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Art and Communications in the West Bank: Visual Dimensions of Palestinian Nation Building

Dov Shinar

The Context

"The Palestinian movement," a respected analyst in the Israeli Press recently wrote, "led in the last 15 years by the PLO, has built a self-conscious nation... there is no point in using the worn-out argument that the Palestinians have no cultural, religious, historic or linguistic uniqueness. ... In terms of nation-building, the Palestinians have had none but achievements during these years" (Ben-Porat 1983).

Indeed, denial of the very existence of a Palestinian national entity, voiced in earlier years by Israeli Prime Ministers and members of the Knesset, has become as unacceptable as formulas designed to solve the "Palestinian problem" by means of encouraging immigration to Arab countries, or by directly or indirectly taking over the East Bank. Such views have been replaced by more realistic positions, adopted even by outspoken hardliners, who have pragmatically and officially recognized "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people".

Gone also are the days when a Jordanian king could issue a decree to forbid the use of the word "Palestine" in official documents or when the regime sought to eliminate West Bank separatist trends by means of lip service, financial support, or bloodshed. Claims for full integration in the kingdom have lost momentum in the entire Arab world, to be replaced by formulas and scenarios which emphasize various shades of Palestinian self-expression and self-determination. The sporadic and ineffective expressions of Palestinian nationalism in the pre-1967 West Bank—when Palestinians had been hindered by Jordanian annexation from establishing independent political authority, had been dependent on the kingdom for allocation of resources, and relied heavily on Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic symbols (Mishal 1978)—and the anomic reactions caused by defeat and occupation have crystallized into the revival of a full-fledged national movement, featuring more consistent policies...

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and more rational behavior. Increasingly clearer national objectives have been developing since 1967, from a claim, voiced by the traditional pro-Hashemite elite, for returning to the status-quo ante, to plans for the establishment of a democratic secular state in all the territory of mandatory Palestine, to de facto recognition of Israel and less radical demands for an independent state in any part of Palestine (see Jiryis 1977; Lesch 1980). Demonstrations of national unity became more effective, finding expression in strikes, rallies, civil disobedience, and petitions, especially after the Yom Kippur War, when a wide pro-PLO consensus developed in the West Bank in response to the perennial question of who was to represent the Palestinian cause. In contrast with Israeli, Jordanian, and international preference for the municipal mayors, the prevailing mood in the West Bank, as from the mid-1970s, may be illustrated by the following statement, made by a Palestinian: "As things are, [the mayors] have to apply to the military governor for spare parts for their municipal vehicles. How can they negotiate peace?"

Simultaneously with the upsurge in national consciousness, efforts have been made to institutionalize Palestinian nationhood. A noted Israeli academic, who has served as adviser to the occupation authorities, admitted in 1980 that "in the last two years, the PLO jointly with the leadership in the territories... has been establishing an infrastructure, seen as a basis for a Palestinian state. This has been expressed in the organization of the political community... the Colleges in the territories... Bir-Zeit, near Ramallah... A-Najjah in Nablus... Frères, in Bethlehem... the Hebron Islamic Seminary... the Gaza Islamic College, front-organizations have been established... women's, students and others... also the Press... industrial infrastructure... schools, hospitals and other projects... construction... In order to finance such a wide organizational effort, PLO and Baghdad Conference funds have been pumped into the territories at an estimated 150 million dollars annually."14

At the same time, processes of socio-economic change and modernization reveal a restructuring of Palestinian society. This includes, first, a spread of secular values, connected with the humiliating defeat in the Six-Day War and the exposure to Israel, as expressed in the statement made by a Palestinian journalist that these events have "undermined his [the Arab's] belief in his own culture, in his blind faith that Allah's people possess superior qualities to those of the infidels; it has shown Arab Civilization, evaluated in twentieth century terms, to be technologically backward, culturally deprived and politically impotent" (Hamad 1971). Second, it features the disruption of the traditional class system, as a consequence of two factors at least: one is the rise in standard of living and the more equitable distribution of income, linked
to the provision of jobs in Israel, which affected all, even the unskilled workers, thus weakening the position of notable families and landowners. The other factor is the sense of equality instilled by the legitimate share of all Palestinians in an emerging national movement led by a radical organization—the PLO. Thirdly, it affects the symbolic sphere, including changing patterns of leisure and a “boom in cultural products and events . . . beginning with poets . . . and going on through exhibitions, posters, jamborees, sports events and the renaissance of traditional embroidery” (Sayegh 1977; quoted in Klug 1979:412). It is finally expressed in the political role of women in the forefront of demonstrations and protest against occupation, together with the expansion of education and job opportunities, legitimized, although reluctantly, because of the circumstances. My Home My Prison, a book by Raymonda Tawil (1979), elaborates in its title as well as its content on the increasingly effective, yet uphill struggle of Palestinian women on two fronts: one, illustrated by Sylvie Mansour’s research finding that Palestinian adolescent boys are more militant and feel more frustrated than girls in trying to cope with identity problems, whereas girls rather than boys outline their ideal selves involved in Palestinian resistance (Mansour 1977); the other, illustrated by comments such as “West Bank men who see the free life led by Israeli girls, sometimes even enjoying their company, tend to react when they get back home by being stricter than ever with their own womenfolk”.

**External and Local Constraints**

Palestinian nation building reveals most of the ingredients typical of development processes in the Third World: integration around national objectives, establishment of an institutional infrastructure, cultural renaissance, and socio-economic change. These processes have been influenced by local constraints, resulting from the Israeli presence, from the performance of Arab States, and from international interference, as well as from the emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Israel has served as a model for an overall social outlook that contradicted the previous reality in which, according to a prominent Palestinian, “no attempt has been made anywhere to organize Palestinian self-help through economic and social activity. The only attempt toward organization was political or semi-military” (Shehadeh 1969), thus deeming Palestinian culture as one of “beautiful words . . . [in which] we still prefer to listen to inciting poetry than to set up a cooperative or any other positive project . . . June [1967] happened because our history stood still while the history of the entire world advanced”.

Exposure to this model features Israel’s role as a catalyst, first in the economic sphere, providing opportunities for personal economic advancement and the adoption of more modern materialistic attitudes; secondly, in the West Bank sociocultural restructuring, whereby the loosening of economic bonds between the masses and their overlords contributed to erode their authority and values. Israel has also played an active role in activating political and social tensions which had largely been contained under the Jordanian pre-1967 rule. Israel’s very presence and policies of atomization and “increasing the price of resistance”7 have turned the Jewish State into an emotional and behavioral outlet, a “legitimate target” in the struggle for Palestinian nationhood, replacing the more complicated and less convenient struggle against Jordanian and other Moslem brethren. Although these processes did not begin with the inception of Israeli rule, its advent probably accelerated their pace, ascribing to Israel “the role of midwife to a fundamental . . . revolution in Arab Palestine” (Shaicovitch 1973).

Resentment, bitterness, and anger, coupled with economic dependence are typical of the Arab States’ role in Palestinian nation building. On the one hand, Palestinians see themselves as “the Jews of present times, oppressed by occupation, forsaken by the world, even by our own brethren . . .”8 This outlook is based upon the disillusionment with Arab commitment and support, as expressed by Jordan in the initial years of occupation, by Syria in the mid-1970s, and by most of the Arab countries, who refused to play host to a defeated PLO, following the 1982 hostilities in Lebanon. The passive role allocated to the Palestinians in the peace process initiated by Anwar Sadat served to emphasize this attitude even more. Thus Arab States may be seen as an additional catalyst. This role includes, on the other hand, a more positive aspect, that of massive financial support coming from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates, Libya, and others. Although heavily manipulated, these funds have enabled the Palestinians to make decisive steps in the nation-building process.

The PLO has introduced a revolutionary dimension to the process. Irrespective of its controversial methods and achievements, the organization founded in 1964 by the Arab League as a government-sponsored propaganda agency was gradually transformed into a largely autonomous operation, viewed as consisting of Palestinians, working for Palestinians, and run by Palestinians in representing the concept and reality of a national movement.9 The PLO has been active in the formulation and reformulation of objectives, providing symbolic ideas, motifs, and objects, in inspiring action, in claiming and achieving recognition as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians, in organizing and mobilizing the population, and in instilling a secular and modernizing orientation.
Visual Expressions of the Process

West Bank artists have given a variety of expressions to the process of Palestinian nation building. The creation and dissemination of visual materials have flourished in the West Bank in recent years. Poetry, literature, and theater were joined by graffiti, calendars, T-shirts, posters, postcards, and paintings to display an impressive array of liberation and development symbols.

Their messages reflect the problems involved in the complex circumstances of Palestinian life, rather than the violent and sometimes racist nature of the verbal and visual pre-1967 Arab propaganda, which concentrated in attacking Israel and the Jews. These circumstances may be understood in terms of nation-building dilemmas and their permanent or temporary solutions, which are an outcome of the typical "interplay between institutional change and cultural reconstruction," viewed by Clifford Geertz as the essence of such processes (1975:244). Artistic inclinations in portraying these dilemmas may be inferred from the contents of an exhibit which took place in the summer of 1983 in the Neveh Tsedek Cultural Center in Tel-Aviv, with the objective of exposing Israelis and others to the cultural life of the West Bank (see Figure 1).

Suleiman Mansour, born in 1947 in Bir Zeit, near Ramallah, studied in Israel and exhibited in Moscow, Western Europe, and the United States; he presented mostly political works in oil and ink, such as "Sabra and Shatila," "After the Massacre," "Settlement Crunch," "Censorship," "Civil Administration," and "Flag Burning." Nabil Anani, born in 1947 in Halhoul, near Hebron, studied in Egypt and exhibited in the Middle East and abroad; he presented oil works with a different emphasis, including "Scene from a Palestinian Village" and "Folkloric Decorations." Hagop Kaplanyan, born in 1948 in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem, graduated from Bir Zeit University and The American University of Beirut, where he acquired experience in photography, posters, pamphlet design, and painting. The titles of his enamel and oil works in the exhibit were "Palestinian Embroidery Motif," "Amulet," "Landscape II," and "Grandfather."

Isam Bader, Vira Tamari, Abed Tamman, Ali Bardawil, Hashem Kaleb, and Kamal Al-Mughanny are additional visual artists whose works deal with various facets of Palestinian nation building.

The dilemma of traditional versus radical tendencies, continuity versus change, typically features, on the one hand, nostalgic and sometimes dramatic portrayals of the Palestinian peasant, such as Kamal Al-Mughanny’s "Thirst." On the other, Mansour’s "Development" expresses the need for modernization, illustrated in this case by themes related to science and technology (see Figures 2 and 3).
illustrated by the surprising victory of a militant religious organization in the 1981 election of the Nablus Student Union. On the other hand, the religious structure of the West Bank is not monolithic and includes Christians of various denominations, with a considerable amount of power, whereas among the Moslems, the relatively moderate Suni sect prevails, in contrast with the extremist Shiites in Iran and elsewhere. Furthermore, the High Islamic Council is supported financially by Jordan, being identified with one of the political streams and thus being out of the national consensus, or at least prevented from being impartial. The small size, geographic position, and historical background of Palestine as a cultural crossroads have probably increased its exposure to modern and secular values during generations, thus having weakened religious influence. Finally, the religious establishment in the West Bank has been tightly controlled by the Israeli authorities, its influence being curbed to a large extent.

The dilemma of Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic versus Palestinian nationalism, and the definite support of the latter by the majority of the population, is clearly expressed by Palestinian artists. The resentment with the performance of Arab countries—well illustrated by statements such as “We have learned that the help given by the leaders of the Arab States is limited and goes up to a point” (Lesch 1980:95)—has followed events such as “Black September” (of 1970), whereby Jordanian forces crushed the attempt made by the PLO to establish a state-within-a-state in the kingdom, devastating Jordanian-Palestinian relations. Bitterness and anger are clearly expressed in Kamal Al-Mughanny’s “Tal Alzaatar,” which refersto the 1976 massacre of Palestinians, performed by right-wing militias, who were allowed by Syrian forces stationed in Lebanon to besiege and destroy this large refugee camp near Beirut (see Figure 5).
Palestinian symbols, on the other hand, appear in less dramatic yet strong terms, undoubtedly inspired by the PLO and including martyrdom, slogans, military insignia, and the Palestinian flag. This last motif appears almost invariably in most works of visual art. Mansour’s “Children in Jerusalem” features the red-green-white-and-black flag in more than one context: it is being held in the hands of young children, perhaps symbolizing the future. On another level, the flag appears together with other nations’ colors, suggesting the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism (see Figure 6). Other works, including Al-Mughanny’s “Prisoner’s Day,” feature the flag in more subtle terms.

Problems of occupation have brought up one of the most serious dilemmas in Palestinian nation building, that of confrontation between the hope for a future in which the Palestinian nation will live in freedom and independence, and a present in which they must cope day by day with the pressures of occupation. In contrast with the ineffective outbursts of violence in the West Bank, in Israel, and abroad which were characteristic of the initial reactions to occupation, the concept of “Zumud”—standing fast—evolved as a temporary solution for daily existence. “Zumud” was adopted as a pragmatic and rational compromise between desperate, hopeless uprising and the feelings of undignified surrender. It has been a temporary formula, a “third way” for the solution of both conflicts.

Figure 4  Color slide.

Figure 5  Kamal Al-Mughanny. “Tal Alzaa’tar.” Postcard.
in perception and acceptance of self, and day-to-day behavior vis-a-vis the Israeli presence.

The concept and its symbols have been dealt with extensively by Palestinian artists. The value of land is an outstanding example: “he who has no land has no honor,” says a Palestinian proverb (quoted in Zogby 1983). Holding on to the land, “not to leave, not to turn your back to occupation” has become a pri-mate, designed to prevent the repetition of the national trauma caused by the exodus of 1948. The conclusion of daily realities was that notwithstanding the symbolic value of boycotting and actively resisting the Israeli presence, they were secondary to holding on to the land. Settlement policies and facts, Palestinian interpretations of statements made by Israeli officials, and Jewish settlers’ behavior increased the fear that Israel may use resistance as an excuse to embark on a policy of massive deportation and land expropriation. Whether justified or not, these feelings changed the initial reaction to occupation.

The attitude that has prevailed as of the early 1970s has emphasized compliance with occupation, without, however, accepting Israeli presence. Consequently, this type of “Zumud” has stood in contrast with the attitude of previous years, whereby any contacts with the authorities and with Israelis in general were disapproved. Positive “Zumud” allows for working in Israel (including in the construction of settlements), to meet with Israelis and to participate in joint events, but it prohibits the selling of land, the receiving of compensation for expropriated land, or the acceptance of Israeli citizenship. Thus, land has become a major symbol in Palestinian literature, poetry, and art. Nabil Anani’s “From Halhoul” is one example of this trend, which has been adopted by most of his peers (see Figure 7).
Figure 8  Color slide.

Figure 9  Kamal Al-Mughanny. "The People & Land." Postcard.

Figure 9a  Kamal Al-Mughanny. "Jerusalem." Postcard.
Figure 10  Suleiman Mansour. "The Future." Postcard.

Figure 11  Suleiman Mansour. "Hope." Postcard.

Figure 12  Suleiman Mansour. "Prisoner's Day." Postcard.
This outlook has been supported by a historical perspective. Based upon two hundred years of the Crusaders’ hold on Palestine and 130 years of French rule in Algeria, hopes have been expressed on the temporary nature of the Israeli presence and on the prospects for a brighter future. Thus the meaning of the past not just as a source of tradition but also as a symbol of the continuous ties between the Palestinians and all the historical and cultural values of their land have been illustrated in a very popular poster in the West Bank (Figure 8). And thus the concept of growing out of sacrifice is expressed in Al-Mughanny’s “The People and the Land,” inspired by the Nablus’s poetess Fadua Tukan (Figure 9).

Uprising and resistance received a strong symbolic dimension in the perception of “Zumud,” perhaps to compensate for the inability to act. “Jerusalem,” by Al-Mughanny, points out the value of “Zumud” as a means of resistance, complying with Yasser Arafat’s statement that “merely holding out for a day is a small victory” (see Figure 9A).12

Suleiman Mansour portrays some present actions that symbolize the future (see Figure 10) and depicts hope and liberation (see Figures 11 and 12).

A final dilemma that deserves attention refers to the Palestinian woman. The two fronts on which she has been struggling and her role in all dimensions of nation building are well expressed by her appearance in roles related to tradition (Figure 13), partnership (Figure 14), captivity (Figure 15), martyrdom (Figure 16), and active resistance (Figure 17).

A more systematic content analysis (Shinar 1983) of 73 visual items, including 33 postcards, 14 posters, 2 calendars, and 24 paintings, features the following themes:
1. Heritage, tradition, culture
2. Religion, divine justice and protection
3. Land, agriculture, village
4. Development, institutional infrastructure, industry
5. Liberation, hope, growth, future, redemption
6. Suffering, torture, destruction, martyrdom
7. Occupation, captivity, Israeli settlement and annexation
8. Rebellion, resistance, struggle, action, revenge

Figure 13 Suleiman Mansour. “Salma.” Postcard.
Figure 14  Kamal Al-Mughanny. “Partnership.” Postcard.

Figure 15  Color slide.
Style: The Palestinian Language of Revolt

The language of Palestinian visual art features a two-fold nature, perhaps revealing another facet in the search for identity. Symbols pertaining to an "international culture of revolution" are explicitly present in many works, notably by Al-Mughanny. His style seems profoundly affected by Mexican artists, such as Rivera and Orozco. The bold colors and the stark, almost cubist human forms contribute to create a dramatic impression, as presented in "Tai-Aizaatar," "Thirst," "Jerusalem," and "Prisoner's Day" (see Figure 18).

There is also an African presence in many works. The themes of national heritage and culture painted by Isam Bader, Vira Tamari, Nabil Anani, and Suleiman Mansour include many motifs that, in their simplicity and explicitness, resemble African handicrafts and sculpture. It seems that in the framework of the revolutionary style, Palestinian artists, when attempting to convey a sense of Palestinian heritage, strive to emphasize the non-Western villagelike nature of their work. The African atmosphere seems to have provided an appropriate vehicle for this purpose.

Abstract, surrealist style and some graphic forms comprise an additional type of international language, extensively used by Suleiman Mansour, perhaps as a result of his longer experience and Israeli training.

A combination of revolutionary influences is featured in a poster-size photograph of the first graduating class in Bir Zeit University, which is not shown here due to its inappropriate technical quality. The Black Power stretched arm-and-fist symbol, with the inscription "Palestine" diagonally across the poster, appears in the foreground. Among the graduates' pictures, in the background, one can discover small portraits of development, which resemble Israeli and other development language: planting a tree, a literacy class, a factory, and so on. On the other hand, a search for local symbolic identity is characteristic of many other works. "Salma," "Partners," "The Future," "From Halhoul," and Mansour's "Bread of Tabbon" are good examples of this trend, featuring folkloric embroidery, decorative motifs, handicrafts, tools, clothing items, foods, typical faces, and traditional moods (see Figure 19).

Moreover, even works that display foreign influences contain Palestinian symbols. Al-Mughanny's art, for example, has a predominance of the national colors—red, green, black, and white—and the Palestinian flag appears in various types of disguise: in a worker's belt, in a woman's dress embroidery, or as in "Prisoner's Day," in a more explicit yet subtle form (see Figures 20 and 21).
Distribution and Utilization

Palestinian visual art is not divorced from the society and the circumstances in which its creation has been involved, thus following the principle expressed by Lev Tolstoy: "Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man, consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them" (quoted in Harap 1949). Most works of visual art in the West Bank are printed in posters and reproduced in postcards. They also illustrate publications' covers, calendars, leaflets, and T-shirts. Despite tight Israeli control, they are available in many stores in Jerusalem. Store owners and users of such visual items express the opinion that they are not purchased for aesthetic reasons, but rather as expressions of nationalism. Posters serve as decorations and make desirable gifts. And many works, notably in the form of postcards, circulate as collectors' items. They are exchanged among Palestinian youngsters in the same fashion that pictures of movie stars and sports champions are exchanged by Western youths. Adults send them through the post and otherwise, in Israel, in the occupied territories, and abroad, usually inside an envelope. The most common foreign destinations are Jordan, Syria, England, and the United States.

Visual Communications and Palestinian Nation Building

The considerable and varied production, circulation, and demand of visual arts in the West Bank suggest that they serve in nation-building functions. The contents and languages of such visual communications seem to be closely meshed in the sociocultural fabric of Palestinian society, thus satisfying the demand for institutional linkages between media of communication and their environment. Faulty linkages proved to be of crucial importance in the Iranian revolution, for example, in the relationship between control and functioning of mass communications. The Shah-controlled mass media did not manage to satisfy the masses' needs for reliable and acceptable symbols, coined by Geertz as representing "essentialist" values (Geertz 1975), with the result that effective control over the media was not translated into effective functioning (see Mowlana 1979; Sreberny-Mohammadi 1980; Tehranian 1980, 1982).

Palestinian visual expression seems to be compatible—at least structurally, although not necessarily in its content—with Khomeini's communications model, in that it is institutionally and culturally matched with the genuine needs of the population. Visual communications in the West Bank are part of a larger network that includes poetry, literature, theater, and the
printed press, and on the other hand channels such as the family, the educational and occupational systems, community institutions, voluntary organizations, the marketplace, rumors and other types of interaction (Shinar 1983).

The scarce amount of systematic empirical research allowed in the special circumstances of the West Bank—with constraints resulting from occupation procedures as well as from the consequent Palestinian reluctance to be exposed in such sensitive matters—at least suggests that visual communications are probably functional in the provision of two types of social and personal needs.

The first is the supply of cognitive and integrative tools necessary for enhancing public awareness and empathy, which can lead to identification and mobilization. This function has been documented in other cases (see Katz and Wedell 1977). The second function is related to affective needs and includes action-substitution and catharsis (see Katz and Gurevitch 1976). In a situation characteristic of all processes of liberation and nation building, which calls for social action, Palestinians have been hindered by occupation and by opting for “Zumud,” from acting in meaningful ways. It seems that the alternative provided by visual and other symbols supplies emotional support, both in reflecting the situation and in compensating for the lack of action. This has been expressed in Rejeh Shehadeh’s concept of “National Pornography,” which he used in his book The Third Way: “When one lives in exile,” says Shehadeh, “one thinks of the homeland in symbolic terms, as in pornography. The love of one’s country is then expressed in its absence, and the process turns the homeland into something different. ‘We the Jews’, says Robert (Stone, whose interpretation of Jewish life in the Diaspora inspired Shehadeh), ‘have had thousands of years in order to become expert pornographers; our yearning for this land includes plenty of rational symbols, which totally lack actual memories or pictures of its image in reality. When the Jews came back in the beginning of this century, they saw the land through these symbols. . . .’ Sometimes when I walk among the hills,” says Shehadeh, “I find myself observing an olive tree, and it changes to become a symbol of the ‘Zamadin,’ of our struggle, of our loss. . . . This is probably the beginning of pornography . . . national symbolism makes you think that way . . . and it is strange that you should feel in exile, as a pornographic addict, while living on your own land . . . since occupation I think of our hills as ‘virgins’ tortured by Israeli bulldozers . . . .” (Shehadeh 1982: 91–92).

Notes
1 Mentioned in the “Framework for a Comprehensive Peace,” appendix to the Camp David Agreement of September 1978, signed by Israel and Egypt in March 1979.
2 As issued by King Abdallah in March 1950; see Mishal 1978:1–2.
3 Quoted in Events, December 16, 1977.
7 Ann Lesch (1980:69) presents a detailed analysis of the connection between the October War and civil disobedience in the West Bank in the mid-seventies, and Moshe Dayan’s policies of atomization.
8 Interview with Ibrahim Dakak, Salzburg, September 1979.
9 This introduction was written before the Syrian-inspired revolt against Yasir Arafat’s leadership of the PLO in late 1983.
11 Interview with a Palestinian senior journalist in Jerusalem, July 18, 1981.
References


Pop Art as Consumerist Realism

David Kunzle

By 1960 over half the employed white population in the United States was engaged in white-collar or service occupations; only 36 percent were defined as blue-collar workers. Of the white-collar workers, the overwhelming majority were engaged in health, education, research, and government. The process of industrialization, which in the nineteenth century moved people into industrial production, in the present century is moving them away from it, progressively attenuating the physical relationship of the majority to the actual production of goods.

Abstract Expressionism

Avant-garde art has correspondingly been concerned less with the physical reproduction of visual and tangible realities than with psychic and cerebral processes. These have presented all the more challenge to the artist, in that the irrational components in them have surfaced, during world wars and other political crises, into social reality itself. In order to deal with this irrationalism, art has oscillated between extreme forms of abstraction and dematerialization, on the one hand, and highly distorted and exaggerated forms of realism and materiality on the other, not infrequently manifested in the same work. At the one pole, artists sought inner-directed mental and psychic energy; at the other, a sublimation of outer-directed physical energy. In the postwar era, abstract expressionism sought to reconcile the two poles with an art abstract in content and physically energized in form. This was believed to represent a kind of creative quintessence with the violence and gratuitousness of the physical gesture conveying pure and naked spiritual energy. The work of art stood as an emblem of the transformation of a once-material, once-functional object, a painting, into a state of pure creative gesture, which retained, however, highly sublimated symbolic connections to the physical effort traditionally or atavistically associated with nonartistic economic production—labor. The act of painting renders the idea of physical labor in a form as far removed as possible from the modern, labor-associated concepts of discipline and uniformity. Abstract expressionist art attempts to replicate what is conceived of as the primal energy displayed by primitives in pretechnological labor, combined with the spontaneous aggressiveness of the hunter or tribal warrior.

The appeal of abstract expressionism is as a form of cultural atavism. At the same time it imposes a unique body-autograph in an increasingly machine-dominated and labor-alienated era, restoring the otherwise missing stamp of human personality to the human-made artifact. It arose in the United States at a time of rapid economic growth, increased personal affluence for the majority, and the global extension of United States military power. All this was accompanied by an attrition, among American people at large, of a sense of social responsibility, of commitment to collective effort, which had been generated by the struggles against the Depression and Fascism. The majority acquiesced in what appeared to be the unimpeded functioning of a natural law of the free market. In these circumstances, the solipsism and asceticism of avant-garde art constituted a refuge for the suppressed conscience of a cultural elite disturbed by naked competition for personal wealth, while the aggressive and individualistic nature of that art was actually in fundamental conformity with the ideology upon which the competitive society was based.

By 1960, faith in salvation through increasing personal wealth and the acquisition of consumer goods was beginning to erode. There began to appear studies critical of the march of consumerism and of manipulation by advertising, television, and the mass media generally—studies which achieved a wide circulation. The milk of that sacred cow, the American Way of Life, and its ideology were turning sour. As the cold war thawed, Communism was seen less as a direct physical and military threat than as a psychological and ideological rival feeding upon the vast pockets of poverty located around the world, which were as yet not cured by the United States. Ideological cracks began to show at home. The intensified economic penetration of the Third World, accompanied as it was by a thickening of its philanthropic veneer, reflected the suspicion that the absorptive capacity of the domestic market was, after all, limited. Advertisers as well as producers of consumer goods upped the ante. The impoverished foreigner had to be persuaded that progress and happiness lay in the acquisition of United States—produced soft drinks and television sets; virgin, once-sterile lands in remote countries were seeded with the fruits of American democracy. At home, the awful possibility of psychological and physical saturation by consumer goods was countered by even harder, more cunning, and more insidious selling techniques. In the United States people continued...
to buy, but more anxiously. Their consumption of the new and ever more sophisticated luxuries was tempered by the uncertainty of whether they were really needed, how much they really contributed to the individual's total happiness, and whether they did not create a prison of escalating personal indebtedness. In other words, the straightforward process of acquiring things, the once simple relationship of owner and thing owned, was undermined. Ownership of objects no longer conferred feelings of power. Consumers as well as producers began to examine motivations, becoming conscious of media pressures even while continuing to yield to them. As acquisition and possession became ends in themselves, they lost their organic relationship to personal lives, and their historic role of conferring feelings of power. Major luxury goods, like automobiles and refrigerators, lost even their social meaning as status symbols as they came within the financial reach of the majority. In these circumstances, the apprehension, latent ever since the very beginnings of the monetary economy, that purchase of luxuries as opposed to barter of necessities vitiates social relations became acute and neurotic. When production is the act of unidentifiable persons or agencies, when selling is known to be motivated exclusively by greed, and when acquisition is totally detached from necessity, there arises a psychological crisis of a magnitude in direct proportion to the efficiency and ruthlessness of the producing and selling process.

By the late fifties works of art were figuring increasingly on the roster of luxury consumer goods. Those who could afford a second car could afford to pay several thousand dollars for a single painting. The postwar era saw a burgeoning market in the United States both for Old Masters and works by living American artists. Works of art had one inestimable advantage over cars and other such conveniences: they did not wear out or become obsolete. They did not lose their value economically or socially. They were an investment, and became, through a change in law, a tax write-off, and thus effectively paid for out of the public purse. This law was to have far-reaching consequences and become a means of consolidating the crucial decisions about support for the arts in the hands of the rich.5

The desire to acquire art for purposes of investment and status derived from that same core of uncertainty about the relationship of real needs to the consumer goods which were swallowing up an increasing share of total personal income. Works of art were seen as objects of permanent aesthetic significance and monetary value, which compensated for the spuriousness, obsolescence, and dispensability of all the other stuff. Art constituted a growing, if relatively tiny corner in an investment market dominated by the stock of corporations of unfathomable immensity. Income derived from such stocks seemed as impersonal as the corporations themselves, which were increasing both their power and their remoteness by means of transnational, global movements. The new art patrons, many of them newly rich, were the managers and professional servants of these industrial behemoths, part cog and part control lever in essentially dehumanized and anonymous economic systems.6 The art object, by contrast, connoting that intensely individual and rebellious presence—a presence both psychological and physical—communicated values richly compensatory for the meaninglessness of work and the leisure derived from work.

Abstract and abstract expressionist styles offered a vehicle of compensation and a refuge, but only temporarily. Inevitably, the style which proclaimed enduring values, but whose success depended on the freshness of its break with preceding styles, would itself be superseded; art was subject to the same fundamental economic laws as any other luxury object on the market, with the difference that the rhythm of turnover was slower. The coalition of artists, critics, gallery owners, media people, educators, and museum personnel, the first beneficiaries of the new all-American boom in art, were able to summon up traditional formalist concepts and "universal values" in order to prolong the life of a style, even as they planned, like good corporate executives, and recruited for the next swing in the market of artistic taste. Consensus was reached to maintain the reputation and value of certain styles and image-types, whose longevity was ensured through constant variations, multiples, and prints. Among others, Robert Indiana, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and most remarkably of all, perhaps, Ernest Trova have produced a kind of staple product, which only needs renewal through fresh label design, packaging, or marketing techniques.

Pop Art and the New Realism

Around 1960, then, consumerism entered a new, defensive-aggressive phase, demanding more than the outright escape offered by abstract and abstract expressionist styles. Psychologically, it needed a form of confrontation, out of which another, more sophisticated kind of refuge might be formed. This pseudo-confrontation was provided by pop art and the New Realism which served to co-opt criticism and absorb anxiety, and the effect of which would eventually be to roll back the growing disaffection from the consumer ethic. Pop art, under a cloak of humor and irony, may be said to have constituted a kind of victory celebration of consumerism, which was also the victory of Americanism—what Robert Indiana proudly called...
Americanism. The visual and literary rhetoric of this celebration, moreover, was couched in a so-called universal language, and was thus suited to the Third World, where consumerism and the American Way of Life, rather than parliamentary democracy and the American way of government, seemed the quicker answer to Communist insurgency.

The inward thrust of art was spent; or, rather, its negative character was exposed, and with it the futility of its attempted escape from the inescapable implications of America's great outward economic and cultural thrust. Art sought a share in power, or to bathe in the reflection of power. The most significant new art movements of the sixties and seventies—op, kinetic, machine, happening, performance, world game, earth, concept—have all reflected this outward thrust and moved to appropriate, sometimes symbolically, sometimes in grandiloquent gestures of physical realization, the concepts and processes of technology, scientific research, ecology, social engineering, and psychological conditioning. These art movements represented more or less utopian fantasy bids to wrest control of social and physical environments from the "military-industrial complex," whose power everyone, following President Eisenhower who first used the term, agreed must be curbed. (Minimal art, on the other hand, has conducted an implicit critique of these pretensions, and a fundamental re­trenchment of the concept of art as a visually consumable object.)

Pop art was perfectly adapted to a preliminary stage of this great fantasy of appropriation, of this symbolic bid for power, because of the low-level reality and democratic availability of the consumer objects it represented. Here at last, rather than in the gloomy, introspective, self-consciously American abstract styles, was launched a truly universal aesthetic based on a global reality, an aesthetic which could play amusingly upon the supposed universality and the admitted triviality of United States popular culture, which during the sixties was being exported literally all over the world: from T-shirts to monumental sculpture, Mickey Mouse and Coca-Cola circulated from Venezuela to Vietnam. The objects in which the home-country consumers no longer fully believed became the subject of artistic sublimation, being peddled not just into the home but right into the heart of the aesthetic consciousness. This artistic sublimation was the cultural equivalent of what I would like to term a form of economic sublimation: that is, the compensation for threatening saturation of the domestic market by expansion into an overseas market. In these terms, consumer goods were sent up to colonize art at the moment of threatening psychological saturation, just as they were sent out to colonize the world at the moment of threatening economic saturation at home. And, inevitably and automatically, the image of the cultural artifact shared the status of international currency accruing to the real thing. Indeed, it did more, it acted as an advertisement for the real thing: wealthier people paid to see and buy, just as their children, wearing emblazoned corporate T-shirts, paid to act as walking advertisements. The distinction between the image and the real thing, or the real advertisement for the thing, was one of context rather than form. The United States-dominated international art market, discreetly aided and abetted by industrial corporations and government agencies, ensured that pop art received international exposure, just as it had done previously for abstract expressionism, but with increased energy and efficiency.

The pop art object, considered as a form of advertising for the real consumer object, played in the realm between the superhard and supersoft self. It could be physically gigantic, like an Oldenburg hamburger (Figure 1), or physically deflated, like a Lichtenstein hotdog. Whatever the scale or treatment, it was able to suggest what the better artists on Madison Avenue were already applying: superficial glosses of self-criticism, irony, and detachment, elements deriving from the new soft sell theory.

Pop art from the outset posed as a form of criticism, and it did so on two levels: the aesthetic and the social. On the aesthetic level, it was hailed as flouting all previous artistic tradition, abstract expressionism in particular. Pop art was an iconophile blast at abstract expressionist iconoclasm. On the level of social criticism, pop art has been seen as an iconoclastic blast at consumerist iconophilia, parodying billboard vulgarity, commenting ironically, perhaps satirically, on the consumerist ethic itself. It was even said of Warhol that he was engaged in an "anaesthetic revolutionary practice." 7 Harold Rosenberg has suggested that if pop art is not social as well as aesthetic criticism, if it is without political content, it "is like a vessel purposely built to be kept empty." We may go further and say that pop art is like the Coca-Cola bottle it has emblematized—always empty be-

Figure 1  Claes Oldenburg at his one-man show at the Green Gallery, New York, 1962.
cause it is made without a bottom, so that we can pour into it our feelings of the moment, without the bottle’s ever filling up or overflowing, and without those feelings meeting any resistance or gaining any shape. The ever-empty bottle of pop art absorbs criticism without resisting, without confirming, without even registering. Its social success lies in its evasiveness, which post pop, especially in the work and philosophy of Warhol, has raised to an absolute rejection of responsibility.

While it clearly resists interpretation as overt satire on consumerism, pop art is not so evasive and am­bivalent that it excludes the opposite interpretation. Pop art is eulogized as a magnificent affirmation of consumerist values by John Rublowsky (1965), in a monograph with a pop style and academic format, which broadly characterizes the phenomenon as “of universal appeal and validity . . . because it goes beyond mere nationalism to reflect a universal aspiration which has its most highly realized (. . . vanguard) development in America. Coca Cola, the supermarket, hot dogs and hamburgers, mass-produced automobiles and appliances, rock and roll, canned foods, television . . . represent a goal [of] emerging nations as well as the more advanced European countries.”

This is the same mentality which takes the number of United States–made television sets in refugee camps as the index of their comfort and the availability of Coke as proof of progress.9 Rublowsky continues, “With the pop movement, American art becomes truly American for the first time, and thus becomes universal . . . [a] unique vision and inspiration from the my­thogenic forces generated by a new social and economic reality” [stress added]. Grounds enough, these, to offer pop art, like the consumerism it reflects, as the global currency. Rublowsky closes with a vision of the American Herrenvolk, proud progeni­tors of an art “rude and boisterous, [which] expresses the American confidence and swagger of a new tradition that feels it is master of the world.”

In the foreword to the same book, the director of the Philadelphia Institute for Contemporary Art sings the praises of American capitalism, which has pro­duced an art “unashamedly inspired” by “the joys of the assembly line, and its evocation of commercial advertising reflects the joy and mirth of today’s scene. . . . [The] satisfaction comes from the accept­ance of oneself and of our mechanized and im­personal world.” This kind of language clearly protests too much, and confirms our view that pop art, like much pop art criticism, is designed to paper over profound ideological cracks, and in order to do so, lends itself to the parroting of hopelessly discredited views of American society.

The pop art object was rendered in two contrasting ways, corresponding to two contrasting levels of per­ception of the originals as consumer articles. By the reductive method—of Warhol and Lichtenstein (Figure 2)—the representation was made as flat, uninviting, and unsensuous as possible, emphasizing the repro­ductive technique, and the art object as twice­processed—as reproduction of a reproduction. This style corresponded to the idea of some disaffection with the original article, its usefulness or the way in which it is sold. The opposite style, embodied in Oldenburg, enlarged and inflated the object in three dimensions, rendering it in luscious colors and in a sensuous artificial material like vinyl, which conse­crated the look and feel and idea of the thing as an essentially synthetic food designed to give the illusion of substance. This style corresponded to a kind of emotional embrace of the consumer object in which any latent disaffection is smothered in associations that are part sensuous, part aesthetic, and include re­gressive childish and magical components.

To these consumer reactions, in which are mingled those of the artist as consumer of the original and the audience as consumer of both the original and the art, we must add the feelings pop art generates in the artists and, vicariously, in the audience, as producers, manufacturers, and marketers of consumer objects. We may use the same polar models of representation. The flattened, nonsensuous, twice-processed, and es­sentially impersonal look stands for a sense of the im­personality of assembly-line mass production; the serial effect used in so deadly a way by Warhol con­tributes ideas of monotony, uniformity, quantity, and the essential meaninglessness of the difference be­tween the infinite number and the single item, which become one and the same thing—the essential meaninglessness, too, of the difference between soup flavors, soup colors, and soup label. The mass is the message of the single soup can and grid of soup cans in the art gallery or supermarket. Enjoy the distinction of eating the ten-million-and-first McDonald’s hamburger. The idea of vast quantity, inconceivable magnitude, predicated upon a single and individual choice also underlies the opposite pop art look, that of Oldenburg, who seems to be parody­ing and glorifying the marketing expert’s fantasy pro­jection of the ideal consumer: childish, credulous, easily seduced, filled with bottomless greed.

The artist now poses not merely as artist (an inade­quate and in some ways discredited role) but as a real producer-retailer of consumer objects to the people. Oldenburg, in his Store (Figure 3) fantasizes himself as a manufacturer and storekeeper, with nostalgia for the days when things were casually laid out, when the man who sold was the man who made, and who sold not just for gain but to give pleasure.10 But, out of the short-lived fantasy of the Store, Oldenburg is the mini-entrepreneur who delegates la­bor (his wife sews the vinyl), as is Lichtenstein, whose assistants paint the benday dots, and as are so many
other contemporary artists. Warhol goes one better in the matter of delegation, that cardinal principle of late capitalism: he delegates absolutely everything, even his thinking. He needs distance, he says, in order to oversee the whole (actually, in order not to see or experience it at all), conjuring up new pseudo-realities out of his (actually, other people’s) head. The art object in the Warhol orbit arises from a kind of immaculate conception, for it is mysteriously and magically willed into being and marketed by myth.

Warhol’s myth is of a special kind. It is a myth which mythifies demythification. Warhol is like one of those self-destructing objects, whose self-destruction is applauded as an act of revelation. Warhol—Factory Owner-Manager, Captain of Art-Industry—through his words and deeds reminds us of a banal fact: the captains of our economic industries do not really create, they merely manipulate the forces of production; nor do they act as individuals, but rather as more or less loosely knit groups which try to guide those forces in the direction most profitable to themselves. Their very anonymity, their invisibility to the public eye, protects them from the pressures and hostility which are deflected onto our spongelike politicians. Art critics and the media have acclaimed in Warhol a porous kind of personality which facilitates the process: a cult of anonymity, a gigantic ordinariness, a pretended powerlessness, a kind of creative sterility or passivity which we, the great American consumer, are believed to share. His ordinariness is allegedly ours, his boredom is our boredom; his evasion of moral responsibility is ours. But our illusion, that out of this boring, sterile, irresponsible existence can come fame, wealth, and myth—that is his reality.

That the cult of banality could be elevated to the highest social success justified the fundamental contradiction of capitalism and absolved the guilt of it: "He [Warhol] offered . . . absolution, the gaze of the blank mirror that refuses all judgment."14 We—or critics and the media on our behalf—have brought into being a new species of antihero, who seemed the more necessary in that the real heroes failed us: the guerrilla fighters allowed themselves to be killed, some committed apostasy, others simply faded back into the bushes of conformity. That Warhol, this anti-hero, should have been shot at the very moment when a real political hero (Robert Kennedy) was shot to death, is a supreme historical irony. Valerie Solanas said she shot Warhol because he, who claimed to abdicate control over everybody and everything, had too much control over her. She also shot his work, which has been shot publicly and symbolically in a popular poster, showing the lifeblood oozing out of the soup can of high art/consumerism (Figure 4). The potshot of a $2 poster at the $60,000 "masterpiece."

In its self-conscious embrace of the everyday, pop art was set up as an audacious repudiation of traditional artistic values. But, with that intellectual legerdemain peculiar to a certain breed of critic adept at having their cake and eating it, pop art was viewed as opposed to tradition and at the same time embodying the finest and most universal formal values derived from that tradition. It would seem that while generally having rejected the Old Masters, the vanguard artists at the same time compare very favorably with those they have rejected. According to Christopher Finch (1968:46), Jasper Johns beer cans "share the qualities of a Vermeer with those of beer cans." But Johns is more than Vermeer ever was, for he also resembles "the Renaissance humanist struggling to unlock the exact meaning of a Latin phrase." For this same author, the car crashes of Warhol are comparable in their classicism, sense of tragedy, and detached attitude to violence to Poussin’s Landscape with a Snake. For Rublowsky, the abstract expressionists are in the "final stage of development that began when Leonardo da Vinci urged students to seek beauty in urine stains on the walls" (ibid.:65). The significance of the fact that Rublowsky should remember this very famous passage from Leonardo’s Notebooks as mentioning urine stains, when Leonardo actually says damp stains, may be left to the students of Freudian slips. The significance is perhaps more serious in another distortion of that same passage; Rublowsky makes Leonardo urge students to seek beauty in the stains, where in fact Leonardo merely offers their random shapes as a stimulus to the imagination, not as beautiful form in itself.

The indiscriminate use of the Old Masters and the
Pop Art as Consumerist Realism

values they transmit in order to promote contemporary art have a precise parallel in, and may indeed in­
directly derive from, that kind of consumer advertising which uses reproductions and names of famous art­
ists in order to sell totally unrelated products. It would be very fitting if all art critics found guilty of misap­
propriation of art-historical funds were condemned to be buried with their books in Los Angeles’ Forest Lawn
Cemetery, which has misappropriated so many artis­
tic monuments from the past. This frivolous plagi­
hure of history is intended to elevate contemporary art, presumably because it is so sorely in need of it. But it would be naive to ignore the fact that the outrageous quality of many of these com­
parisons is consciously designed-—like the ful­
some descriptions and metaphors of dishes on the menus of popular restaurants—to titillate and amuse.

Waldman goes on to call Lichtenstein’s picture of a brush stroke a “response as emotional as was Ingres’ for his women, expressed with a not unrelated de­
tached and rational style” (ibid.:20). Ingres comes in for a worse beating in Ellen Johnson’s book on Oldenburg. According to Johnson, Oldenburg’s giant Fagends composition “recalls the voluptuous plating up of curved shapes in Ingres’ Le Bain Turc”, which she adds “is difficult to look at, its eroticism is combined with violence, but the implica­
tions of shattered limbs in Fagends is more shocking than Delacroix’ explicit representation of slaughter.”

More shocking, therefore even better art.

There are other robbers of literary graveyards: thus Rainer Crone introduces his oeuvre catalogue of Andy
Warhol (Crone 1970) with tidbits from Goethe, Flaubert, Valery, T. S. Eliot, and Brecht, all of whom come out in praise of Warhol.

By a law both economic and cultural, there was a spin-off by which the concrete social data op art had first processed was diversified. Abstract expressionism did not permit of such diversification, only of further reduction. Pop art demanded it, and political developments, world and domestic, beginning in the mid-sixties, broadened the base of social consciousness for it, enabling pop, post-pop, and the New Realism to embrace an ironic or mock-ironic view not only of hamburgers but of Vietnam as well.

Pop Art and Vietnam
The mass media did not see any essential difference between the one type of commodity or spectacle and the next; the My Lai massacre and the Manson murders, the face of Marilyn and the face of Mao—all were equalized by their saleability. Imagery of consumer commodities meshed with imagery of war; there was a diverting sameness and a pleasant incongruity about them. The new "political" pop used reproductions of political events preprocessed for mass consumption. In some cases the supposed intention was to shock those sensibilities which preferred to segregate Coke from Vietnam; in others, to prove that all sensibilities around this desire to segregate (or willingness to equate) were already blunted. Having affirmed the most banal aspects of society in the early sixties, pop art banalized or discountenanced the political struggle of the late sixties.

The war was a spectacle. This idea was readily internalized by an avant-garde long corrupted by market principles, although certain dissident phenomena, notably the Poster of Protest, forcefully denounced this internalization. With what seems an uncanny prescience, just before Vietnam became a public issue, Roy Lichtenstein aestheticized—or anesthetized—the idea of the brutal bombing war in a number of gaudy and brash enlargements derived from war comics (Figure 5). The particular choice of the war comic is curious, because neither it nor its lay cousin, the horror comic, was considered the controversial moral issue it had been ten years before, at the time of the great campaign against the horror comics. But to those who had their feet in both camps—high and low art—who had a lingering memory of the controversy, and a lingering suspicion of the imagery of war and violence which continued to afflict all the other media, Lichtenstein’s use of war comics seemed designed to dull the conscience by dignifying art which was morally as well as aesthetically low.

Those so disposed, of course, could see Lichtenstein as hilariously antiwar, magnifying inherently suspect imagery in order to ram its real content down our throats—and give us a good gag in the bargain. But Lichtenstein’s models, the original war comics he chose, related implicitly or explicitly to an old war, the Nazi war, which stood at a safe distance—one in which history had already punished the villains and settled all the moral issues. There was no risk of reference to any of the current or recent United States “police actions” around the globe. Less evasive than pop art, the low-art medium, such as the explicitly imperialistic and militant Terry and the Pirates, was shortly to take up the new war in Vietnam and urge it onward (Figure 6), while Lichtenstein passed the slaughter by the wayside, turning to idyllic landscapes and parodies of other avant-garde art styles.

Lichtenstein has discouraged any kind of political interpretations of his war cartoons and other parodistic compositions by means of a careful separation of the man, who may privately hold strong political, antiwar opinions, and the art, which is after all art: “My personal opinion is that much of our foreign policy has been unbelievably terrifying, but this is not what my art is about and I don’t want to capitalize on this popular [sic] position. My work is more about our American definition of images and visual communication.” As the Tom Lehrer song puts it: “Vunce ze rockets go up, who cares vere zey come down, zat’s not my department, says Wernher von Braun.”

Pop Art and Fashion
The Vietnam era was preceded by a “revolution” in sexual mores that was reflected in both art and fashion. Fashion, that is, haute couture, became more sexual, naked, visually dazzling, fetishes. It increased its sensuous appeal by borrowing from avant-garde art—abstract, op, and pop—which, in turn, found in the fashion magazines potent sources of publicity and support. The high fashion consumerist image of the beautiful was incorporated by pop art in various ways: in the cool, anti-erotic downbeat of Warhol’s Mouths of Marilyn Monroe, and in the hotter upbeat of Wesselman’s enlarged mouths (see Figure 7), which were prominently featured in the high-fashion magazines as part of the campaign to sell the new range of lipsticks, the new mouth, the new face. Oldenburg’s work in this area, his giant lipstick for Yale University, for instance (Figure 8), is the most dynamic, psychologically as well as physically, of the
whole group of oral artists. His use of the phallic symbolism of the lipstick holder, which fashion advertising copywriters had long known about and capitalized on, meshed with the concurrent efforts of the industry to resexualize the mouth and render more explicit its labial-vaginal symbolism by plugging the wet-look lipstick, shown glistening and dripping, on temptingly parted lips (see Figure 9).

As fashion became more overtly fetishistic, with high-heeled lace-up boots, vinyl dresses, face masks, and slave jewelry, and the sexually explicit and deviant became more commercially viable in all the media, high and low art responded accordingly. The relatively flat, commercial pinup stereotypes of earlier pop yielded to more intense imagery. Richard Lindner achieved belated recognition for the perverse and fetishistic charge of his female icons; the English pop artist Allen Jones struck roots in the marshland of the sado-masochistic and fetish magazines he discovered in Los Angeles. Jones was stimulated by the representational method, which combined a surrealist, mechanistic view of the human form with intense, overtly flat, commercial imagery (Figure 10). He was particularly affected by the so-called Nutrix publications, which flourished nationwide, but more or less covertly, in the late fifties and early sixties, whose artists, before and quite independently of pop, had stylized figures and situations completely out of any feasible reality deep into the realm of fantasy (Figure 11). The publisher of the Nutrix series was eventually prosecuted and driven out of business, while the pop artist became celebrated—and rich—with expensive painted, printed, and sculptural realizations of Nutrix-style emblems. These seemed, around the political climax of 1970–1971, to represent pop’s confrontation with real social issues, in the form of parody or endorsement or both at once, of the male supremacy fantasies castigated by burgeoning feminism. In the photograph, of course, the Allen Jones woman-as-table idea seems rather mild and deflated compared with the grotesquely exaggerated “original” fetish illustration type. Viewed at first hand, however, Jones’s “sculpture” gains in visual intensity from the very precise craftsmanship of the cleverly adapted shop window dummy and the real, all leather fetish-corset and boots, made by a London specialist in such things. I cannot help concluding this comparison of high and forbidden art with the reflection that the forbidden kind, which tries to approximate the crudest and most inadmissible sado-masochistic, misogynistic, and self-destructive impulses, is essentially more honest than the high art, which, while also preying upon a grossly sexist core, seems more corrupt, more commercial (much more expensive, of course), and, in its formal realization, so much more calculated and slick.

**Patriotism**

The flag imagery of Jasper Johns in the fifties is regarded as a landmark of our pre- or proto-pop. There were certain minor legal problems attached to the use of United States flags, simulated or real, in art contexts lacking in overtly patriotic intent, but it does not seem that avant-garde appropriation of the Stars and Stripes (Figure 12) has suffered serious run-ins with the law, compared with real-life desecrations for purposes of political dissent, and in protest of the Vietnam war. Arrests and prosecutions of protesters “misusing” the United States flag were fairly common. The pop artist’s purpose in using the flag, if it is to be politically construed, was affirmative: flags were sacred and familiar Americana, even before Coke bot-

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**Figure 5** Milton Caniff. From *Terry and the Pirates* comic strip, ca. 1968.

ties and hamburgers and dollar bills. They were, like the latter, icons of the newly rediscovered American scene. The flag pictures of Johns and others (see Figure 13) give off an air of amused reverence and nostalgia; rearrangements were formalistic and anodyne, unlike those symbolic destructions practiced by designers of certain political posters in support of the peace movement who twisted the stars into a swastika and the stripes into prison bars, who concealed the flag behind bandit masks, who transformed it into statistics of genocide—this last process simple and striking enough to lend itself to realization in a real flag which, when carried in peace marches, actually provoked physical attacks from “patriotic” bystanders. One of the later flags in this line to be visualized by the counterculture hides, under cartoonlike wit, a prophecy of total civil war and destruction.18

In the early years of the peace movement, the concept of love acquired a new, political dimension (since co-opted and lost). It was immediately subjected to commercial exploitation, first by hippie mini-capitalism, then by big business and the pop artist. Robert Indiana launched the new and universally acceptable four-letter word into the high-art world in a monumental and abstract form, and has since thrived from its use in various media (see Figure 14). As late as December 1972, this property, in immense enlargement, was serving not only as proof that the market for love was bigger and richer than ever, but also as a gallery advertisement, promoting the pleasant fiction that it was love, not interest, which formed the primary bond between the artist and the owner of the gallery he was contracted to. To which the counterculture makes a suitable reply (Figure 15).20

Another of Johns’ proto-pop devices was the target, which he painted in various forms. It is, significantly, a blank target. What Johns deliberately leaves open (who or what is being targeted?) is filled in, once again, and turned around by the protest poster: it is the young American draftee who is the target, it is Uncle Sam who is doing the shooting. The famous Uncle Sam as recruiter, with his illusionistically pointing and accusing finger, which was conceived during World War I and helped send millions to their deaths, became, with the pop artist, an object of mere curiosity, an amusing gargoyle from the past, innocuous in itself and faintly absurd, especially when duplicated serially so as to resemble a wallpaper design.20 The Poster of Protest, by contrast, turned the accusing finger back against the originator (Figure 16) in a gesture of defiance and rejection which was all the more necessary because the Pentagon, at that time, didn’t need to make the rhetorical and moral appeals to voluntarism, contained in the old recruiting poster, but only to set in motion the deadly machinery of compulsion.
The Vietnam war, which happened at the end of the great, relatively continuous postwar economic boom, threw the savagery of United States military conduct and the suffering of the “enemy” at the other side of the globe into sharp relief against the quiet luxuriance of the “good life” at home, where the moral imperative was still to keep consuming. For Americans, to eat was the official ideology, as well as the great compulsion biologically, economically, militarily. Eating, no longer functional, had to become art. America (U.S.) is the first society in history to have totally divorced eating from hunger, to have raised it to an icon. Pop art enshrined that icon, not as a mere image but as a social duty, with absolute (religious) injunctive force in a way which elides the distinction between commerce and art. This occurred at that great international political-commercial-artistic festival, the New York World’s Fair, the year of the great escalation in Vietnam (Figure 17).

Our billboards and restaurant signs extol the great American freedom to eat mindlessly, selfishly, needlessly, and self-destructively. This “freedom,” which is used as symbol and substitute for political liberty, when rammed down the throat of an impoverished Asian people, becomes an obscene, sadistic gesture of oppression (Figure 18). The popular poster which formulates this with more graphic wit than historical accuracy (the Vietnamese rejected this “freedom”) is the work of a highly successful commercial artist and illustrator, sufficiently disturbed by the war to find its impositions distasteful.
Postpop and the New Realism have appropriated photographic documentation of war abroad and violence at home. Typically, this was done in a fragmentary way, betraying the feeling that the war is just one of myriad fragments of reality obtruding upon our consciousness; at other times, the war photograph is reproduced entire and used for its dadaistic, anti-art shock effect. Either way it is depoliticized. The peace poster or poster of protest, however, used it as political indictment (see Figure 19). Savage photo collages contrast, for instance, the plight of a Vietnamese family half-drowned in the flood of a bombed dyke with a beautiful American fashion model caressing her own naked form in the waters of a river, to the caption, “This is the spell of Chanel for the bath.”

In the realm of high art, whatever the intentions of the artist, critical obfuscation takes charge of his or her work. The sculpture *Riot* by New Realist Duane Hanson (Figure 20) faithfully reproduces a photograph of police brutality, with its interpretation deliberately left open, so as to allow, it seems, for such critical subtleties as those of Udo Kultermann in his big New York Graphics book, *The New Realism.* For Kultermann, this picture exemplifies the artist’s role, which is to “present reality directly and emphatically while maintaining both coolness and objectivity.” Such a view of reality has the proper “discipline” and “high seriousness” lacking in “propaganda” art (such as, presumably, the posters of protest, which denounced, satirically but openly, the war at home and abroad). Kultermann goes further: compared with the...
That a major international art event, testifying to United States cultural hegemony, should be held in Brazil at that time is in itself significant, for Brazil was aspiring to the position which is now unquestionably hers: that of the major, expansionist subimperialist power on the Latin American continent, and the crenelle guardian of United States business and military interests. In reading Rosenberg’s book, one has no idea, because Rosenberg carefully avoids the subject, what was convulsing Brazil in August-September 1961 (he does not even give this date). He does not tell the reader that the insurrection at that moment was of popular and progressive forces against the militaristic reactionaries, a struggle which managed to put into the Presidency the progressive João Goulart. (His regime was later ousted, in 1964, by the United States–backed Brazilian military and replaced by a fascistic dictatorship whose legacy remains.)

When the popular upheaval in favor of Goulart threatened the smooth running of the Bienal and all the social high jinks planned for it, Rosenberg adopted, self-consciously and with true New Yorker nonchalance, the pose of the aesthete miffed because his pleasures have been intruded upon. Rosenberg had come, so he says, determined to study the Bienal in terms of its audience as manifested in the social festivities planned for the opening gala—but the gala never came off. “Politics butted in. The President of the Republic resigned, students demonstrated, armored cars appeared on the streets of São Paulo.” But Rosenberg, ever resourceful, decides to shift his approach. Despite the fact that the party was off, and even if the audience was no longer available in the proper form and circumstances for sociological and whatever else analysis, “the art was there. . . . Let the audience worry about revolutions and protocol . . . the paintings and sculptures had learned to speak over the heads of events.” Finding himself caught up in a revolution, the art critic summarily dismisses it and the students struggling in the streets: “With the human assemblage cancelled” (inside the museum—outside doesn’t count) “it was left to listen in to what this multitude of objects and images had to say to one another.”

The Third World

As we observed earlier, United States postwar modernist art, and particularly pop art and the art of that age, has been marketed in the Third World with resounding success. We may close by turning to Latin America, where the penetration of United States culture has seemed as irresistible as that of United States corporations. Harold Rosenberg, although a much more sophisticated and indeed skeptical critic than those we have cited hitherto, has furthered this process, and shares that desire for detachment, that yearning for purification of sociopolitical reality through aestheticism. The first chapter of his book The Anxious Object (1964), which deals with the Sixth Bienal in São Paulo, Brazil, speaks, in tones of astonishment mixed with admiration, of all the “Arab Pollocks,” “Argentinian de Koonings,” and “Ecuadorian hard-edge” painters exhibiting there. The phenomenon of surrender by Third World bourgeois artists to United States models is an occasion for wry admiration; the astonishment is that the foreigner should prove so adept at picking up American styles. Rosenberg establishes what he calls a “profound internationalism” and the “negation of cultural background” as the logical, necessary, and inevitable development in art at this point in history, but he does so without connecting it to the ruthless transnational economic thrust of this internationalism, with its concomitant systematic destruction of native cultures (in Brazil at that time, the genocide of Indian peoples was proceeding apace, as it still is).
Figure 12  Pop art flags: page from Lucy Lippard, Pop Art, 1968.

Figure 13  Bill Stettner. “Stars and Stripes forever?” poster, ca. 1970.

Figure 14  Robert Indiana. Advertisement for gallery show, 1972.
Figure 15  Anonymous poster, “SHIT,” ca. 1969.

Figure 16  Anonymous poster, “Uncle Sam Wants You!” ca. 1969.

Figure 17  Robert Indiana. “EAT,” New York World’s Fair, 1965.

Figure 18  Tomi Ungerer. “EAT” poster, ca. 1968.
Solipsism

This is the new form of dialogue. We have progressed from the idea, which has long been a commonplace, that art speaks primarily to other artists, critics, and a few collectors, to that of art speaking to itself. This solipsism, this incest, represents not just an artistic and cultural but an economic philosophy. It lies at the very heart of the ethos of consumerism. The consumer object is to be judged and used, not on the basis of its being good in relation to a real need, but on that of its being better than or different from or bigger than its predecessors or rivals. The new car is roomier than the old one; brand X washes whiter than brand Y; the latest cigarette has less tar than all the others; Reagan is less corrupt than Nixon—no matter that the car is unsafe, the detergent pollutes, the cigarette causes cancer, or that politics breeds corruption—these considerations are irrelevant to objects marketed on the assumption that they relate only to themselves and their kindred.

So it is with art. This art exists by virtue of its dialogue with other art and other media, battenning, at a safe aesthetic distance, upon human experience, or, rather, upon images already detached from and falsifying of human experience. Far from “acting in the gap between art and life” pop art, like much other avant-garde art, widens that gap and establishes consumerism as the bridge. Art which tries to elevate itself above the stream of history and the fabric of human struggle eventually raises itself out of human sight altogether.

Is pop art then already dead? No. Together with other devices of the avant-garde, it is like a weapon seized by guerrillas from an army of occupation and turned against the enemy. The pop art mouth, which celebrates the false ingratiation of our culture, becomes in the hands of the Third World, the Cuban artist for instance (Figure 21), the obverse to an authentic and historic pain. It is to this voice that we must listen.
Figure 20  Duane Hanson. Riot, 1968.
Figure 21  Frémez (Cuba). Poster, ca. 1970.
Notes

5. See Feld 1983. My thanks to Larry Gross for directing me to this work.
6. Rublosky 1965, in Pop Art, pp. 155ff, lists, as the major early patrons of pop art, excluding the gallery owners, a taxi cab and insurance magnate, an Italian industrialist, a rentier, a corporation lawyer, and an insurance broker.
10. But not to all art critics: "[The Store] where you can buy his disagreeable pastries at slightly inflationary prices" (Kozloff 1962, pp. 34–36).
12. See Johnson 1971, p. 44.
13. Ibid.
14. David Kunzle, Posters of Protest (exhibition catalog, Art Galleries, University of California at Santa Barbara, with copious reproductions; smaller edition, with fewer reproductions, published by The New School for Social Research, New York, both 1971). See particularly no. 55. A slide set of these posters has been published by Environmental Communications, 62 Windward Ave., Venice, CA 90291.
15. Waldman, op. cit., p. 27.
17. Allen Jones Figures contains reproductions of Jones's sources in fetish and advertising art (see Galerie Mikro 1969, p. 71).
18. Stars and Stripes Forever? by Bill Stotter. 1970, showing the flag composed of serried ranks of matchheads, one of which, in a corner, is burning. In Kunzle, Posters of Protest (n.d.), slide set I, no. 7. The other posters referred to are listed in Kunzle, exhibition catalog cited, nos. 28 and 30 (with reproductions), and nos. 34, 35, and 38.
21. Ibid., no. 78.
23. See Rosenberg 1964, p. 15.

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Frank Sadorus: Photographer (Photo Essay)

Raymond Bial

"I was raised in the Corn Belt," Frank Sadorus claimed quite aptly on one of his self-portraits, and, all humor aside, the statement fairly well summarizes Sadorus and his work.

Lugging a view camera around the family farm in East Central Illinois, he made portraits of his family, landscapes from a nearby maple grove, and lovely still lifes. In postcards to his brother, Enos, who lived about twenty miles away in Urbana, he wrote humorously and tenderly of his attachment to the home in which he was born and raised. "How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood."

He did travel at least once to the State Fair in Springfield and, on another occasion, went to Urbana, most likely to visit Enos. He also made one longer trip to visit relatives in Ohio—"in each case, making one or two offhanded negatives of the State Capitol Building, Main Street in Urbana, and his father standing on the shores of Lake Erie. Yet, as shown in this sampling of photographs made from his original dry-plate negatives, he was essentially involved with photographing those people, places, and objects around his home that meant the most to him.

Frank Sadorus was born on the family farm a half mile east of the town of Sadorus, Illinois, on January 5, 1880, the fourth of seven children (five of whom survived to adulthood) of Phoebe and G. W. B. Sadorus. His great grandfather, from whom the town derived its name, was the first permanent settler in Champaign County, Illinois, and his father had been a captain with the 125th Illinois Volunteers during the Civil War. When he returned home from the war, G. W. B. Sadorus settled down to farm his 104 acres just east of town and, in due course, built the house that appears with such frequency and warmth in his son's photographs.

As he grew up Frank Sadorus worked on the farm with his brothers, Enos, Elmer, and Warren, while his sister, Mary, helped their mother in the house. The family worked hard, generally six days a week, although there was time for picnics in the maple grove (always in Sunday best) and for antics such as Warren's warning to "Post no bills" on the soles of his shoes.

In this quiet, relatively isolated setting Sadorus became interested in photography, although the source of his interest, as well as his education in photography, is still unclear. In all likelihood he was self-taught as a photographer and simply happened upon photographic equipment and materials.

Most of his negatives came from the Seed Dry Plate Company in St. Louis, and in a postcard to Enos he sings the praises of Velox, a favorite printing paper. Enos, who worked at the Big Four railroad yards in Urbana after he married and moved off the farm, was also an amateur photographer, and the two brothers no doubt discussed their common interest. Moreover, despite the relative isolation of the farm, Sadorus did reside near a railroad line which brought him newspapers, magazines, and books on photography as well as camera equipment and supplies.

He experimented with a variety of styles and never seemed to overcome an ingrained uncertainty about himself and his work. On postcards and photographs he variously referred to himself as "Frank Sadorus, Photographic Artist," "Sadorus, Lifegraphist," "The Beauty Artiste," "Sadorus, Artistic Pictorialist," and "Frank Sadorus, Artist."

There is a quality of humor in these titles as well as what he himself called the "Sadorus Sunshine System." However, in photographing what mattered to him personally, he does imbue his work with integrity. There are clear, yet hesitant glimpses of his potential as a fine artist, such as the portrait of Mary and Elmer Sadorus with snowballs held in their fingertips.

He left only 350 negatives. Yet, in primarily four years—from 1908 to 1912—in time he could spare from working on the farm, he completed a body of highly original work. Through humorous portraits of his family as well as still lifes of familiar objects, including common field corn, his work offers a highly personal look at a young artist and his home on a small farm on the Illinois prairie.

In photographing the maple grove and family farm, as it turned out, Sadorus was documenting not only the last years of a way of life in the rural Midwest but also his own life in that place. The automobile and mechanized farming were on the verge of radically altering the region, and the nation would soon engage itself in a futile world war. Yet Sadorus seemed primarily concerned with the loss of a personal landscape. On one photograph he wrote, "Goodbye, old timber, you are doomed." Indeed the indigenous maple grove was being cut down so that the land could be converted to larger, more profitable farms that emphasized cash crops. But Sadorus was also recording his last years on that land.

The first critical change in his life came on June 17, 1911, when his father died. On a photograph of his brothers, his sister, and himself made at the time of the funeral, Sadorus wrote prophetically, "A turning

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point in five lives." And, especially for himself, things were never the same again. By early 1912 he had given up photography and, never having settled upon another career, simply continued to live on the farm with his mother, Elmer, and Mary.

Eventually, in 1917, the estate was settled and the family farm to which he had been so attached was sold. The same day he bought a small house at the western edge of Sadorus that his father had originally purchased as a first home for Warren when he was married. With her proceeds from the estate, Sadorus' mother built a house in town, and Mary and Elmer, who retired from farming, moved in with her.

Displaced from the farm, entirely on his own, Sadorus lived only a few months in the small, two-room house. Then, on March 22, 1917, under very questionable circumstances, he was committed to a mental hospital in Kankakee, Illinois, about 100 miles north of Sadorus. Various reasons have been advanced as explanations for the commitment. One rumor suggests that he got sunstroke while working in the fields years before and had never quite recovered; another that he drank and smoked excessively.

Disregarding speculation on the actual reasons for Sadorus' commitment, the result appears to be extreme. Against his will he was abruptly and irrevocably separated from the home he valued above all else. The house that he had occupied so briefly was shut up and remained empty, ironically in his name and always informally referred to as "Uncle Frank's house," while he was in the hospital for the next seventeen years—until his death on Christmas Day, 1934.

Apparently resigned to his fate he never returned home again, not even for a visit. Only once during those years did he make an effort to leave the hospital. One day, about five years after his arrival, he simply walked off the grounds and tried to return home by following the railroad tracks that he knew led back to Sadorus. The family was promptly notified of his absence. However, after walking a few miles, he apparently realized the futility of the trip, for he turned around and went back to the hospital.

During this period Sadorus did make some drawings. However, they have since been lost and in contrast with the rich record of photographs that he left of his life on the farm virtually nothing remains from the years in the hospital. As far as is known he never picked up a camera again, and the only surviving evidence from those seventeen years is a single snapshot taken in the last year of his life. On the back of the photograph he wrote, "Taken July 1, 1934. I don't know if it looks like me, but it's me anyway."
Figure 2  Double exposure of Warren Sadorus.
Figure 3  Unidentified man with a flag apparently made by stitching Illinois State Fair prize ribbons together.
Figure 4  Still life of magazines, books, and photographic equipment.
On a print of this photograph Frank Sadorus wrote, "Corn raised on the Sadorus farm by FAS and Bill. Shortie trimmed 'em." "FAS" is Frank Allen Sadorus, and "Bill" is Elmer, whose full name was William Elmer Sadorus. Frank was also called "Shortie."
Figure 6  Warren Sadorus.
Figure 7  Frank Sadorus. Self-portrait. November 6, 1910.
Figure 8  Sadorus called this photograph of Mary and Phoebe Sadorus "Breaking the News to Mother."
Frank Sadorus labeled this photograph "The Punkin Orchestra." The date of the photograph is unknown, but the print was made on March 2, 1912. This photograph includes family members Warren, G.W.B., Mary, and Elmer.
Why Dance Films Do Not Look Right: A Study in the Nature of the Documentary of Movement as Visual Communication

Virginia Loring Brooks

Sources of Error in the Perception of Dance on Film

The actual performance of a dance is an event that occurs in a particular space over real time; John Martin (1965) terms it a "formal entity." How we perceive such a performance when it is presented on a large movie screen or a small television screen is subject to a number of variables that provide possible sources of perceptual error. These variables reflect the interaction between the characteristics of the display on the screen and those of the real world (that is, the rhythm and the composition of the choreography and of the performance).

Just about everyone who cares at all agrees that dance in film does not look right. In the theater the audience experiences the inherent rhythm and the composition of the choreography. The audience viewing the event on the screen, however, experiences the rhythm imposed by the shots selected by the editor and the composition selected by the cameraman through framing. Both of these factors are under the control of the director, who ideally should work in collaboration with the choreographer; unfortunately, this is not always the case.

What happens to the composition and rhythm we experience in the theater when it is transposed to the screen, which has its own composition and rhythm?

The composition of the motion picture frame is, in fact, a major source of perceptual error because it affects the way the space of the performance area will be perceived. The way the performance area is perceived, in turn, determines how the depth and magnitude of the movement that occurs in that field will appear. This topic can be divided into four separate categories, the first two being determined by the dancers' relationship to the screen's frame and the second two being determined by their relationship within the screen's frame:

1. The dancers' relationship to the total performance area when the screen's frame equals the whole performing area
2. The dancers' relationship to the screen's frame when only a selected area of the total performance space fills the frame
3. The dancers' relationship to each other within the screen's frame
4. The dancers in terms of their own body space within the screen's frame

Errors also arise in the crucial area of perceived time and rhythm. This topic includes, of course, the objectively measured rhythm of the music (or other accompaniment) and the relationship of the choreography to it. In addition, we must consider the performance, i.e., the dancers' phrasing as it is seen to relate to the musical measure and as it affects how effort and energy level are perceived when the dance is translated to the screen. Perhaps less obviously, this topic must also include the subjective or perceived rhythm of the music as it relates to the choreography and as the choreography is affected by cuts, camera movement, and camera placement. Other factors to be investigated in the perception of time and rhythm are the effects of repetition versus change and the rate of change versus the complexity and comprehensibility of the display. There has been a long history of theory and research in psychology on the question of how apparent time is affected by the perceived amount of material with which it is filled (Ornstein 1969). The results of most of these experiments have been inconclusive; the adequate measures have not yet been isolated, and anecdotal evidence suggests that research is still needed.

These are the two general areas in which the perception of staged and filmed dance are likely to be different. This article attempts to do two things: to identify the sources of error in perceiving the composition and the rhythm of the choreography and performance of dance as they occur in existing films and tapes of dance performance, and to formulate the principles that should govern the relationship between dance and film in those films that are intended to document how a live dance performance is experienced. These analyses and generalizations are undertaken first for the problems of composition and then for problems of rhythm. This enterprise is a valuable one not only for those concerned with the specific task of improving the quality of films of dance but more widely for those interested in the visual communication of all movement.

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Composition: Perception of the Space of the Field and the Perception of Movement in That Space

The Entire Performance Area Revealed by the Stationary Camera

What are the factors that will influence the way in which we perceive the choreography as performed by the dancers when the screen displays the whole stage area, i.e., when the camera need not move to include the whole scene? The performance presented in the real, three-dimensional world differs from the performance viewed on a flat screen, and we must begin by considering these differences in a general way.

Of course, the screen is flat or slightly curved. In order to represent a real performance in any way, the image must provide information about the spatial layout of the represented performance, that is, it must provide depth cues. Depth cues are the characteristic patterns that are produced when the light from a three-dimensional layout is projected on a two-dimensional surface. Many of the static depth cues are familiar from their use in still pictures: linear perspective, occlusion or interposition (the interruption of a far object by a near one), size perspective (the image of a far object being smaller than that of the same object nearby), texture-density gradient (the image of a surface composed of pebbles, tiles, grass, etc., showing progressive decrease in size from near to far), and height in the field or relation to the horizon. Perspective was analyzed formally by Brunelleschi in 1413 (Kemp 1978); the first three static depth cues were prescribed by Leonardo da Vinci in 1457 (Richter 1970); the fourth category was analyzed by Gibson (1950) and the fifth by Sedgwick (1980). These cues provide the viewer with information that the image on the flat surface is related to (that is, that it represents) an arrangement of objects at different distances in space (Haber 1979). These static cues also apply to film and video when a stationary camera is directed at a static layout, within which motion may, of course, occur.

In addition, there are motion depth cues that are produced when there is relative motion between the viewer and the layout: motion perspective, in which the near objects move faster on the screen than far ones; kinetic occlusion, in which the leading edge of an object progressively hides more of the background and in which the trailing edge progressively discloses more of the background; and the optical-flow pattern, in which all of the texture elements and other discernible contours in the field of view move away (with faster velocities for nearer objects) from the image of the point toward which the viewer or camera is moving and at which it is directed. This last cue will be important in the next section when the camera’s, and therefore the audience’s, point of view will be moving.

Now that we have considered the representation of depth in a general way, we must look at five specific sets of factors that will be important in performances presented on the screen: the background, the floor, the aspect of ratio of film as it compares to the proscenium arch, the distribution of objects in foreground and midground, and the lighting.

The background. The background is one of the most important factors in the perception of the space of the field and of the depth and dimension of the movement when one is looking at a display that includes the whole performance area.

A homogeneous background, such as a uniformly lit cyclorama or a dark backdrop that produces the effect of dancers moving in limbo, makes easier the task of editing shots together and matching them seamlessly (Hochberg and Brooks 1978). At the same time, the eye is given no reference point against which to judge the size of the movement of the dancers (Duncker 1938, Vorkapich 1972).

When a dancer or a group of dancers is moving against a homogeneous background, a cut (or change in direction of the angle of the camera) is disorienting to the viewer, even when the shot includes the whole performance area. This is so because the viewer has no information as to whether the dancers have moved or the camera has moved. The viewer of a live performance has no such problem, because he “knows” whenever he has changed his direction of gaze. The viewer of a live performance must turn his head and make eye movements over a large area. The film viewer looks at a much smaller area, depending on how far he sits from the display, and there are no proprioceptive cues from the muscles of his body that relate the views on the screen to their loci in space. This fact may be used purposely in filming in order to produce a particular “floating” effect, in which the dancers seem almost to be in freefall (this is done in the San Francisco Ballet film Telaia and in Birgit Cullberg’s “Red Wine in Green Glasses”), but it may also destroy the viewer’s grasp of the dance space and the choreographic structure.1

If there are several dancers on stage, some of them may act as reference points for the others, provided that they are stationary; this may be seen in “Trinity” (City Center Joffrey Ballet, Dance in America series) in which the active dancers’ movements are perceived in relation to a set of static dancers who are posed at the sides and back of the set, which is a plain cyclorama.
When the background is part of a realistic set or contains a pattern or some distinguishing landmarks (Hochberg, Brooks and Roule, 1977; Hochberg and Gellman 1977), the situation is quite different. Now the dancers move against the visual framework that is provided by the pattern; they are seen passing before it, and the value and extent of their movements are preserved, as is not the case with the homogeneous background.\(^2\)

The detail of the background is far more critical in tape and film than it is in the theater, because in the former case the detail is actually in the same plane with everything else that the viewer is watching. That is, both the background and the dancers are in the plane of the screen. This is a very important point: None of the depth cues that are used to create apparent depth change the fact that the image on the film screen or video monitor is two-dimensional and that all the components of the scene are in fact at a single distance from the viewer. In the theater, of course, an actual physical distance extends between the dancers and the scenery, and the viewer’s eyes can converge and focus on the plane of the dancers, or on that of the background, but not on both. Unless extremely selective focus is used, therefore, the detail in the background will have much more visual impact and consequence on the screen than it does in the theater.

**The floor.** Almost equal in importance to the background, particularly when it is homogeneous, is the floor as a factor in perceiving depth.

Because the screen is flat, the dancers’ movement toward or away from the camera may be perceived less as motion in depth than as the change in size that their images on the screen undergo as their distance from the camera changes. When the background is homogeneous, therefore, and there are no salient depth cues, the floor itself is a very important factor to be considered.

A pattern or grid on the floor will provide a cue for depth because it offers a *gradient* of perspective on the screen: that is, the horizontal and vertical lines of the grid will be farther apart the closer they are to the front of the stage set and will converge toward the back. This contributes to the perception that, as they travel on the vertical lines, the dancers are going back into space, rather than just appearing to become smaller. This phenomenon is apparent in both “Allegro Brillante” and in “Tschaikovsky Pas de Deux” (“Choreography by Balanchine, Part IV,” Dance in America series).

An irregular pattern of any sort gives more of a cue to direction than does a homogeneous and featureless field, either on the background or on the floor, and it provides some information about depth (by providing on the screen a gradient of the texture’s density [Gibson 1950]), but a nonrepetitive pattern does not carry the sense of depth that is given by a perspective pattern.\(^3\)

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**Figure 1a** The proscenium arch and the stage filled with dancers. The spectator in the theater will be aware of the black frame (the darkened theater) surrounding the arch only if he turns his head or if he sits far away.

**Figure 1b** The standard Academy ratio format of film, 1.33 (width) to 1 (height), here imposed on the scene from straight on. If the entire width of the performing area is preserved, there will be a black unlit area below the dancers and a large area of unused lit headroom above them.
Why Dance Films Do Not Look Right

The ratio of film compared with the proscenium arch. Another major factor that alters the visual impact of the dancers' movements on the screen is the amount and distribution of unlit space on that screen. For example, if the performance is taking place on a proscenium stage (Figure 1a), both the standard Academy ratio of the film frame (i.e., the proportion between the width and height of a projected picture, 1.33:1) and the cut-off of the television screen are such that the top third and the bottom third of the frame will be empty when the stage is shot head-on and the wings are at the side of the frame. The action will then be displayed only within the limits of the center third of the screen and will be "oppressed" or minimized by the large percentage of dark area (Figure 1b).

The extreme long shots from the top of the house in the Live from Lincoln Center series and many sequences shot in the theater for The Turning Point exemplify this problem. If the stage is filmed slightly from one side, the discrepancy will be lessened, but the area on that side of the stage will be distorted (Figure 1c). In the studio, the width of the performance area will be not so large, and even at the widest prospect the edge of the performance area will be defined by the edge of the frame, as will the top and bottom edges. The field filling the frame will be completely lit (Figure 1d). This can be seen in the final section of "The Four Temperaments" ("Choreography by Balanchine, Part I," Dance in America series). I contend that this sequence seems to have even more impact (by which I mean the ability to convey to the audience the energy of the choreography and its relationship to the music) than does either a film of the performance on the proscenium stage or the actual performance. In the first case, the field is filled and fully lit; in the case of the film, the field is not fully lit; and in the case of the performance, the field is not filled. This hypothesis has no research to support it, nor is it clear as yet how we could measure "impact" experimentally, but the importance of a frame has been discussed in general terms by others (Arnheim 1960, Gombrich 1972) and research efforts in this direction are probably worthwhile.

Figure 1c The standard Academy ratio imposed on the scene from slightly to one side. The sense of center is distorted, but more area is lit because the width requirements are reduced.

Figure 1d Fully lit framing of the entire performance area achieved in a studio.
Distribution of objects, foreground and background. The visible field in which the performance occurs is sometimes restricted in other ways, even in the studio situation described above. In order to affect the perception of depth and the orientation of the whole performance space, people or objects are placed in the foreground and midground of that space. Depending on how these elements are distributed and how they are lit, they may provide good cues for depth within the scene, or they may obscure parts of the performance and be distracting. Early examples of the use of these devices to increase the feeling of depth were seen in Birgit Cullberg’s “Miss Julie,” where nondancing characters in low-key light were arranged around the edge of the frame, and in the Kirov Ballet's “Swan Lake,” in which the camera moves, while looking through candle flames, to find Rothbart. In both of these films a sense of depth was created without making it difficult to see the main subject. This was not the case with the less successful “Holberg Suite” (Dance Theatre of Harlem, Dance in America series) and in “Les Patineurs” (American Ballet Theatre, Dance in America series); both films had tree branches in front of the dancers in some shots. The branches did provide the depth cue of interposition and elicited the sense of several planes of space, but they also made the shots feel cluttered. A classically bad example is seen in Duo Concertant (RM Productions film of the Balanchine ballet) where, in some scenes, the dancers are observed from behind the violinist (Figure 2), an angle and position from which one would hardly choose to watch the dance, even though it did provide some depth cues through occlusion.

The lighting. Finally, how the scene is lit is an extremely important factor in how the performance will be perceived on the screen. The general light level must be high enough to satisfy the technical requirements of the film or tape, and a great many filmed or taped performances seem to take this as their sole criterion. But other criteria are based on aesthetic requirements as well as the need for legibility: lighting that is designed to produce shadows on the floor will enhance the feeling of depth; lighting from the sides provides a means of modeling the bodies and helps to separate them from the background; and the use of different levels of light on figures dancing in different planes (background, midground, and foreground) increases both the feeling of depth and the legibility or comprehensibility of the image.

Lights may also be used to isolate one area from another, as in regular stage lighting. Efforts to recreate stage lighting, however, or attempts to film or tape in a performance situation with unaugmented stage lighting often fail because attention is not paid to the continuously varying exposure levels and the overall light level needed to obtain a good image on film or videotape. Indeed, the range from light to dark that is often found in the theatrical lighting of a single scene poses different problems for videotape and for film. For the former, a three to one ratio of the lightest to darkest area is ideal; a somewhat higher ratio is possible with film, but a much higher base level of light is required, and this is a very serious limiting factor. In taping and filming stage productions, with their existing lighting arrangements (or “plots”), therefore, the detail in the lower light areas will almost certainly be lost if the brighter areas are not allowed to burn out.

Once the director knows the lighting effects he wishes to obtain, they can be achieved better through the shaping of light in individual areas (and by the use of sequential contrast) than by attempting to reproduce an entire range within a scene. Good use of lighting in this way was achieved by Ralph Holmes in “Martha Graham Dance Company” and “Sue’s Leg/Remembering the Thirties” (Dance in America series).

In summary, when the frame of the screen is equivalent to the whole stage or performance area (i.e., when the camera doesn’t have to move because everything is in the frame), the following factors are potential sources of error in the perception of space, depth, and of movement (and by this, I mean the impact of the movement that is the heart of the dance, as well as the perceived magnitude and direction of the movement).
1. If the background is homogeneous, it may be difficult or impossible for the viewer to keep track of the orientations and locations of the dancers through the course of a sequence of cuts from different angles, since the eye is given no reference point against which to judge the size and direction of the dancers’ movements.

2. If the background is a patterned cyclorama or a realistic set, its details may compete with the dancers in significance, because the dancers and background are both being presented in the same visual plane, that is, the plane of the television or motion picture screen.

3. A homogeneous, featureless floor will give no cues to depth or direction of movement and may result in disconcerting changes in perceived size.

4. The dimensions of the proscenium stage when filmed straight from the front do not match standard film ratio; I believe that the resultant unlit space reduces the impact of the performance. Filming from the side lessens the discrepancy but distorts the viewer’s sense of center.

5. Elements placed in the foreground or midground of the set to achieve a sense of depth may make the frame appear cluttered and actually obscure parts of the performance to be recorded.

6. Finally, the level of lighting may be too low for adequate recording, or the design of the lighting may be too flat to provide the separation and shadows that are needed as depth cues or it may be too uneven to provide the consistent illumination required for ideal exposure.

The Whole Scene Constructed from Parts through Camera Movement or Editing

So far, the problems described have been very simple ones—almost artificially simple. We must next consider what the choreography and the dancers look like when one can see only a part of the performance area at a time and when other parts of the stage can be seen only by moving the camera or by cutting from one shot to another.

Background is found to be an even more important factor when the camera moves continuously to keep a traveling dancer in view and the screen frame encompasses only a section of the performance area. When the dancer is moving against a homogeneous background and the camera is also moving, the viewer has no way to determine how much of the motion on the screen is due to the camera’s motion and how much is due to the progress of the dancer. No sense of the size and direction of the movement will be provided by the homogeneous background (Duncker 1938, Vorkapich 1972). In a realistic set or in one with markings on the backdrop or with patterned lighting on the cyclorama, these elements will move on the screen in the opposite direction, behind the dancer, who is being kept in frame by the panning camera. This opposing motion will increase the impact of the dancer’s ongoing movement.

A ubiquitous aspect of the background is the horizon line, or wall-to-floor line. That line moves down and up in the frame as the camera follows a dancer moving up and down. If it is deemphasized by the use of a cove (a curved molding) and special lighting, as is often done in a television studio, the wall-to-floor line that moves up and down in the frame as shots change angle will be less noticeable. This is not without cost, however, since a noticeable horizon line does provide a clearer frame of reference for the height of the dancers’ jumps and an indication of the distance that the dancers move backward and forward in the set. The movement of the line may be minimized, where it is objectionable, if the dancers are kept in frame by camera movement rather than by cuts, so that the abrupt transitions that cause jumps of the horizon are eliminated even if the line itself remains clearly defined.

Another set of factors that will be very important when the space of the performance area is assembled through camera movement or cuts is the size and angle of the frame. The size and angle of the frame affect the perceived depth of the represented space and, therefore, affect as well the apparent speed and size of the dancers’ movements. These relationships are worth examining in some detail because they must affect all representations of motion and not only the films of dance.

When the camera is stationary, the size of the frame determines the distance available for the dancers to cross; it also defines the true value of the movement on the screen itself. In a closeup, a large movement may fill the screen, and whereas the step of which the movement is a part may be identifiable from the detail available in the very near shot, the compositional value of the step will not be the same as it would be if the entire movement were visible: Even a small movement will cover a larger visual angle of space than it would in the theater and, therefore, will have a different value in the composition as a whole. The general fact is that the closeup presents a much narrower field of attention than would be applied normally to watching dance. As such, it may prove valuable before the dance begins or during an early pose to provide an opportunity to identify with the dancers. Research on this point would be very useful.
A medium shot will include slightly more of the performance space, but it is still the case that only part of a dancer will be shown. The medium shot is also a narrower focus of attention than is usually directed to dance, particularly since it does not afford the viewer the choice of changing his view, as his peripheral vision of the stage normally does.

A medium long shot can include a full-length dancer with room for the arms extended to the sides or overhead. As a stationary camera shot, it can serve for turns in place, tight partnering, port de bras, mime sequences, and the like. In these cases, the movement perceived will be relatively true to life. When the dancer begins to travel, however, the camera will have to move fast in order to keep the dancer in the frame. A patterned background will then move correspondingly fast in the opposite direction, amplifying the movement and, perhaps, changing its relationship to the music, as we will discuss later. In addition, in a medium long shot there will be little opportunity to maintain orientation in the frame similar to that in the whole performance space.

In a long shot, several dancers may be included: for instance, a principal couple and two soloists on either side in the horizontal plane. In addition, the shot would include whatever number of dancers from the pattern of the choreography fit into the inverted triangle of the camera’s space behind the front line of

Figures 4a, b, c Changing the focal length of the lens but maintaining the same distance from the camera to the subject simply changes the magnification of that subject on the screen while preserving the same perspective.
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Figure 3c  Same formation shot from slightly to one side, just above eye level, showing front to back interactions but losing the actual pattern.

dancers. The larger frame permits a wider range of dance movement in proportion to camera movement; the value of the movement may appear close to that in performance or it may be slightly diminished. As the frame gets larger, the angle from which the steps are being shot seems to become more critical, in terms of how these movements will be interpreted or read.

The very long shot and the extreme long shot will include the entire performance space; no camera movement is then required to keep the dancers in frame. In these cases, however, the size of the dancers' image and, correspondingly, the value of each of their movements are greatly decreased, because the distance that they displace on the screen is very small. In 1931, J. F. Brown reported on laboratory experiments showing that the perceived velocity of an object was proportional to the size of a stationary framework imposed around it. Despite this prediction, it seems that the apparent reduction in tempo experienced in the extreme long shot indicates a breakdown of motion constancy (the fact that things seem to move at the speed they are really moving regardless of their distance from the viewer) when the image size is this small.

In addition to the choice of field size, which is established by the distance from the subject and focal length of the lens used, the director must consider the continuum of possible angles from which to shoot, ranging from low through eye level to high and from side to side through the center. The changes in height are important primarily for the shifting of the horizon line and for the amount of floor that is revealed. These changes determine whether the pattern of choreography will be seen against the floor or whether the dancers will be seen moving in front of each other and/or the background. This situation compares with that of a member of the audience whose angle of vision depends on whether he is sitting in the orchestra or the balcony. The center shot approximates the axis most preferred in the theater and the one on which choreography for the proscenium is based (Figure 3a). For the film or television screen, however, the center shot is not always the best choice for seeing either the overall pattern of the choreography or for making legible the individual steps. Unless the camera is high (Figure 3b), a shot taken slightly from the left or the right of center will be more appropriate if there is a formation consisting of more than one row of dancers (Figure 3c).
In all of the previous section we have noted that the size of the field and the angle from which that field is viewed will determine the graphic content of the shot, but the relationship that is most critical in the perception of movement filmed in depth is the one between the distance the camera is placed from the performing area and the focal length of the lens that is needed to obtain the desired field size from that distance (Figures 4a, b, c).

The camera distance determines the relative proportions of near objects (or dancers) to far objects, maintaining the size of the main subject using different focal length lenses as shown in Figures 5a and b. The focal length of the lens determines the amount of magnification applied to the proportions obtained at that distance, as in Figures 6a and b. The perceived distance between the dancers results from the interaction between the proportions and the magnification.

Moving the camera in or out on a dolly, track, or crane changes the proportions of the dancers to each other; in contrast, zooming in or out (i.e., changing the focal length but not the camera distance) merely changes the magnification but retains the same proportions. All these factors are known to cameramen and directors and are utilized by them in narrative films to create a variety of effects; for instance, the wide-angle, deep-focus space in Long Voyage Home and the telephoto, compressed space of Benjamin's race to the church in The Graduate. The feeling of separation of planes and of opened-out space, in the former, and the futile race that makes no progress, in the latter, were intended to create physical bases for emotional states. The actual values of the movements were not really the subject of either film. In a film dance performance, however, movement is precisely the subject. Cutting from one lens to another, moving the camera, zooming, and changing the size of the field all distort the value of the movement (Hochberg in press). In dance, only the choreographer should be entitled to alter the movement: the director of the film or tape must be prepared to consult with the choreographer about any changes that may result through the use of specific camera techniques.

The size and angle of the frame, discussed above, should also be chosen with regard for the feeling intended by the choreographer. A stage densely crowded with dancers may not be perceived as crowded in a long shot that does in fact include them all but in which they fill only one-third of the frame (the top and bottom thirds would be black or empty of movement because of the standard aspect ratio). The decision should be the choreographer's. The choreographer must choose whether the shot should be long and high, to reveal the pattern (Figure 3b); long and at eye level, so that the whole pattern with front to back interactions is seen (Figure 3c); or closer, so that only part of the pattern and interactions are seen and a sense of the quantity is captured.

In the case of a single dancer, how much space is needed to convey the feeling intended by the choreographer? A full figure shot will emphasize the actual steps being performed or the detail of a mime sequence. A long shot will reveal the figure's aloneness on the stage or the dancer's movement through
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Figure 6a  Wide-angle lens with the camera at the same distance as in Figure 5a.

Figure 6b  Telephoto lens with the camera at that same distance. The image has been magnified and includes a much smaller portion of the performance area.

the whole space. The choreographer’s intent must be the main determining factor in selecting the shots; but in order to preserve the relationship between the dancer’s body and the steps, and between the steps and the choreography, no less than a medium long shot of one complete full figure, with no hand or foot missing, should be on the screen most of the time. The amount of detail needed to convey both the content and the feeling of the choreography will vary with the complexity of the dance, the pace of the dance, and the number of dancers on the stage.

The frame should not create a vector that conflicts with the choreographed movement; that is, the frame should not move in a way that will unintentionally diminish or magnify the screen value of the stage movement. For example, a choreographed movement that is supposed to travel on the diagonal from upstage left to downstage right should not be shot after a cut is made to a shot from a camera located downstage right. It probably should not be shot from downstage left either, unless there were some other compositional reason for doing so, such as something going on upstage right. The scene should be shot from near the center to allow for the sense of the dancer crossing the stage on the diagonal. If the camera must move out or pan in order to keep the dancer in frame, it should not move, zoom out, or pan at a rate faster than the dance movement itself.

The camera movement may, in fact, enhance the choreographed movement by amplifying it, as when the camera pulls out at the same rate that two dancers are separating and, therefore, increases the distance between them on the screen available for them to move apart within. Conversely, if the dancers are coming together, pulling the frame in at the same rate not only increases the size of their images on the screen, it decreases the distance that separates them (Figures 7a, b, c, d). The camera may also magnify the choreographed movement by moving sympathetically, swinging from side to side as the movement swings. In the pas de deux from the balcony scene of “Romeo and Juliet” with Fonteyn and Nureyev (Figures 8a, b) or in the ballet sequence from “Limelight,” in which Eglevsky’s leaps, the sense of movement is amplified and elicits an especially pronounced feeling of participation or empathy from the viewer.

When the frame is changed by means of a discontinuous transition or cut, the orientation and direction of the perceived movement must be preserved either through the use of landmarks in the background or by the presence of other recognizable dancers on the stage. Clear and continuous comprehensibility are particularly important in reproducing the experience
of a dance event. Viewers in a theater never need to cope with any confusion over where they are sitting, and such confusion about one’s viewpoint is a factor that simply has not been considered in the original choreography. Even a momentary disorientation or confusion will cause an unplanned emphasis that may change the perceived rhythm of the choreography on the screen. In the opening of the final section of “The Four Temperaments” (“Choreography by Balanchine, Part I,” Dance in America series) (Figures 9a, b, c, d), an abrupt cut and a dissolve on the beginning of a travel movement by the female soloist disrupt the viewer’s orientation: at least a full beat is required for the viewer to achieve reorientation and reidentification of the dancers.

Carefully planned cuts may be used to prepare for a better-angle shot of a particular movement, but, as with camera movements, thought must always be given to the succeeding shot. The actual location of the figure or figures on the screen at the end of the first shot must be considered when planning the shot to follow, or unintentional and undesired apparent movement on the part of that stationary dancer (or an element of the scene) may result.

One reason that such unintentional apparent movement may be distracting is that it may represent movements that are physically impossible. Such an impossible movement occurs in the opening of “Elegy” (“Choreography by Balanchine, Part IV,” Dance in America series). In the first shot, the man is seated on the floor downstage right, that is, in the lower-left-hand portion of the screen. In the second shot, he is in the center of the screen, still seated in the same position, and it seems as if he has moved diagonally, across a quarter of the stage, while still seated. Unintentional apparent movement may also detract from the movement in the second of two shots, as in the men’s variation before the finale of “Allegro Brillante” (Figures 10a, b). The men move into the frame and pose upstage left as the women move out of the frame upstage right. The second shot cuts in on the men, moving them farther back stage left (to the right on the screen) while they are still posed and just before they begin to move out to screen left. This is a backward movement on the screen that was created by the cut, and it detracts from the physical move forward that follows it. Standard film practice is to look at shots in series of threes (Sharff 1982) in order to take into account the influence of the shots preceding and following the shot in question. This practice is particularly important in filming dance, because the choreographed movement must be preserved without interference from interactions between the shots, interactions produced by camera movements and editing.

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**Figures 7a, b, c, d** Diamonds (Balanchine, New York City Ballet, Dance in America). From an extreme wide shot when the soloists are farthest apart on the stage (7a), the camera zooms in as the soloists move in toward each other (7b and c) until the final medium wide shot (7d), when they are closest together on the stage. On the screen they remain just as far apart at the last stage of the zoom (where height is the limiting factor), but their images are much larger, and the impact of their crossing the final space to meet each other will be much greater in Figure 7d than it would have been had the camera remained as in Figure 7a and had simply allowed their small images to cross and meet.
Space, Depth, and Movement: the Dancers' Relationship to One Another

The third question to be considered in the perception of space, depth, and movement is how the dancers are perceived in relation to each other. That, of course, is an essential feature of the choreography that is to be communicated. The angle of view and the focal length of the lens both have important effects on the apparent distance between the dancers, front to back on the stage. Unlike the options available in a studio through the use of cranes and dollies, however, recording live performance in a theater limits the possible combinations of distance and angle from which to shoot. If the director wants to shoot from above, he must place the camera in back of the orchestra or at the first level up in the theater. A telephoto lens would then be used to compensate for the relatively long distance to the stage. If such a camera follows the principal dancer in a full figure long shot, the members of the corps who are posed or making small movement patterns around the edge of the stage will appear to be very close together, front to back (Figure 11b). The principal will appear to be dancing in a narrow space. If the director cuts to a lens of shorter focal length, shooting at a lower angle but closer up, the amount of floor revealed in the frame will still be narrow, but the perceived distance front to back will be enlarged. If an extreme long shot from the top of the house is used, the actual distance will then be shown to be much larger than either of the preceding shots had indicated (Figure 11a). The same telephoto shot from the back of the house will have decreased the value of the movement of the dancers toward the camera: they will appear to move through a very small space. A wider-angle lens will increase the apparent distance through which they will move during the same time. When shot from the top of the house, the corps will appear to be moving up and down on the screen in a flat picture, rather than backward and forward in depth.

When the camera is not moving, one of the best cues for depth comes from the interposition of the dancers as they move around each other and around the other elements in the performing area. When the camera does move, and particularly when a cut is employed from one shot to another, care should be taken to communicate the relative orientations of the dancers. For example, if the camera cuts from the view of a distinctive movement being made by one dancer to another angle on the same dancer finishing the movement, the sequence will preserve the identification of the dancer but it is likely to change the value of the step. The dancer will look the same, but the step will assume a different character when seen from a different point of view. The choice of where in the movement to cut, or whether to cut at all, depends on the dynamics of the steps. Some research has been done on the perceptual "chunking" of movement patterns, that is, on the recognition of the beginnings and endings of movement phrases (Lasher 1979), but knowing where these perceptual divisions occur does not ensure knowing the best
Figures 8a, b  Romeo and Juliet (MacMillan, The Royal Ballet, Czinner). The camera swings from left to right as Romeo lifts Juliet from screen left to right (arrow 1). At the same time, the background moves from right to left (arrow 2).

Figures 9a, b, c, d  Four stages in the sequence at the beginning of the finale of Four Temperaments (Balanchine, New York City Ballet, Dance in America). (A) The female soloist has traveled screen right away from three couples. When the couples have been cut out of the frame (B), a dissolve begins: (C) the soloist fading out and the three couples fading back in (D). The location of the image of the soloist on the screen at the beginning of the dissolve and the fact that all the women are wearing black leotards makes it particularly difficult to keep track of who is where.
place to cut. The emphasis must surely change if the cut is made in the middle of a phrase, just before the climax of the phrase, or at the end.

There are several ways to keep the viewer aware of the dancers’ relative orientation to each other. One of the simplest and most effective is to keep a clear landmark object in view within the shots before and after a cut. An optical effect that can be used to that end, while changing angles, is a matched dissolve: the figure of the principal dancer is in the same spot in both shots and the dissolve simply changes position in terms of direction or distance. This will also preserve orientation of the dancers both to each other and in the whole performance space. Examples of this device used to good advantage may be found in the film of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, Memories and Visions, and in the previously mentioned "Four Temperaments" ("Choreography by Balanchine, Part I") (Figures 12a, b, c). Dissolves do seem to produce a beat or change in flow of the rhythm just as cuts do, however, it must be made clear by example, early in the film of the dance, that the dissolve is being used only to change angle and not, as in the conventional narrative film sense, to mark the passage of elapsed time. In using this device, moreover, the actual duration of the dissolve must be considered in relation to the movements in the shots being dissolved, so that the full extent of the movement will be seen.

Another optical effect that can be used to communicate the orientations of the dancers relative to each other and to the performance space is a field that is horizontally split into an upper and a lower section. This represents an extreme departure from fidelity or reality, but it may be useful in the case of an intricate pas de deux that takes place in front of a dancing, rather than posed, corps. A medium long shot including the principals, full length in the first shot and full stage in the second shot, will give the detail of the duet along with its relation to the corps. If the principals are dancing alone on the stage but are covering a lot of space, the split field can also be valuable, as it can give the detail in one shot and the direction of travel and the dancers’ location on the stage in the other (Figure 13).
Figures 10a, b  Sequence of two shots from the beginning of the men’s variation before the finale of Allegro Brillante (Balanchine, New York City Ballet, Dance in America). Apparent movement backward on the screen (heavy arrows in Figure 10b) in second shot detracts from the continuing forward movement in space that follows.

Space, Depth, and Movement in the Dancers’ Individual Space

How the dancers’ stances and movements are perceived in terms of their own individual spaces may determine how the choreography is perceived. The frame must be planned so that each dancer has space in which to move that is appropriate for the particular combination of steps that will be executed. When the size of the frame is changed in order to accommodate a larger movement or the beginning of a traveling sequence, i.e., by moving back to a long shot, the filmmaker must take into account the effect this will have on the value of the movement on the screen. Thus, as the frame size gets larger, the size of the dancer’s image on the screen and, therefore, the value of the movement will get smaller. The relative speeds with which the two movements occur—the enlarging of the frame and the dancer’s movement itself—will determine the perceived value of the movement.

If the frame is suddenly enlarged through the use of a cut or rapid zoom out, the ensuing leaps or turns—the human effort—will appear insignificant relative to the mechanical or optical movement. If the field enlargement is to be made by cutting to a long shot, it should be made enough in advance of the large movement that the latter will seem larger than those movements that immediately precede it. In other words, if a dancer executes some turns, walks around, and then performs a series of leaps on the diagonal, the camera could stay in tight while the dancer turns in place, but it should use the time between the turns and the leaps (the time during which the dancer is walking around) to pull out to a new position or to cut to a wider shot. If the cut were made before the walk, there would then be time for the viewer to compare the walk with the leaps in the same field size.

If a zoom lens is being used, the shot could stay fairly tight on the full figure until the walk, at which time it could start to open out just enough to allow the leaps to begin without leaving the frame. Then it could continue to open out just fast enough to let the figure cross the frame at about the same rate that the performance space was being traversed. This action would not diminish the value of the movement and would preserve the sense of location on the stage.

Careful analysis in this vein must always be used in order to determine the best place in the overall choreography and in the specific steps at which to change the camera’s viewpoint of the dancer. The decision cannot be based solely on the rhythmic needs of the montage.

As far as it is possible to do so, the orientation of a dancer in the performance space as viewed by the theater audience should be maintained in the frame space of the film or television screen, particularly if traversing a lot of space and the pattern of movement
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Figure 11a  Les Sylphides (Fokine, American Ballet Theater, Live from Lincoln Center). The first shot is wide and taken from a very high angle, using whatever lens was necessary to include the full width of the stage from that distance. The scene appears flat, but the spacing of the groups of dancers on the stage is clear. The soloist is about to move from point A (stage right) to point B (stage left).

Figure 11b  Soloist has arrived at point B. The shot is now a telephoto taken from the orchestra level of the theater. The space is compressed, and there is no sense of the distance between the groups of dancers on the stage.

are what is important in a particular section of the choreography. Thus, if a dancer is circling the stage in turns, the figure on the screen ideally should go from one side of the frame through the center to the other side of the frame and back to center, while the camera follows the moving dancer (Figures 14a, b, c).

Similarly, the filmmaker is not free to decide the succession of camera angles solely on the basis of conventional editing techniques used in narrative filmmaking. The angle of each shot must be chosen to provide the best way to look at the body for the particular steps the dancer is performing. From some angles, the form of the dancer’s limbs and of her motions may actually disappear through foreshortening. There has been a strong tendency recently among some perceptual theorists (e.g., Gibson 1979, Shaw and Turvey 1981, Johansson 1982) to assert without proof that motion automatically and directly specifies tridimensional form and that therefore as long as there is any relative motion between dancer and camera, the dancer’s location and movements will be communicated correctly. A direct test of those assertions, however, shows them to be unjustified (Amira, Hochberg, and Peterson 1983; Hochberg, Amira, and Peterson 1984). The filmmaker must take into account the momentary two-dimensional image as it is displayed on the screen. A straight shot of a dancer approaching the camera, in a step in which the leg is raised forward, will lose that line completely: the leg will disappear to a point (Figure 15). Examples can be found in the film of the Bolshoi Ballet’s “Giselle” and in “Elite Syncopations” (“The Royal Ballet Salute to the U.S.A.”). The angle that will best display each step, or at least the steps of the principal dancers, must be studied in advance. Usually this angle is from or near the center of the audience (since dances are usually choreographed to be seen from there), but it is influenced by the number of dancers on the stage and their placement.

Time, Pace, and Rhythm

Misperceptions of time and rhythm provide the second major class of errors in perceiving choreography and performance on film. As John Martin (1965) observed, “All these problems of space involve elements of time as well for manifestly it is impossible to move throughout space without occupying time.” Once the choices of angle and lens have been made, and once the space and the movement within it have been recorded from those angles and distances, the next decision to be made is how long each shot should remain on the screen. And how will the interaction of the content of the shot with its duration affect the perceived time and rhythm of the dance?
Lack of Quantitative Research

No quantitative research has, to my knowledge, been designed to disentangle the effects of content of each shot and the duration of its display on the perception of dance on film. We have available only anecdotal evidence and casual observation on this matter, and these are poor substitutes for research in the case of so precise a factor. Nevertheless, a start is needed, and I will sketch briefly some of what has been written of a theoretical nature, illustrated by such examples as may point to areas of possible experimentation.

What is there about time and rhythm in dance that must be preserved on film? Martin (1965) proposed that all the spatial elements of dance are multiplied, as if in a geometric progression, when considered in terms of their temporal aspects. It is not difficult to perceive such factors as “speed and slowness, gradual accelerations and retardation, or sudden shifts in the rate of movement.” It should be possible to portray these elements in a fairly straightforward way on the screen, subject to certain conditions to be discussed shortly. According to Martin,

It is when we approach more complicated involvements in which time and dynamics are concerned together that difficulties appear. This is the category in which the vexed subject of rhythm exists, with its corollaries phrasing and sequential development. . . . All rhythms are products of dynamics concerned only incidentally with time. They consist basically of the alternations of accent and unaccent; the time element enters only with the periodicity of the alternations. . . . In dance rhythms and phrases, time will play the smallest conscious part, and the spectator will be aware of them chiefly in terms of recurrent spatial patterns with dynamic variations.

Dynamism, indeed, is the heart and soul of rhythm and the vitalizer of the whole art.

This sentiment is echoed by Rudolf Arnheim (1967): “it is essential for the performance of the dancer . . . that visual dynamics be clearly distinguished from mere locomotion. . . . What counts for artistic performance is the dynamics conveyed to the audience visually; for dynamics alone is responsible for expression and meaning.”

The temporal unit of choreography (above that of the step) is the phrase. The components of the dance phrase are isolated by Edwin Denby (1968): “The dance phrase is formed by variation in speed and variation in stress. Its total length is determined by the length of the musical phrase: its total dynamic by the nature of the steps and leaps that are used, by the amplitude that is given them in this particular musical setting.” In discussing the relationship of the choreography to the music, Denby points out that the steps often run over the end of the phrase and that accents are distributed sometimes with and sometimes in opposition to the pattern of the music. He notes that the dance phrase may rest “on several accents or climaxes of movement which other movements have led up to or from which they will follow . . . . dance accents frequently do not reproduce the accents of the musical phrases and even when they correspond, their time length is rarely identical with musical time units.”

One of Denby’s observations that is most important for filming dance is that “the variations of energy in dancing around which a dance phrase is built are what make the dance interesting and alive; and they correspond to a muscular sense, not an auditory one.” His observation would seem to be crucial for
the timing of cuts and camera movements in documents of dance performance. The dance phrase must be noted and preserved, rather than a strict, safe adherence to the musical beat being maintained. Sometimes, of course, the phrase does correspond with the beat in the choreography itself, but the director and the editor must still be aware of the dancer's emphasis. The dancers' ability to vary the component phrases of the steps—their sense of time values in a sequence of motions—is also, says Denby, a sense of the visual values contained in every sequence: "The quickening or retarding of motion allows some moments in the movement to be seen more sharply than others, and these stressed moments become the central images around which the observer's mind groups the rest of the motion." Not only the relationships between the music and the choreography itself, but the dancers' phrasing and emphasis within the choreography, must be captured for the film audience. If a dancer is engaged in extending a measure with a strong balance on point or with a particularly slow pirouette, a cut precisely on the beat would destroy the effect.

In a chapter on rhythm, Ivor Montague (1970) addresses the question of why ballet is so difficult to film:

For us to be conscious of the depth of corps de ballet movements our viewpoint must rise above the level on which they take place. Only then will the tempo of movement in space be in some degree restored and the composition cease to be a jumble. But too high a viewpoint will distort the figures so that though they will still comprise patterns at approximately correct tempo, they will tend to become dehumanized . . . A greater problem here is the change in viewing detail. . . . The music still
remains the guide. The actual movements of the dancers remain in time. But each cut presents us with a graphic composition so novel compared with the last one that it takes a fractional moment to adjust ourselves to the new composition before we can begin to apprehend its contained movement. The cutting intrinsic to cinema, and necessary to the effective portrayal of any filmed process, here interrupts the rhythm if it is not taken into account. ... The rhythm of the dance can be recreated, but only if, in combining shots, the filmmaker takes into account not only the actual speed of the dancers but the composition of the shots and the change of fresh shots.

Change in View and the Perceived Choreography

In addition to the problems raised by Montague, the pattern or line of the choreography and the phrasing of the performance must be taken into account by the filmmaker. Following a change of view, the absolute rhythm of the music (or other accompaniment to the choreography) will be perceived differently. The magnitude of this effect may be directly related to the degree of change imposed, that is, to the number of compositional elements in the shot that change and have to be reanchored; and it may depend as well on the moment in the choreography when the change is made. A continuum might be set up from least disruptive to most disruptive changes. A matched dissolve between two shots, different only in frame size, that occurs on the musical phrase during a solo might be the least disruptive sort of change in views. A very disruptive change might be produced by a straight cut joining two shots taken from different angles and of different frame sizes. In this case one shot might contain the large ensemble and a soloist in a limbo setting with no landmarks, providing for a massive change in composition; as for timing, the disruptive cut might come during an intricate combination performed by the corps, just before the soloist begins her variation, and in the next shot she would appear on the opposite half of the screen (Figures 14a, b, c).

Figure 14a It Starts With a Step (Lotte Goslar Pantomime Circus, The Riverside Dance Festival.) The progression of a dancer in a circle around the stage as it would look in a shot wide enough to include the whole area.

Figure 14b A closer shot, making the dancer’s image larger, but with the image kept centered on the screen. There is no sense of covering a space equivalent to that being covered on the stage.

Figure 14c The image is the same size as in 14b, but now the position in the frame and the directions of motion approximate the orientation and progression of the figure on the stage.
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Figure 15 Image of dancers shot coming toward the camera (Elite Syncopation, MacMillan, The Royal Ballet Salutes the U.S.A.). The sense of diagonal progression seen on the stage is dissipated on the screen, and the line of the leg being raised forward in this step is lost completely.

Figure 16a The stage showing the positions of the dancers in the entire performing area, and the location of the camera in each of the succeeding shots.
Repetition in Choreography

Choreography is inherently repetitious. Perceived rhythm is likely to be affected by the way in which that repetition in the choreography is filmed. If repetitive steps or combinations are filmed or taped in the same invariant way, the rhythm of the repetition will be evident. If these choreographic similarities are treated in dissimilar filmic ways, the rhythm of the repetition may be disrupted.

The relationships between repetition in the choreography and its complexity and the techniques used in filming have a significant effect on the viewer’s comprehension of the dance and, therefore, on how the rhythm is perceived. Controlled experimentation designed to determine the effects of these components would be very useful, not only for application in filming dance but for understanding the more general principles of montage as they must be modified in the communication of structured motions and events.

Summary

If dance on the screen is to communicate successfully the beauty and excitement that may be generated by dance performed live in a theater, as well as the actual space-time events themselves, the guidelines for how to preserve the impact of that beauty and excitement must be discovered. The principles of visual perception, gained by studying human interaction with the three-dimensional world, should serve two purposes: to specify those aspects of the performance in the theater that define the experience, and to translate to the two-dimensional screen those aspects that must be preserved in order to keep the performance experience intact. If the rules that must govern perceiving dance on the screen are refined and applied in determining the best shots and the best methods of editing to use, perhaps the audience for dance in the movie theater and in front of the television set could be served as well as the audience for sports events on the screen has been. Choreographers and dancers might be presented with as much care and devotion as has been accorded to coaches and baseball players; and the audiences for dance, both live and recorded, might grow apace.
Acknowledgment
This article is based on a chapter from the doctoral dissertation of the author (Brooks 1981). She is grateful to Julian Hochberg for his assistance in the preparation of the figures.

Notes
1 It may also diminish the value of the moment, as in "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," (Choreography by Balanchine, Part I, Dance in America series), in Frederick Ashton's "Monotones II," and in his "Five Brahms Waltzes in the Manner of Isadora Duncan." This is particularly true of the "Live from Covent Garden" version, but is also true in "Trailblazers of Modern Dance," Dance in America series.
2 Examples here include the Tchaikovsky section of "Choreography by Balanchine, Part IV," Dance in America series, and both the Bolshoi Ballet and the Live from Lincoln Center versions of "Giselle."
3 The cues to depth that can be given by stage sets may also affect the perception of movement of the dancers. Such a relationship is particularly evident in Dance in America programs of American Ballet Theatre performing "Billy the Kid" and of the New York City Ballet performing "Tzigane," examples of interactions in which the depth of the dancers' movement is preserved through its relation to the increased sense of depth provided by the forced perspective used in the sets.
4 With film, the raw stock may be evenly exposed with a set level of light ("preflashed"), in order to reduce the contrast and bring up some small amount of the detail in the darker sections of the set. This method will not provide as much control over the final results, however, as will actual modification of the lights.
5 Examples of this problem can be found in the Live from Lincoln Center series "La Bayadère," in which the magnificent set was lost in shadow, and in the Paul Czinner film Romeo and Juliet, in which the set was often lit so unevenly, particularly when the follow spot was used, that the details of the background appeared and disappeared in a disconcerting manner from shot to shot and as the camera panned following the soloist within a shot.
6 This effect can be seen in "Chaconne" ("Choreography by Balanchine, Part III, Dance in America series) and "Ballo de la Regina" ("Choreography by Balanchine, Part IV, Dance in America series), among many other places.
7 Examples of these problems can be seen in "Les Sylphides" and in "Theme and Variations" (American Ballet Theatre, Live from Lincoln Center). In the extreme long shots of these productions, the members of the corps all appear to be in the same plane, each dancing suspended in air on top of the head of the girl in the row in front of them.

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Why Dance Films Do Not Look Right

Tony Vera, a fire-blowing street performer, draws his performing space on the sidewalk with chalk and writes his name around the perimeter. He describes the circle as “magic,” saying, “All I have to do is step into that circle and my crowd starts to develop. It happens by itself. It’s magic.” Fifty people or more may collect around Tony during his circle-drawing in anticipation of one of many performances he will offer in Washington Square Park on a weekend afternoon. By the time his performance is underway, up to 300 people will be crowded around the circle to watch with rapt attention as Tony manipulates his juggling tools, magic tricks, fire torches—and the audience.

On any warm and sunny weekend in New York City, Tony and other street performers regularly present their comedy, magic, juggling, and musical skills to the people who visit Washington Square Park. Wandering mimes, juggling unicyclists, food and balloon vendors, soccer players, roller skaters, Frisbee players, and religious proselytizers also present their “acts” in the square (Figure 1).

A man covered with American flags and mirrors sits in the center of the dried-up fountain; an older man dressed entirely in purple, his long white hair flowing behind him, guides a purple bicycle through the milling crowds; a punk-style young man wears a sign on his back, proclaiming “Loud Silence as Rebellion—No More Pisco”; a wine-soaked individual wanders by, balancing on his head a shoe with a wooden hoop dangling from it, asking for donations (Figure 2).

The music of a piano, hauled daily into the square, competes with the blare of double-speaker radios blasting out disco music. The smell of hot dogs and sauerkraut permeates the air. All manner of sensory experiences—heard, felt, sniffed, touched, seen—collide in this highly concentrated environment, “festivalizing” the everyday uses of the space.1 The number of diverse activities the square contains, compared to other open spaces in New York City, is even more impressive when we consider that it constitutes nearly half the total park space available to the 80,000 persons who inhabit the area of Manhattan called Greenwich Village.

Approximately 19,000 people visit this square on a daily basis each Saturday and Sunday afternoon in good weather. The regularity of this event, punctuating the uniformity of week-day life, reflects an unusual intensity of involvement. Performers, spectators, and participants alike engage in the sharing and transmitting of multiple messages through a variety of sensory channels simultaneously as events flow in and around one another. This spontaneous flow of events appears to unite people in a particularly powerful feeling of fellowship in which social distinctions may be leveled and conflict circumvented.

“But who has organized this event?” you may ask. No one—or everyone. Indeed, it is a “people-generated” event, organized by no one and participated in by all.

**Historical Overview**

Washington Square Park is a container, composed of elements of fixed-feature space, which is further transformed by the nonfixed element of the people themselves, moving and interacting within the container. As palimpsests—ancient parchments erased and written upon again and again—the physical structures of Washington Square Park have been symbolically “erased” and “written upon” numerous times. A brief historical overview of Washington
Square reveals what I call the folk imprint on the built environment—the ways in which space becomes place.

Originally a marshland teeming with wildlife, the 8.6-acre area was turned into a burial ground by the city during the choleran epidemic of 1798. Shortly thereafter, it also became a public execution site, and the Hanging Elm, New York's oldest living tree, still stands at the northwest corner of the square. During the 1820s and 1830s, residential housing began to be erected in the vicinity of the square. The development of a sense of neighborhood in this area was stimulated by its conversion, between 1826 and 1828, from a pauper's burial ground to a military parade ground.

In 1852, a fountain was added in the center of the square, and in 1871 the original diagonal paths that had led to the new fountain were redesigned in a curvilinear pattern that was inspired by Frederick Olmstead's design of Central Park. The area was beginning to respond to residents' needs for relief from an increasingly congested and industrialized urban environment.

By 1895, the white marble arch, designed by Stanford White to commemorate the centennial of George Washington's inauguration, had been completed on the north side of Washington Square, at the base of Fifth Avenue. Its dedication was marked with an assortment of parades, bands, speeches, and cheering crowds. Perhaps most significant to my present analysis of events, however, is the quotation from George Washington that was engraved on the south façade of the arch: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair—the event is in the hands of God."

As the neighborhood surrounding Washington Square became more and more notorious for its concentration of artists and bohemians in the early 1900s, the square also became the center of a number of revolutionary activities. The most interesting of these was the take-over of the arch in 1916 by John Sloan and several of his somewhat inebriated friends. They climbed to the top of the arch, shot off cap pistols, built a fire in a large bean pot, read poetry, and declared the State of New Bohemia, with Washington Square Arch as its symbolic monument. Unfortunately, they soon surrendered their new republic to several conscientious policemen.

The redesign of the square in 1871 is particularly significant to this analysis of performance behavior within the square's boundaries. Olmstead's curvilinear designs affected a number of urban parks, and his intention was to create a sense of meandering through a pastoral environment. But Washington Square Park, despite the confusion generated by its name, is not a park, pastoral and serene in its atmosphere. It is, rather, an urban square, plaza, and market: noisy, ac-

tive, vital, and attracting a wide range of socio-economic groups. The clever designs of Olmstead, which influenced the rearrangement of space in the square, intensified rather than pacified the environment, as the curved walkways tend to spiral a visitor in toward the central fountain area, or what I call the "performance ring" of the square (Diagram 1).

The diagram of Washington Square Park reveals numerous circular walkways and choices of movement. Once inside the square, one finds one's sense of direction distorted; it is easier to get into the square than out of it. Circular sitting areas, benches that face in toward the circle, ledges around the fountain that face either out toward the benches or in toward the center, stimulate a public reflexivity in the total environment, where all are conscious that they are on display to all others. The circle within the square thus becomes a theater-in-the-round, stimulating performance behavior in all its participants. The athletes perform their soccer and Frisbee games as well as play them; bizarre individuals wander about in the space; readers perform the reading of a book in an environment so noisy and active that concentration on the material must be doubtful; and street performers use this public reflexivity to earn their livelihood.

When this circle within the square is then placed within the larger gridlike structure of New York City, which is efficient but isolating, the appeal of the square's circularity, which is conducive to communication and interaction, becomes more apparent.

In addition, symbolic meanings continue to be ascribed to the square. Regular visitors characterize the square as a kind of "urban Woodstock" because of its multiple performances. It continues to be used as a site for rallies and demonstrations. It is the end point of the Annual Greenwich Village Halloween Parade, and New York University holds its spring graduation ceremonies there. The square is used daily by students, the elderly, dog walkers, sun worshippers, drug dealers, athletes, food vendors, religious proselytizers, tourists, and performers.
Making Space into Place

Figure 3, taken from the roof of New York University’s Bobst Library, opposite the southeast corner of Washington Square Park, is one of a series of 576 photographs taken every minute over a 9½-hour period on September 20, 1981.²

The dynamic ebb and flow of audiences become part of the charged atmosphere surrounding the performances. Just as iron filings are attracted to a magnet, the individual magnetism of the performers creates shifting patterns of movement that can be observed throughout the entire series of overhead photographs, and a complex set of relationships between time, space, actions, and objects is therefore proposed. At each level and during each transaction, a series of negotiations takes place. Each event has a structure that relates to other events, and the combined frequencies, durations, and locations of these events constitute an overall pattern.

Diagram 2 illustrates the frequency and duration of several key events in the series of photographs. Note the exchange in performing times between the Piano Player and Tony Vera. Note also that the two lesser street performers—the Mime and Chang the Juggler—both begin their performances just as Tony Vera’s performance ends. It becomes apparent that if we are to visualize the territory fully, a relational or field-centered view will be required. Space is defined from this perspective by the locations and movements of people: it lies between, around, and among them. Time is defined in terms of interactions, rhythms, and intensity of performance times.

Several samples from the series of photographs taken in 1981 will illustrate the rhythms that underlie the activities of Washington Square. We begin with the first photograph of the day, taken at 10 A.M.: the empty space, where all is potential, readiness, possibilities unknown (Figure 4).

Events begin slowly on weekends in Washington Square. For several hours, only an occasional stroller moves through the center of the square, perhaps pausing briefly at the fountain. By 1:00, however, the food vendors have arrived, the square’s resident pianist has hauled his piano under the arch, and a number of roller skaters have arrived (partially visible at the lower left of Figure 5).

At 1:08 P.M., Tony Vera begins his first performance of the day. His performance space is located directly in front of the arch, and in a series of photographs we see his crowd collect around his chalk-drawn circle (1:08), increase in size (1:11), and become visible as a clear circle (1:17). The configuration of spectators then remains relatively constant for the next thirteen minutes of photographs (Figure 6).

Tony concludes his performance at 1:30. His crowd disperses rapidly, appearing to gravitate back to the roller skaters’ area. A few spectators remain around the pianist (Figure 7).

Prime performance time in Washington Square Park is generally between the hours of 2:00 and 5:00 P.M. The photographs below, taken from 4:55 to 5:12 P.M., show Tony Vera’s fourth show of the afternoon underway in front of the arch. Within minutes, two other performances begin: those of Chang the Juggler and a visiting mime. By the end of the series, at 5:12 P.M., four clear rings of spectators are evident in the photographs. The fourth ring has been created by the arrival of the jazz musicians in their regular location beneath a group of shade trees (Figure 8).

By 5:13 P.M., Tony Vera and the jazz musicians are taking a break in their performances. Their audiences scatter, and some are drawn to the two remaining performances in progress (Figure 9).

Finally, toward the end of the day, at 7:00 P.M., Tony Vera concludes his fifth and last performance. Charlie Barnett, the evening entertainment in the square, has arrived. He waits until Tony has completed his show and then begins to gather and arrange his audience in a space that for most of the day has remained relatively empty—the center. His performance is longer than most of the daytime shows and continues long after it is too dark to photograph. His audience has assembled in the center of the square for a final gathering before returning to their homes or moving out of the square toward other nighttime activities in the city. The special sense of “communitas” one encounters in the square on any pleasant weekend afternoon has been affirmed, and soon after, as night falls, Washington Square Park becomes once again an “empty space” (Figure 10).
Diagram 1: Walkways and “performance ring” of Washington Square Park.

Diagram 2: Frequency and duration of key performances in Washington Square Park.
Figure 6  Washington Square Park.

1:08 P.M.  1:11 P.M.

1:31 P.M.  1:32 P.M.

4:56 P.M.  5:00 P.M.
Figure 9  Washington Square Park.  5:13 P.M.

Figure 10  Washington Square Park.  6:57 P.M.
Drawing a Circle in Washington Square Park

5:04 P.M.  
5:05 P.M.  
5:14 P.M.  
5:15 P.M.  
6:58 P.M.  
6:59 P.M.
Many of the multiple functions of the space have been determined by the diverse groups who frequent the square, and the multichannel functions of the square have caused the emergence of clear territorial boundaries. We now return to ground level to investigate these boundaries.

Performers into Place

The first territorial area is at the square’s perimeter, where a steady stream of joggers moves rhythmically around the surrounding sidewalk, physically defining this boundary as a “jogging track.” Crossing this boundary, a visitor encounters the circular choices of movement mentioned earlier—pathways curve to the left and right, circular sitting areas open out to the sides, and the visitor is ultimately drawn to the performance ring.

Strolling along the outer pathways, the visitor finds areas that are officially designated for specific activities by fixed-feature elements: chess tables, children’s playground equipment, a petanque court, and so on. However, other areas are “unofficially” designated territorial areas as well. The elderly, for example, are always found seated on the northwest benches surrounding the fountain. Drug dealing, although occurring throughout the square, tends to gravitate toward the western area surrounding the fountain. Soccer players have established the southwest section of the fountain as their own, using garbage cans for goal posts and physically imperiling the welfare of any who wander through unaware, while Frisbee players perform on the opposite southeast section. Roller skaters demonstrate their ballet-like movements, accompanied by loud disco music, in the volleyball area, but will generally surrender this space when someone arrives with an “official-looking” net.

At the apex of this territorial structure are the street performers. Their presence in the square dominates the environment, not only through their elaborate fire-blowing, juggling, and humorous routines, drawing huge crowds, but also through their appearance in consistent locations that are agreed upon and regulated to a degree by Tony Vera, the self-proclaimed “king” of Washington Square Park.

Tony holds the prime location in the square, directly in front of the arch, and the power of this space, combined with his consistent appearances in the square for nearly five years, maintains his “kingship.” He will suggest locations, arbitrate disputes, invite new performers to the square, and assist other performers who are having a difficult time. Recently, someone from the Park Department painted Tony’s “magic” performance circle on the sidewalk with green paint, confirming his kingdom through an official agency as well.

This self-regulating phenomenon has developed over time without the assistance or interest of city administrators. There has been scant media attention and no clear organizing agency beyond the people themselves. It is a contemporary example of Edward Sapir’s classic definition of culture: “people act in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all.” My job, as a performance studies “detective,” has been to arrive at an understanding of this phenomenon through its primary agents—the street performers.

The Street Performer

The street performer, found throughout New York City and other urban centers of the United States as well as on nearly every other continent of the world, is the contemporary representative of an ancient tradition of performance dating back at least to early Egyptian times. In the past, he was known as a “busker,” “minstrel,” “jongleur,” or “troubador.” Today, in the United States, he is known simply as a street performer, though he is more often found in the parks and other open spaces of cities than in its streets.

A significant element of the street performer’s routine concerns his ability to interact directly with the audience. Foregoing the sanctity of a walled theater space, with darkened auditorium, fixed seating, prepared audience, and reassuring reviews, the street performer develops a “performance text” that must reflect his environment directly and hold transient audience members. His act is not designed to travel as the script of a play might, being transmitted from performer to performer and from century to century. It is specific to himself, his abilities, and his audience, incorporating messages of particular relevance to the culture-specific audience he acquires on the street.

Even within New York City, there are great differences among the performances found in its unofficial performance spaces—Central Park, outside the Metropolitan Museum and the Public Library, Times Square, and so on. The Central Park performer, for example, performs for an audience seeking a pastoral environment. His act may include Renaissance costuming, poetry, stringed instruments, story-telling, or magic tricks. The act of the Washington Square Park performer, on the other hand, reflects the conversion of a complex urban square to high festival. This performer will rely upon humor, political satire, sexual innuendo, and drug-oriented commentary. The Washington Square Park performer is fast, harsh, and dazzling. A detailed investigation of street performance therefore cannot
overlook the impact of the environment in which it is taking place.

Diagram 3 indicates the locations of Washington Square’s current performers, as well as some of the other central, recurring activities found within or near the performance ring. Having set the scene and sketched the environment in which these performances occur, I now describe three major performers in Washington Square Park.

**Diagram 3: Locations of Washington Square Park’s current performers.**

1. Chang the Juggler
2. Tony Vera
3. Charlie Barnett
4. Mitchell Cohen, turtle races
5. Soccer players
6. Frisbee players
7. Roller skaters
8. Bench of the elderly
9. Drug dealing
10. Solo musicians
11. Piano player
v. Vendors

The street audience must be “captured” by the street performer as individuals pass his performance, and its attention must be held until the important “pitch” for contributions is made at the conclusion of the act. As Washington Square audiences are particularly interested in seeking relief from city-generated anxieties when entering this festivalized environment, frequent laughter is a critical factor. Many street performers I interviewed cited a factor of one laugh, giggle, or other acknowledgment from the audience every three to five seconds. A street audience is less inclined to wait patiently for the development of a slow-building climax, seeking instead a quick laugh and the opportunity to move on.

Soon Chang was performing alone and had moved into the performance ring. He had also become a close friend of the king, Tony Vera. In his 1983 performances, Chang explains his tricks, adds funny names or stories to his techniques, and actively solicits participation. For example, he has the audience repeat “Ching Wah Wah” over a “devil stick,” which he
then causes to rise into the air. He asks questions, stops to pose for photographers, and comments on his audience's behavior.

Chang has incorporated his Oriental background into the performance text. Though originally from Vietnam, he tells his audience he is from China, perhaps not wishing to add stressful memories of recent history to his audience's appreciation of his performance. Some of his routines depict a foreigner's experience of New York City—the "Tax Collector," "New York Staying Alive," and "Disco" techniques of juggling.

Another central street performance technique Chang currently uses involves teasing an audience. He says, for example, after juggling five balls, "Want to see seven?" When the audience responds affirmatively, he holds up seven balls, shows them to the audience, and lays them down again. After performing a particularly difficult routine he says, "Want to see that again? Come back tomorrow." And, at the conclusion of his act, Chang says, "One of the nicest things about street performing is that you always get a standing ovation," referring to the fact that his space provides no places for sitting.

Chang told me in April 1981 that he was getting an M.B.A. from Fordham University and that he was performing in the square for tuition money. When I returned in September of that year, he had forgotten our initial meeting and denied that he performed to earn his tuition. Perhaps Chang had learned to keep quiet about finances and outside activities in order to create the self-sustaining image that is also essential to a street performance text. This image relies upon an audience's identification with a "talented," "independent," "hard-working" individual. One must appear skilled and earnest, yet not overly professional (read: "wealthy") in order to receive substantial contributions. The message further appears to be one of "we're all out here on the street together," or "we're all equal" in the street performance text. A performer must therefore tread a fine line between the equally negative connotations of "begging" and "too good to be on the street." As a successful performer, Chang responds to the codes and manipulates them with the same skill he employs in the juggling of his batons.

Figure 11  Chang the Juggler, performing at his first location in front of a statue west of the performance ring. He chooses this spot on very hot days because it offers some shade.

Tony Vera

Tony has been performing regularly in Washington Square for nearly five years. Every Saturday and Sunday, from 1:00 to 7:00 P.M., he performs from 6 to 10 shows, each twenty to thirty minutes in duration. Tony is, in fact, the most predictable of the performers in the square. He stays in the vicinity of his performance space, either performing or taking a short break and speaking to the square's regular visitors.

Tony's act is best known for the lighter fluid that he spurts out of his mouth and ignites into huge fireballs, five to ten feet in diameter. Actually, this is a relatively small part of his act. In a well-rehearsed routine that he repeats with little variation throughout the day, Tony mixes comedy, magic, and juggling with his dramatic fire-blowing technique. He balances not only a bicycle in his mouth but also a small boy perched on a folding chair, demonstrating a symbolic victory over space and gravity (Figure 12).

Tony communicates entirely through gesture, facial expression, and different rhythms and tones produced by four whistles he wears around his neck. No words are spoken at any time during his act, and yet each complicated routine is entirely understood by the volunteers he selects from his audience. Tony says that he can speak Greek, Chinese, French, Swahili—"any language of the world"—with his whistles and gestures.

Nearly 50 percent of the audience-assisted scenarios that Tony proposes involve the use of a dollar bill. In his opening routine, for example, Tony draws a young child out into the circle. He shoves a handkerchief into his fist and indicates that the child is to select the hand that holds the handkerchief. If necessary, Tony will repeat the trick until the child guesses successfully. He then rewards the child with a dollar. The trick is repeated. A dollar is rewarded. Again and again, Tony performs the trick, no longer
bothering to hide the handkerchief completely, and soon the child holds a fist full of dollar bills. The real trick is finally performed, in which the child does not find the handkerchief in either hand. Tony yanks the dollar bills away, and pulls the handkerchief out of his mouth. Following the audience’s laughter, he rewards the child with a dollar.

Tony similarly rewards the young winner of an eating contest between three volunteers. He has a man produce a dollar bill in order to be kissed by a woman he has never met. These visual cues of the proper code of exchange becomes significant at the conclusion of his performance, when he presents his dramatic fire-blowing demonstration.

The emotional pitch of Tony’s audience is high by the time of his finale, and he rides the waves of their enthusiasm. He elaborately fills his mouth with lighter fluid, swishes it around, and walks around the circle, seeming to seek the best angle for his fiery exhalation. He may clown around with the audience and move several times. Finally, he will produce a breathtaking fireball in the air (Figure 13). The crowd inevitably cheers with tremendous enthusiasm.

Tony then steps into the center of his chalk-drawn circle and bows grandly. Removing his hat, he begins to imitate the audience’s applause and shakes his head from side to side, indicating that a different gesture of their approval, enjoyment, and understanding of his act is now requested. The preset code of exchange has been visually established and, as Tony passes his firehat through the crowd, one observes that the most common contribution is, in fact, a dollar bill (Figure 14).

Charlie Barnett

Charlie Barnett is a particularly notorious performer in Washington Square Park (Figure 15). Primarily a stand-up comic, Charlie uses humor that is rude, insulting, sexual, highly topical, and New York City culture-specific—and his audiences love him. By using the play frame already established by the festivalized environment of the square, Charlie has developed a stylized form of rudeness that enables him to reframe messages and manipulate the context of his abuse into a playful (i.e., “not true,” “as if”) mode of performance. Functioning as a contemporary clown figure in Washington Square, Charlie engages in a form of social leveling that has been uniquely employed by the clown throughout history. He insults the various cultures of New York City—black, gay, Japanese, tourist, Upper East Side, Puerto Rican, and so on—with carefree enthusiasm. He imitates their behavior on the streets, in the subways, or in the bedroom (a particular favorite with his audiences). During his routines, he will point to representatives from the group he is parodying and ask, “Isn’t that right?” They respond with giggles and embarrassment.

Charlie’s humor appears not to reflect the “actuals” of whatever ethnic group he is abusing at that moment, but rather the dominant (i.e., white middle-class) culture’s ethnocentric image of that group. His humor is concerned with delineating boundaries: between “us” in the square and “them” outside the square, between “us” in New York and “them” in New Jersey, between “us” the residents of the United States and “them” the foreign tourists, and between “us” the poor and “them” the rich.

His humor is extremely physical and oriented toward mimicry. He imitates the gay population of New York in a large portion of his material (Figure 16). He imitates the way different groups go to work (the Polish walk backward, for example), the way tourists look at black New Yorkers (“Will you mug me, while my husband takes a picture?”), the way black New Yorkers wear their hats backward and one pants leg pulled up (“If you were a cab driver, would you pick this person up?”). He twists his face into a delightful
Figure 13  Tony Vera, blowing lighter fluid from his mouth.

Figure 14  The "pitch," humorously known among street performers as the "audience disappearing act."

Figure 15  Charlie Barnett, standing, upper left. Surrounded by seated audience in the natural amphitheater of the fountain.

Figure 16  Charlie Barnett, imitating a gay man.
laughter-producing imitation of a Japanese tourist discovering the World Trade Center towers, which appear as his prop in the southern skyline of the square.

The most significant element in the environmental structure of Charlie’s act involves his choice of location and way of acquiring an audience. He is the only performer who chooses the center of the dried-up fountain for his performance space. Perhaps he is the only performer who has the vocal strength to sustain a performance in such an extraordinarily large space, but more likely it is the power he acquires from his superior and intimidating demeanor that supports him. His energy within the space holds one’s attention throughout his performance. Further, this is the only space with seating, on the steps that descend into the fountain, thus forming a natural and more comfortable amphitheater for his performance.

Charlie begins by standing on one of the ledges surrounding the fountain and shouting, “It’s show time! Next show starting now! Everyone over here!” Usually 20 to 30 people are attracted by this opening announcement. Following this, Charlie announces to the assembly that he has a terrific show for them, but that he won’t do it for less than half the square’s population. (Perhaps, given the insulting context of his performance Charlie is counting on “safety in numbers”: when there are many in the audience, they’ll laugh; when there are just a few, they’ll get angry.)

In the past, Charlie would entice his initial audience with a few jokes and insulting remarks; now, since his routines are legendary among visitors, he simply has to remind them of their role: when he counts to three, everyone must yell, cheer, applaud, whistle, and generally make an incredible amount of racket. This never fails to attract great numbers of people. (“They’ll think I’m getting killed over here, and they’ll all come over to watch!”)

The Magic Circle

The necessity for crowd control is important to consider in any street performer’s presentation. Charlie plays on the desire of a crowd to be where the most people are when he elicits great noise from an audience in order to draw others. He also relies upon the many to control the few throughout his act. For all the performers in the square, however, the spontaneous crowd also becomes a closed crowd: the spectators turn their backs to the city and, in the ring formation, the crowd exhibits itself to itself, increasing a sense of security in the ring. The performer becomes, in such a configuration, the ringmaster, in control of the risks that he demonstrates through magic, juggling, humor, or simply his presence on the streets, and the magic circle of performance is defined in reference to this central figure.

The unique, magnetic power of the individual street performer makes it possible to draw other persons, the participating spectators, into the magic circle, and the circle becomes an image of both community and creation. Thus, the forms of street performance have symbolic significance that reach far beyond the explicit content of the particular text. In the same way that Paul Bouissac (1976:66), in his semiotic analysis of circus, feels that “the meaning of circus performance is based on each act’s particular relevance to those structures that constitute the culture of the country in which the acts are being performed, i.e. the ‘contextual culture,’ ... we can identify in the smaller culture ‘circus’ of Washington Square Park, set within New York City, responses to the complex competitive environment of a large urban space. Value is created for the visitors to this urban square, as performers explore a dramatization of the inner life of New York City residents and tourists, and respond to their desire for a sense of unity.

In an environment such as Washington Square Park, where the spectator can move around and explore a number of different circles containing different events that are occurring simultaneously, he or she has the additional opportunity to explore theatrical space in an active and creative way, while the territorially defined consistency of the environment offers another kind of security, conducive to communication and participation. The spectator creates opportunities within the performances to actively inject his or her personality into the event, and the notion that this is an event that is “outside the system” of commercial entertainment further heightens one’s sense of personal potency.

For many New Yorkers, the city streets are a kind of tunnel, leading only from home to office or from home to shopping and back again. A good street performer has the ability to surprise these tunneling individuals, drawing them into a temporary world of wonders, encouraging interaction and participation, and allowing the isolated, cautious New Yorker the opportunity to temporarily let himself off his own leash. The magic circle of performance, whether in a theater or on the street, encourages the notion that something special may occur, and as people enter into the event, attention focuses on the performance while distractions are screened out. The circle closes securely around the event, and a transcendent, if only temporary, sense of relief is achieved.
Notes

1 The term “festivalization” is a recently coined expression used regularly at New York University’s Department of Performance Studies, where this study first came about. I feel that it accurately expresses the sense of festival in an environment that is not “officially” a specific festival. There are no colored lights, gaudy banners, or predominant themes—yet the milling crowds and diverse activities “festivalize” the space.

2 All overhead photographs were taken by Tom Mikotowicz, a fellow doctoral candidate in the Department of Performance Studies, and Joe Mosier. The initial research for this study was undertaken, with Tom Mikotowicz as a coresearcher, in connection with a Performance Theory course offered by Richard Schechner. I owe them both credit for much of the early research into the square’s structure.

3 The use of the word “text” should not imply that the street performer records in written form any part of his act. Instead, the text of performance includes the facial expressions, costuming, props, interactions, location—all the “readable” elements of the performance as a whole.

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Reviews and Discussion

Two New Books on Alfred Stieglitz


Reviewed by Bonnie Yochelson
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The Alfred Stieglitz exhibition, seen at the National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), and the Art Institute of Chicago, is accompanied by without doubt the best publication on Stieglitz yet to appear in print. The magnificently produced, oversize book presents Stieglitz’s photographs with a fidelity and elegance comparable to his own epoch-making journal, Camera Work. Sara Greenough’s text—a short essay and a selection of Stieglitz’s writings on photography, both heavily annotated—constitute the most succinct and sensitive presentation of Stieglitz’s ideas to date. More problematic, however, is Greenough’s claim that “the purpose of the exhibition and catalogue is to de-mystify Alfred Stieglitz.” What is the Stieglitz myth, and how does this publication promote or dispel it?

For Alfred Stieglitz, understanding modern art was a test of one’s strength of character and spiritual resources. Those who visited his art galleries—“291” (1905–1917), The Intimate Gallery (1925–1929), and An American Place (1929–1946)—or subscribed to Camera Work implicitly accepted Stieglitz’s challenge: are you superficial, opportunistic, and conventional, or are you willing to consider what is new, sincere, and difficult? Stieglitz worked unsparring to isolate and elevate works of art from ordinary life; hence the utter simplicity and refinement of his gallery spaces and the perfectionistic craft and design of Camera Work. He put his heart and soul, not to mention his material resources, into the challenge, and he expected no less from others. Because of his militancy and his personal magnetism, a loyal following emerged, and from the following came the myth of Stieglitz as prophet of modern American painting, as father of modern photography, as eccentric storyteller and ascetic brooder—in short, as romantic hero.

The first of several attempts to capture Stieglitz’s greatness for posterity was the 1934 tribute, Alfred Stieglitz and America, A Collective Portrait, edited by Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, Dorothy Norman, Paul Rosenfeld, and Harold Rugg, and published on the occasion of Stieglitz’s seventieth birthday. In 1944 Dorothy Norman organized an exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art of Stieglitz’s works and his collection. In 1966 Herbert Seligmann wrote Alfred Stieglitz Talking, a collection of anecdotes based, like Norman’s text, on notes of encounters with the aging Stieglitz. Aperture, the fine art photography publishing firm, has made the Stieglitz myth widely available to the broader-based, young photography audience that developed in the 1970s. In 1973 Aperture published Dorothy Norman’s aculatory Alfred Stieglitz. A Modern Seer, available in 1983 in paperback; in 1976 it published a smaller Stieglitz monograph for its History of Photography series, introduced by Norman; and in 1979 it reprinted the 1934 Collective Portrait. For readers such as myself, who are too young to smell the gunpowder from the battle for modern art and who cannot animate the famous image of the black-caped, shaggy-haired man with piercing eyes and sculptured lips, these books are tedious and frustrating. Stieglitz is after all gone, and their nostalgia cannot take root anew.

Georgia O’Keeffe, Stieglitz’s widow, has taken a different approach, best summarized in her own words:

For me he was much more wonderful in his work than as a human being. I believe it was the work that kept me with him—though I loved him as a human being. I could see his strengths and weaknesses. I put up with what seemed to me a good deal of contradictory nonsense because of what seemed clear and bright and wonderful.

O’Keeffe’s lack of hero worship and her deep skepticism about art criticism has had a lasting effect on Stieglitz’s reputation. In her management of his estate, O’Keeffe has hindered access to his papers and promoted access to his works. She created the “key set,” numbering roughly 1,600, of Stieglitz’s photographs given to the National Gallery, and she enlarged Stieglitz’s gift of twenty-seven photographs for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to sixty-nine. These gifts spawned two exhibitions: one in Washington in 1958 and one in Boston in 1965. O’Keeffe’s secretary, Doris Bry, who helped with the dispersal of the estate, wrote a short essay on Stieglitz which was included in both the 1958 catalogue and the more sumptuous 1965 publication. While O’Keeffe has unabashedly promoted and protected Stieglitz’s critical fortunes, her stress on the works rather than the man distinguishes her efforts from others.

In 1978 The Metropolitan Museum sponsored an exhibition of Stieglitz’s portraits of O’Keeffe, which she selected; she wrote the short catalog essay and, assisted by Juan Hamilton, supervised the production of the book. Here O’Keeffe had the opportunity to present Stieglitz as she saw fit: in a large format, luxury book with excellent reproductions and a short, informative, extremely personal but unromanticized text. Her intention, like Stieglitz’s in Camera Work, was to create the opportunity to experience great art, to test the viewer’s powers of artistic feeling in the belief that Stieglitz’s works command the authority of great art. There is no misplaced nostalgia here.
Reviews and Discussion

Figure 1  Alfred Stieglitz. “Georgia O’Keeffe,” 1920 (?). Gelatin silver print, 8¼ x 5¼ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1980.

The Greenough-Hamilton book is a more ambitious effort in the same spirit. Although O’Keeffe was further removed from the actual creation of the show and book, her imprint is clear. Hamilton’s co-authorship—he shared the task of choosing the photographs and oversaw the making of the plates—is one link, and the book, even more beautifully made than the Metropolitan catalog, is a virtual pendant: the two share the same size, color, design, typeface, and printing. The text is short, again in the interest of allowing Stieglitz’s work to stand on its own; and Stieglitz the “great talker” and theorizer is presented through a selection of his own words. Greenough—who has cataloged the key set of photographs, written a thesis on Stieglitz’s writings, and published an important interpretation of Stieglitz’s Lake George photographs—was uniquely qualified to correct in the extensive notes the considerable misinformation about Stieglitz and to make the unavoidably interpretive selection of his writings. Like the Metropolitan catalog, this book, if given the time and concentration, yields to the reader a sense of Stieglitz’s greatness in a way that earlier publications have failed to do. For those impatient with the Stieglitz myth, it is convincing of his importance, certainly as an artist, and even as a personality. By virtue of its accuracy and lack of romantic hyperbole, the book does in a limited sense demystify Stieglitz. However, only through critical distance rather than empathetic intimacy will he be fully demystified. The Greenough-Hamilton book stands as the definitive Stieglitz testimonial, not as the definitive critical evaluation. Greenough’s contribution, while fulfilling the requirements of a testimonial, makes considerable progress toward a new, more analytical approach. Her work, in large part masked by the book’s format and virtually ignored by reviewers, deserves special attention.

Stieglitz’s life is usually divided into three distinct chapters: his early photographic career, including his leadership of the Photo-Secession (1890s–1910); his sponsorship of modern art at “291” (1910–1917); and his later photographic career of the 1920s and 1930s. The first period has been repeatedly discussed by photographic historians, the second by art historians concerned with the introduction of modern art to America, and the third by literary historians interested in Stieglitz’s friendships with William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and Sherwood Anderson. Greenough’s accomplishment is to integrate these three approaches, stressing Stieglitz’s unflagging and passionate struggle to forge a new “idea of photography”—an idea consonant with and nourished by avant-garde painting and art theory.

Unfortunately, Greenough’s unity of vision is splintered into four separate parts of the book: the introduction, the notes to the introduction, the selection of
writes, and the notes to the writings. The short introductory text, printed in the large typeface of a school primer and written in the simple, declarative style of received knowledge, looks perfunctory; its subtle arguments only become clear in the notes. The selected writings, the most original part of the book, are relegated to the back, after the illustrations, hidden as if a mass of pedantic documentation. In fact, this selection reveals with a new force Stieglitz's evolution from conventional naturalist photographer to radical crusader and from innovator to self-absorbed pessimist.

The chopping up and distribution of information into four compartments dissipates Greenough's achievement. A typical example is her discussion of Kandinsky. Stieglitz was preoccupied with fusing the theory of abstraction with the practice of photography, an inherently mimetic medium. In the introduction Greenough correctly connects Kandinsky's idea of art as the "outward expression of inner meaning" to Stieglitz's belief in photography's potential as an expressive art. This simple correlation is all the discursive text permits, but in parentheses Greenough supports the link with two important facts: an excerpt from Kandinsky's book On the Spiritual in Art appeared in Camera Work, and Stieglitz bought the only work by Kandinsky in the Armory Show. In the introduction's notes, Greenough speculates on the exact point of contact between Kandinsky's ideas and Stieglitz's circle, and the reader is directed to the selected writings. There one finds an excerpt from a letter in which Stieglitz justifies his purchase of the Kandinsky, stating that while Kandinsky was "not the master like Cézanne or Picasso," his work was "possibly the most important feature in the whole [Armory] show." Only in the notes to the writings does Greenough feel free, finally, to discuss the more general affinity of Stieglitz's and Kandinsky's artistic ideas and their shared symbolist roots. There she cites correspondence in which a Kandinsky show was planned at "291," and she discusses the secondary literature on Kandinsky's influence in America. A similar trail of facts and ideas could be reconstructed for Stieglitz's interest in Picasso and Henri Bergson, or his relationships with Marius de Zayas, Edward Steichen, and Sadakichi Hartmann, as key players in Stieglitz's intellectual development. (Only Max Weber is given short shrift.) But running the obstacle course of this fractured text is worth the effort.

Another example of the book's hidden treasure is Greenough's treatment of 1917, a major turning point in Stieglitz's life. While the years 1910-1917 are usually understood as an incubation period between Stieglitz's nineteenth-century pictorialist and twentieth-century modernist styles, the full impact of the human drama of Stieglitz's sense of total defeat and phoenix-like rise in the 1920s is reenacted and amplified in Greenough's notes and selections. In her notes on this "very bleak period for Stieglitz," Greenough describes his life crisis at age fifty-three: the Armory Show, the development of the Arensberg and Mabel Dodge salons, and the appearance of the little arts magazines eclipsed "291"'s avant-garde function; Camera Work, down to thirty-seven subscribers, was increasingly difficult to print in Germany; with the war, Kodak discontinued platinum paper, Stieglitz's preferred medium; U.S. anti-German sentiment dealt Stieglitz a personal blow and led to his break with Steichen; he also broke with de Zayas; and his twenty-five-year marriage ended, causing financial as well as emotional strain. These notes supplement a passage from a letter to O'Keeffe:

I have decided to rip 291 to pieces after all—I can't bear to think that its walls which held your drawings & the children's should be in charge of any one else but myself. . . . No the walls must come down—& very soon—in a few days—So that I am sure they're down—Others should move in & build anew. . . .
Greenough ends this vivid description with an analysis of Stieglitz’s photograph “The End of 291,” a still life featuring a wooden sculpture of a male figure to which Stieglitz added a sword and gauze headdress. She writes:

[With its piles of burlap and the stacks of Camera Work . . . [this photograph] is a document of the end of 291 and Stieglitz’s destruction of those rooms. It is also one of his most overtly symbolic photographs: with the bandaged bust of Stieglitz’s father in the upper right and the framed pictures turned to the wall, it is a comment on Stieglitz’s attempt to bring art to America. For it is clear . . . that he saw himself as the warrior who had tried, and failed, to get Americans to accept art as an integral part of their lives.

The scent of symbolic meaning often pervades Stieglitz’s photographs, but Greenough’s intimate knowledge of his thinking and works produces many new readings such as this one—so simple and so obvious, once articulated.

Yet another especially creative and convincing interpretation, again found in the notes to the writings, concerns a ca. 1933 photograph of the “Little House,” a small building on the Stieglitz family property at Lake George that in 1927 Stieglitz made into a darkroom.

. . . it cannot be merely coincidental that Stieglitz included his shadow in the act of photographing—of making a negative image—which, in the same darkroom being photographed, would be turned into a positive print. Even the moon, usually associated with night and darkness, echoes this positive/negative process. This work is, at one and the same time, a symbolic portrait of Stieglitz the photographer and an homage to the process of photography.

Greenough’s analysis bears comparison with Rosalind Krauss’s well-known discussion of Stieglitz’s 1889 photograph, “Sun Rays—Paula,” in which Krauss speculates that Stieglitz’s portrait of a girlfriend contains multiple references to the characteristics of the photographic medium itself. Ironically, Krauss’s excellent article has established her reputation as a Stieglitz expert, while Greenough’s interpretations in this book, just as penetrating and more numerous, have thus far been overlooked.

While the choppy presentation of the book has required that most of her ideas be squeezed into the notes, Greenough does contribute one major theme to our understanding of Stieglitz’s achievement. Stieglitz’s importance and the unity of his work have rested on his theory and practice of straight photography, the belief that photography must exploit its ability to describe external appearance and that the photographer’s creativity lies not in darkroom manipulation but in the composing of the image—in the taking, not the making, of the photograph. Greenough has deliberately avoided the term “straight photography” and instead has relied on Stieglitz’s own phrase, “idea of photography.” The advantages of this approach are twofold: it avoids confusion of Stieglitz’s evolving theory with what straight photography came to mean for the younger generation of Strand, Weston, and Adams; and it encompasses the intellectual complexity of Stieglitz’s wrestling with modernist art theory.

The rewards of Greenough’s approach are reaped in her stunning discussion of Stieglitz’s monumental projects of the 1920s and 1930s—the O’Keeffe composite portrait; the cloud studies, or Equivalents; and the skyscraper series. Superficially, these projects appear very different: a collaborative portrait; a series of abstract compositions of sky, sun, and clouds; and a cool, precisionist, uninhabited vision of New York skyscrapers. Greenough unites the three by invoking the early influence of Bergson on Stieglitz’s thinking and the importance of growth and change in his work:

The presence of change unites the 1930s photographs of New York with both the O’Keeffe portrait and the Equivalents. By changes in a series of photographs of O’Keeffe, Stieglitz documented her physical as well as psychological evolution. By variations in images in a series of photographs of clouds he illustrated the flux of his emotions. And by conflicts between natural forces—the contrasts of light and dark tones, shapes of clouds that collide and merge in the sky—he created an abstract equivalent of emotional tension and spiritual conflict. The later photographs of New York are not the blatantly subjective expression the Equivalents are, but neither are they dispassionately formal. While they are representational images, they do not abandon the idea that photography could embody subjective expression. By contrasting the beauty of the skyscrapers with their unremittent growth, Stieglitz made the buildings symbolic not only of the continuous change of New York, but of change itself as a principle of all being.

There is, however, a disadvantage to Greenough’s approach, and her avoidance of the terms “straight photography” and “modernism” are symptomatic. After all is said and done, the simple fact is that Alfred Stieglitz invented the modernist theory of straight photography. In his search for fundamental principles inherent in his chosen medium, he shared with Gropius or Malevich or Matisse the establishment of an artistic tabula rasa upon which to build a new art. These pioneers participated in what Stieglitz himself called “an actual revolution going on in painting, just as the spirit of revolution is working through all the world.” What has been assumed, rather than analyzed, is Stieglitz’s influence as the “father of straight photography.” He is understood, very loosely, as the first in a long line of straight photographers—leading
from Strand to the f64 group of the '30s to the photo-journalists of the '40s and the "snapshot" school of the '50s and '60s—who adhered to a set of "fundamental principles inherent in the medium." In fact, with the passage of time, Stieglitz shared less and less with his "protégés." He believed in the creation of the straight print as a precious object of art and as an expression of one's spiritual life, far from the taint of commercialism. Although he stressed the moment of photographic exposure, his compositions have nothing to do with "decisive moment" photography that relies on the forced relationships of disparate, unrelated objects for its meaning. His synthesis of modernist thought and photographic practice, while producing a great, perhaps the great, body of modern photographic work, is in fact quite idiosyncratic in the context of the '20s and '30s, which saw the development of photography for advertising, documentary, and propaganda purposes.

Stieglitz's work, which has been only tentatively considered in relation to the painters of his own circle, also bears closer comparison with European painters. Broadly speaking, the Lake George landscapes conform to the German romantic tradition; the Equivalents share a good deal with Kandinsky's Improvisations; the portraits of the '20s suggest the directness and meticulous description of New Objectivity portraiture; and his choice of O'Keeffe as a primary subject recalls Picasso's similar preoccupation—both artists labored under the shadow of the fin-de-siècle femme fatale. These off-the-cuff associations suggest a fresh approach to Stieglitz's accomplishments. His insistence on the distinctness of photography from other arts and on his "American-ness" has obscured his affinities with European modernism and forced his affinities with younger American photographers. The next step in understanding Stieglitz—a step beyond the scope of the Greenough-Hamilton book—is to demystify Stieglitz by removing him from his Olympian isolation and reassessing his place among European modernists and American photographers.


Reviewed by Kenneth Finkel
The Library Company of Philadelphia

Alfred Stieglitz remains a cult figure for modernists in art and photography eighty years after the first issue of Camera Work. William Homer continues to carry Stieglitz's torch; this is his sixth publication on the photographer, editor, and art impresario. Much of our attraction to Stieglitz is that he was a heroic figure with tremendous vision and unmatched energy. With the force of his own will, Stieglitz refined the largely unformed amateur photographic community in the United States. By the beginning of 1902, he had consolidated some of the interests in American art photography—called pictorial photography—into a loosely knit organization called the Photo-Secession. Though its members did not meet regularly for the first two years, and after that only during monthly dinners at a popular French restaurant in New York, they assembled successful exhibitions in prestigious galleries across the United States. Camera Work, the sumptuous, independent journal "devoted to the furtherance of modern photography," sprung from Stieglitz's mind. "He masterminded Camera Work," writes Homer, "and used it unashamedly as a vehicle for his own ideas." As the journal and the organization grew and became stronger and closer, Stieglitz shepherded photography to new aesthetic heights. Homer tells this intricate story concisely and in detail.

It is unclear whether the book is intended to be a partial biography of Stieglitz or an overview of the Photo-Secession. We find Stieglitz's early years discussed at length, though his later years are barely mentioned. His death date is not to be found in the text. If the book is an overview of the Photo-Secession, it falls short of being comprehensive. The sixteen chapters and 158 pages of heavily illustrated text are packed with terse essays. Many of the photographers who receive special treatment—Gertrude Käsebier, Clarence White, Edward Steichen, Anne Brigman, and Alvin Langdon Coburn—have received attention before. Other, less press-prone members of the Photo-Secession's core group—John G. Bullock, William B. Dyer, Edmund Stirling, and others—again receive only a passing glance. An excuse for this brevity may be that the publication of this book accompanied a traveling exhibition organized by the Currier Gallery of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire. But some recent exhibition catalogs resemble telephone books, and it is time that such a thorough
guide to turn-of-the-century photography be published.

Stieglitz can be credited with the founding of the Photo-Secession, though he did not create the conditions that made its founding possible. In the 1880s and 1890s, there was an amateur movement in Europe and America to raise the standards of photography. At first, exhibitions included any and all submissions—there could be thousands—and hardly a competent photographer left without a prize. This brand of exhibition gave way, in the late 1890s, to shows of fewer prints selected by a jury before hanging. Salons, as they were called after similar efforts in Europe, were annual events at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1898 to 1901. No prizes were given; selection was the sole honor. Robert S. Redfield, president of the Photographic Society of Philadelphia, invited Stieglitz to become a juror for the first of these, and Camera Notes, which Stieglitz edited, carried a glowing review. It was called “the most remarkable photographic display ever shown to an American public.”

Only where Stieglitz is central to the evolution of modern photography should he be placed at center stage. Where he is not central to it, he should remain in the wings. Before 1902, when the Philadelphia Salons were defunct and the Photo-Secession and Camera Work were new and fresh, Stieglitz is a supporting actor. But there is no heroic figure for that earlier time. If we are ever to understand photography before modernism, we must shift from a search for heroes. The history of photography is neither simple nor straightforward, but it is rich.

“The concept of amateur photography,” writes Homer, “was something entirely new in the mid-1880s, and it radically changed photographic history in a way that earlier practitioners could never have foretold.” When the dryplate negative was first marketed in the early 1880s, amateurism permeated American life. But from the beginnings of photography, and especially during its nascent period, scientists, artists, tradespeople, and dilettantes defined the contours of the medium’s potential. European societies—the Calotype Club of Edinburgh, founded in 1842, and the Royal Photographic Society of London and the Société Héliographique of Paris, both founded in 1852—were models for American versions. Members of the American Photographical Society (New York, 1859) and the Photographic Society of Philadelphia (1862) enjoyed the social nature of their organizations at dinner parties, through the exchange of prints and in publications. In the journals of the same period, many of which were organs of the societies, debates about lenses, printing papers, and exhibitions were carried on. And a few of the personalities of the early period, such as Charles Wagner Hull in New York and S. Fisher Corlies in Philadelphia, were active into the 1880s. Redfield learned photography from Constant Guilloë, who was the first president of the Photographic Society of Philadelphia.

Amateurism persisted long before the Photo-Secession arrived on the scene. In fact, the organizational triangle of club, journal, and exhibition, which Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession so carefully abided by, was a form derived from traditions in amateurism. When Stieglitz is seen in this broader historical light, his heroic stature diminishes and his accomplishments seem more understandable. With such perspective, the turn-of-the-century photographic community can be seen independently of its own publicity hype.

The piles of journals filled with mundane discourses and the dusty boxes of old albums in attics are finally getting their due from several scholars. They will assemble widely dispersed collections, sift through materials already in libraries and museums, and tell the story of premodern photography. Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession is a point of departure for historians to search out the unvarnished facts of this epic chapter in the history of photography.


Reviewed by Stuart Liebman
Queens College, C.U.N.Y.

In one of the most famous passages in his voluminous correspondence, Flaubert wrote:

An artist must be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all powerful. He should be everywhere felt, but nowhere seen. Furthermore, art must rise above personal emotions and nervous susceptibilities. It is time to endow it with pitiless method, with the exactness of the physical sciences.

In the great French novelist’s severe injunction, a would-be writer, now widely regarded as one of the central figures in twentieth-century American photography—Walker Evans—found his own artistic credo. The consequences for Evans’s development as an artist, as well as for the evolution of photographic practice and criticism in the United States during the past half century, have been substantial, but at least until recently, insufficiently analyzed. In 1983, at least
two significant effects of Evans's acceptance of Flaubertian principles on American photography and on writing about it can be confidently identified. His commitment to a self-effacing, rigorously photographic address to his subjects has been a crucial influence on many of the most interesting photographers who emerged during the last three decades. Without Evans's insistence on an approach combining a documentary-like respect for the surface textures and colors of the world with an extraordinary compositional complexity and rigor, the work of Lee Friedlander, Ted Papageorge, or Stephen Shore, to name only three, would certainly not have developed in the same way. Second, owing to the efforts of John Szarkowski, director of the Photography Department at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and perhaps Evans's most important critical champion, Evans's working aesthetic has become the foundation for sophisticated contemporary discourse about the medium. New photographic pantheons as well as novel criteria of photographic connoisseurship have been based on these premises, and the resulting shifts in taste in turn have had an enormous impact on the way in which photography is collected and exhibited by museums and traded as an art commodity.

Clearly, therefore, an intensive investigation of Evans's achievement should be and, indeed, has been an urgent matter for photographic critics. Over the last decade or so, Evans's classic American Photographs (1938) has been reissued, all his Farm Security Administration photographs have been collected in book form, and several splendid anthologies of his best-known images have been published. A number of scholarly articles and monographs, moreover, have begun to explore the ways in which later generations of photographers responded to Evans's path-breaking work. However, a detailed analysis of the "pitiless method" Evans used to realize his photographic ambitions has been conspicuously lacking in the growing critical literature about him. To fill this gap is the express purpose of Walker Evans at Work. John T. Hill, the executor of Evans's estate, has assembled 745 of Evans's photographs along with excerpts from his essays, correspondence, and interviews in a volume that successfully conveys many of the manifold intricacies of Evans's working methods. Jerry Thompson, Evans's former student and assistant, provides a concise account of the many different cameras and lenses Evans used over the course of his forty-five-year career. Evans's developing and printing techniques are also discussed in some detail. Most impressively, Thompson's observations are concretely anchored in the abundant illustrations taken from Evans's negatives and contact prints, many published for the first time. Taken together, they provide graphic evidence about how Evans approached his subjects and gradually resolved them into the images that have become celebrated monuments in the American photographic heritage.

Never before have so many aspects of a major photographer's working procedures been made so accessible to a nonspecialized audience. Indeed, Walker Evans at Work is to my knowledge unique in the literature about photography, and in many respects it could serve as a model for future work in the field. There are, however, a number of curious lapses in both the choice and layout of the images and written documents. These lapses, moreover, lead to a number of interpretive problems that are rendered more acute by the editor's failure to state clearly the criteria used in selecting the materials. The questions raised by these lapses are crucially important and must be discussed, however briefly, because they help to define both the value and the limits of a study such as this one.

It is obvious that the written texts accompanying photographs can often have a decisive impact on the way in which we comprehend the images. Unfortunately, the texts included in Walker Evans at Work are too often little more than a couple of sentences taken from diverse contexts (letters, working notes, published and unpublished articles, or interviews spanning Evans's entire creative life), and these documents are not always clearly paired with the illustrations. For example, Evans writes enthusiastically about Paul Strand's famous "Blind Woman" (1916), which he saw in the Camera Work files of the New York Public Library, in a letter to his friend Hanns Skolle dated June 1929. A short excerpt from this letter is printed next to several of Evans's studies of the casual poses of people idling on the Coney Island boardwalk taken in 1928–1929. The point of the juxtaposition, however, is not clear. Did Strand's blunt, powerful image directly provoke Evans to make the images we are shown, and if so, how can the obvious differences of character between the "stimulus" and the "response" be explained? Or had Evans already taken his Coney Island photographs, and did the discovery of "Blind Woman" only encourage him to pursue a path he had already chosen? Other aspects of Strand's oeuvre, moreover, were at least as important to Evans at the beginning of his career. The plunging angles and quasi-Cubist grids of Strand's Manhattan cityscapes from 1920–1921 are clearly reflected in Evans's similar views taken in 1928–1929, but no text accompanies these images. It is odd that Evans, always very aware of his debts to earlier photographers, wrote nothing about these images. Of course, it is possible that he did not or that the document has been lost, but the editor should at least have noted the relationship. The important lesson to be learned from these examples is that careful editorial guidance can avoid unnecessary ambiguities. In these instances, the editor does not provide it.
A different but related editorial failure diminishes the value of the many unfamiliar photographs, variant cropplings of familiar ones, and sequences of slightly different versions of the same motif presented in the book. So many photographs are used; in fact, that most are necessarily small in scale, and thus the clarity of detail so characteristic of Evans’s best work is often undiscernible. (Some of his late Polaroid SX 70 color prints are even reproduced in black and white!) Hill may have decided that the quality of reproductions could be sacrificed because superb copies of many images were readily available in Szarkowski’s Walker Evans (1971) and the magnificent Walker Evans: First and Last (1978). Hill’s overriding purpose, in any case, is to demonstrate aspects of Evans’s photographic and editing procedures, and this goal is unquestionably most effectively implemented by using as many illustrations as possible. The character of the illustrations also helps to realize this goal. The unedited strips of 35 mm. film do suggest how Evans—sometimes systematically, often spontaneously—pursued his subjects. Printing the full negatives of images originally published in extensively cropped form (Evans was never a purist in this regard) permits comparisons that clearly reveal how incisive an editor of his raw material Evans was. Finally, novel graphic layouts, such as the superimposition of pictures of the same subject taken from slightly different vantages, conveys the shifts in Evans’s stance quite vividly, helping to refine our understanding of what feature of the scene primarily interested him.

Too often, however, the status of the pictures is not clear, and this raises a number of questions. Do we see the entire set of images Evans took of a particular subject on a specific day, or have we been shown only an edited selection? If the latter is true (as I suspect), what criteria did the editor use to make the selection? Furthermore, are these variants—few, if any, were published in Evans’s lifetime—to be regarded as sketches, as failed experiments, or as new individual works of art? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how do these variants really contribute to our understanding of Evans’s art? Anyone familiar with the subtle but crucial organization of American Photographs or with the ordering of the images of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is aware how much each image’s significance depends on its placement. The meaning and ultimately the value of each image arguably derive far more from the context of the other, very different images in which it is placed than from the very similar images produced during the same shooting and editing sessions. Hill and Thompson do not even pose these questions. The import of the many fine illustrations would have been greatly clarified had they not evaded this important critical responsibility.

One large and essential question must finally be considered: does Walker Evans at Work articulate terms through which Evans’s artistic achievement can be significantly illuminated? Unfortunately, Hill’s preface and Thompson’s essay fail to do so because both focus on “the tools and habits of a complex man” rather than on the forms and themes animating his work. For example, we are told that Evans used a “long” (telephoto) lens to collapse perspective in his well-known view of the cemetery and steel mills of Bethlehem, Pa. (1936), and that this decision “purposely” relates objects lying on the near and distant planes in the photograph. This is an interesting fact, albeit one that could be rather easily deduced by anyone familiar with the basic optical properties of lenses. Knowing how the image was produced, however, only establishes that Evans was an astute photographic craftsman. Such information says practically nothing about what really matters, namely, how and why this image possesses artistic significance for us. Although the photograph’s meaning depends in a very limited and perhaps even trivial sense on the technical decisions the photographer makes, it cannot be reduced to an effect of the camera, lens, or filter chosen. Thompson’s brief remarks about a similar picture, “Joe’s Auto Graveyard, Pa.” (1936), indicate he is aware of this point, but he does not emphasize it enough. The book’s limited purpose does not permit consideration of the larger and ultimately more important questions about Evans’s work.

A genuinely critical discussion of Evans’s art must take place on an entirely different level of discourse, and it will be conducted using notions of working procedure and style very different from those offered in Walker Evans at Work. In the Bethlehem steel mill picture mentioned above, one might begin by observing how Evans exploits the capacity of his lens to juxtapose familiar social icons—here a cross and smokestacks—to create a palpable conceptual envelope around the lives of those who live in the most working-class homes lying between them. The notion of restricted horizons, social as well as existential, is dramatically invoked. One might then proceed toward a more general observation about how often Evans deploys the signs (often in a literal sense: billboards, posters, etc.) and icons of popular culture to organize the picture space, to create ironies, or to formulate the characteristically understated social criticism present in his work at certain periods. These suggestions hardly exhaust this photograph’s significance, but they at least sketch some of the terms and directions that any critic would have to explore to come to grips with Evans’s oeuvre. However interesting, knowledge of the “tools and habits” of an artist of Evans’s stature can only be the first step toward what is urgently needed: an intensive, detailed, and wide-ranging assessment of his artistic achievement.
Briefly Noted


Semiotic fellow travelers with expansive expense accounts might want to buy this collection for the handsome covers alone. Unfortunately, there isn't all that much else to recommend the purchase at the outrageous price. The contents appear to consist of nearly every paper presented at the 1979 Vienna Congress, charmingly retained in their original, variegated, typewritten (and not always proofread) form, divided in a 4:2:1 ratio among English, French, and German. It may be that the uneven quality and highly diffuse foci of these approximately 200 papers accurately represent the state of the semiotic enterprise, at least in 1979, but the publisher is charging a very high admission price for that intelligence. In other words, caveat emptor.


"In cultural politics today, a basic opposition exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction. These essays deal mostly with the former—its desire to change the object and its social context" (from the Preface by Hal Foster). Published by a small and little-known press, this book contains a valuable and diverse set of essays, engaging the issues raised by the "crisis of postmodernism" in the context of visual media—architecture, sculpture, painting, photography, and film—as well as the more familiar literary terrain of critical inquiry and debate. The contributors are impressive and varied—Baudrillard, Habermas, Jameson, Krauss, and Said among them—and their essays provocative.


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