, authoritarianism, Louis XIV, Vladimir Putin?

Somehow these issues always come up in art history. When I teach my courses, I'm making contemporary references to what's in the news. I think because the issues that artists deal with in some fundamental way comment on what it is about us that's human, it has an application. When you teach the Gothic cathedral, you're talking about the way people conceived of the ultimate meaning of their existence. How can that not have huge applications? It was an age of faith; you don't have to be a Catholic to understand the power of Gothic architecture or baroque art.

Imagery is implicated in everything we do. When you're talking about art history and you're not talking about broader issues, then I don't think you're really doing a very good job. You're going back

to an old-fashioned methodology of art history—a kind of restricted methodology of art history, that it's only for the elite. That's why senior faculty should be teaching intro courses, because they've been around universities and their own discipline long enough. They can't help themselves; they're just so convinced that it's important in these ways. And they want an audience.

RAR: Do you think that art history has caught up in a meaningful way with these methodological debates?

VHM: If you go to conferences, every once in a while you'll hear a session in which it seems like these people are participating in the methodological debates, and the discussants are well-informed and are not narrowly interpretive or not downright hostile. Norman Bryson, for instance, in my opinion one of the great writers of art history, got his Ph.D. at Cambridge, I believe, in literary studies, came to the United States, and started writing about art history. And he brought all of this understanding of post-structuralist theory with him. He wrote books like *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime*. He wrote a wonderful book on still-life painting—one of the most profound meditations of still-life I've ever read. And the American art historians cut him into ribbons. They wrote bad reviews of his books. But everything he wrote was an eye-opener to me. It was just wonderful. They didn't have the impact I thought they were going to have on the field of art history. I think there's a resistance somewhere.

I don't know that art historians have ever thought very seriously about interpretation. If you can't interpret, then you're not critical; if you're not critical, then you're not a critic. And if you're not a critic, you just sort of accept things as they are. And you're not doing something that can change the world that way.

RAR: Thank you for speaking with us.

VHM: Well, I've given you all my favorite hobbyhorses, I guess. Thanks for your interest.