

Object Lessons



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with essays by

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This publication is dedicated to the memory of Naomi Schor, the Benjamin F. Barge Professor of French at Yale University from 1999 until her death in 2001. Professor Schor was one of the leading scholars and critics of French literature and critical theory. She coined the title for the Object Lessons series and was the inaugural speaker in the series with a lecture on Rodin's *The Thinker*, presented on October 31, 2001.

Jock Reynolds
Director's Foreword

Object Lessons began as a series of gallery talks given by a select group of popular Yale professors. They were invited from across our campus to present scholarly papers on—and, more importantly, in front of—an object of their own choosing at the Yale University Art Gallery. This meeting of art and ideas took hold immediately and now provides both faculty and students alike opportunities to bridge academic disciplines and perceive objects in new ways. In doing so, the project has also helped to broaden an appreciation of art and create a more diverse audience for the Gallery. It has also given the participants, students, and public the chance to more fully engage and appreciate the Gallery's encyclopedic collections.

These talks are a choice example of the many student-conceived projects that the Gallery Guide Program, now in its eighth year, generates. The Object Lessons lectures have been taped and transcribed, and a small sampling of the talks are published here so that we might revisit the careful looking and critical analysis that are the hallmarks of this series. The five essays in this book represent not only disparate artists and periods—from *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* by Martin Johnson Heade (ca. 1865–75) to Dieter Roth's *Duck Hunt* (1971–72)—but also different styles of looking—from art historians Christine Mehring, Assistant Professor in the History of Art, and Tim Barringer, the Paul Mellon Professor and Director of Graduate

Studies in the History of Art; to artist Jessica Stockholder, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Sculpture; to sociologists and philosophers Jeffrey C. Alexander, the Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor of Sociology, and Karsten Harries, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Philosophy. We thank these participants for their own insightful and inspiring views and their infectious passion for art and its history.

Several Gallery staff members, both past and present, have assisted in publishing this selection of Object Lessons, including Anna Hammond, Deputy Director for Education, Programs, and Public Affairs, who realized the publication of these talks; Pamela Franks, the Nolen Curator of Academic Affairs, and Ellen Alvord, former Associate Curator of Academic Initiatives, without whose support and limitless enthusiasm this project would not have been possible; Christopher Sleboda, Director of Graphic Design, and Ken Meier, a Yale graduate student working in the Graphic Design department, for their expertise in resurrecting the talks within these pages; and Tiffany Sprague, Associate Editor, who skillfully oversaw the editing and production of the project. We also thank Christopher Canizares, B.A. 2002, who initiated the series, and Anne Thompson for her copy-editing skills.

Finally, we recognize the Gallery's Shamos Family Foundation Fund, which generously supports the Object Lessons lecture series and other stimulating educational programs that bring our students more fully in touch with art, each other, and our always-helpful faculty.

Jock Reynolds

The Henry J. Heinz II Director

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Tim Barringer

Seeing Silence: Martin
Johnson Heade, *Sudden
Shower, Newbury Marshes*

It seems, perhaps, sacrilegious to stand and talk in front of a painting for which the best response is a rapt silence. To absorb the full aesthetic power of Martin Johnson Heade's¹ *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* (plate 1), I suggest that you come when the galleries are empty and stand before it in quiet contemplation, as at a Quaker meeting. Although perhaps not a Quaker himself, Heade was brought up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in a Quakerish milieu and was deeply influenced, if not formally taught, by Edward Hicks, the Quaker painter of the visionary, naive *Peaceable Kingdom* series. Hicks's beneficent landscapes, peopled by cheerful specimens of God's creation, present a providential vision of the bounty of nature. But Heade's landscapes delve far deeper, presenting with true plainness and moving eloquence a Protestant view of the natural world. Like the profound silences of Quakerism, Heade's painting expresses not merely inwardness but a strength of vision that allows the world to be seen, and represented, as it really is, naked and divorced of the gaudy trappings of convention. Its emptiness is pregnant with rather than devoid of meaning. Where Quakerism claims to divest itself of the humdrum iconography and ritualistic trappings of organized religion—preferring white-washed walls and clear light to incense, statuary, and stained glass—Heade self-consciously purges from his art the trappings of

academic painting and those declarations of self that are a keynote of Romanticism. In a gesture of visual puritanism, a stripping of the altars, he reaches to the very essence of his subject and offers the viewer the freedom to interpret it as he or she may wish. It's my belief that Heade seeks in this work something parallel to the inner light of Quaker theology, through his reverential analysis of the natural fall of light on grass and water, the moving of a rainstorm across a coastal plain. Scrutiny of the external world and theological questioning were for Heade, as for his contemporaries John Ruskin and Ralph Waldo Emerson, one and the same process. I want to suggest, then, that Heade transforms a quotidian scene into a statement of aesthetic and pictorial purism, reconfiguring the empty salt marshes as a secular icon, a focus for spiritual and perhaps even religious devotion. Heade gives us a series of plateaus whose poignant, agonizing emptiness, whose very lack of specific features, forces the viewer to confront the painful questions of faith and identity so easily deflected by the Wagnerian, nationalistic bombast of much work from this period.

It was the painting's combination of formal innovation, quiet technical mastery, and affective plangency that inspired me to place it at the heart of *American Sublime*, an exhibition I curated with Andrew Wilton at Tate Britain in 2002. Thanks to the generosity of the Yale University Art Gallery, the painting traveled to London for the exhibition. Few visitors to the show could ever have heard of Heade, whose work is not represented in any British collection. Yet *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* was singled out by British critics as a key work in the exhibition. It hung in a room of small paintings from the 1850s and 1860s that stood in contrast to the bold and grandiose works in the rest of the exhibition (such as Yale's *Mount Ktaadn*, by Frederic Edwin Church), providing a contrasting insight

into American art of the period and a moment of repose in a show otherwise characterized by works assertive in color, composition, and scale, replete with symbolism and pictorial drama.

We were able in *American Sublime* to install the work alongside three other paintings by Heade depicting Newburyport Meadows in Massachusetts, works deriving from a series of images whose content is minimal—haystacks, rivulets, a few harvesters in the sunset—yet whose impact is profound. There are about 120 of these paintings, made over a period of forty-five years. Together, they constitute a profound meditation that utterly transcends the seeming banality of their subject matter. It's impossible, perhaps, to see a series of paintings of haystacks without thinking of the Claude Monet series of the 1890s. Modernist taste would tend to present Monet's assertive use of paint as exemplary of his radicalism and Heade's plain surfaces and multiple glazes as conservative and backward-looking.

But I am quite serious in arguing that Monet's works, for all their gestural freedom, can appear crude and even pretentious when compared to Heade's, to me, more subtle and penetrating work. Monet's performative, theatrical manipulation of paint chimed with the Modernist project. To misuse a distinction made by Michael Fried, one might contrast Monet's theatricality with Heade's absorption in his subject. Monet presents the painted surface as an extension of his artistic persona. Heade gently leads the viewer through imperceptibly thin layers of paint into the great emptiness of nature. Monet's vision is ultimately triumphalist, reassuring, egotistical: Look at me, as the big signature in the corner asserts. Heade's is bleak, foreboding: Look at the emptiness of nature, look at God, and think, feel, and worship for yourself. For critics in the 1950s, such as Clement Greenberg, whose mission was to find historical precedents for the big, gestural American Abstract Expressionist



Plate 1



paintings of that era, Heade's work—small, bourgeois in scale, obsessed with apparently quotidian detail—could look ridiculous in its pedantry, a dead end in art history. Canvases by Monet, with their loose brushwork and chromatic assertiveness, by contrast, clearly fed into that late-Romantic Action Painting tradition. Like Hans Namuth's photographs of Jackson Pollock, one could imagine Monet at work, his strokes swift, bold, deliberately provocative, swiping and blotting at the canvas. But Heade was anything but quick. *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* was made slowly in the studio. It was made painstakingly—with small brushes, in series of near-transparent glazes—and thoughtfully—each glaze applied with care, over a period of weeks, after the last layer had dried. Heade's delicate gauze of glazes could be easily damaged by clumsy or overzealous cleaning, but the excellent condition of *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* allows us to appreciate the subtlety of his technique.

We are not standing in the 1950s, happily, and it is no longer the case that contemporary art production is about picture planes, paint, and abstractions. Action Painting is dead. The macho persona of the artist-as-hero has been systematically undermined by more than a generation of Postmodern critique. Contemporary art production tends to be concerned with issues of identity, spirituality, belonging, place, space—issues that, I'd wager, are more subtly considered by Martin Johnson Heade than by Monet or Pollock.

Let's consider what is new about *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes*. How do I justify my claims for its radical reformism, its rejection of pictorial convention? Unlike American and British landscape painting from before 1850, this is not, to my mind, a Romantic painting. It shares something with the naturalism of an artist like John Constable, whose penetrating, inspirational studies of sky and light can be seen at the Yale Center for British Art. But Heade's

surfaces deny that sense of the Romantic artist as a confessional genius, which is inherent to Constable's practice. The drama of Romanticism is absent here. Considering especially that its subject is an oncoming storm, this is a singularly undramatic painting. Think, for example, of the work of Thomas Cole, which is full of "shock and awe" (a formulation of American sublimity all too familiar in modern times). Cole's work exudes explosive violence. *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* does possess a sense of quiet menace, perhaps, but nothing like the paintings of Cole, who so often offers a simple binary in which a fearsome storm on one side of the composition is balanced by a heavenly tranquillity on the other. This contrast of motifs resembles the construction of an early Romantic piece of music, a symphony in which there are contrasting first and second subjects, masculine and feminine, the way Beethoven put together a symphonic argument. In such binary forms, the drama of contrast is the motivating principle. But in Heade's mid-nineteenth-century painting, this Romantic heritage is abandoned in favor of a cooler, more reserved viewpoint. It is, to continue the musical metaphor, a symphonic poem such as Dvořák or Smetana might have written, evocative and eloquent, rhapsodic but formally self-deprecating.

To pursue this analysis, let's start by looking at the way this painting is organized. Unlike painting in the Modernist tradition, which draws attention to the materiality of paint and canvas, Heade's work, apparently delicate and fragile in its physical form, delivers a massive space, a sense of volume. The surface of the painting offers no resistance but transfers you directly into the physical space of the landscape. Heade's mastery of perspective allows for this small, flat object to conjure up a sense of vast expanses. It is a common critique of "academic" painting that its glossy illusions

require too little of the viewer, delivering easy, populist pleasures. But Heade's work gives no easy payoff. It calls for an imaginative engagement. Heade invites the viewer to enter the painting, placing his or her body in relation to the size of the objects in the canvas in order to explore represented and imagined space. Unusually, the horizon is very low, and Heade eschews the verticals on either side to frame the composition—the *repoussoir* trees used by almost every landscape painter from Claude to John Constable and Thomas Cole. The felling of these trees is an act of pioneering reformation, a telling removal of the father figures of landscape painting, which opens up new, panoramic possibilities.

Heade achieves a sense of recession by giving us indices to draw us into the composition. The most effective element investing us in the painting's quiet world is the quotidian motif of a ditch, a dike of salt water. This simple device operates in a manner that is both perspectivally and associatively complex. It brings us into the composition through a double oxbow, quite a common geographical feature of salt marshes, examples of which can be seen today from the windows of the train between New Haven and Bridgeport. Enter the painting and follow that double oxbow, perhaps imagining yourself punting down it as agricultural laborers might have done while delivering cut hay or food for grazing animals. As you experience the painting's fictional space, you will find yourself both oppressed and elated. Above you, great black clouds well up; beyond, a huge expanse of space in the distance.

The double oxbow might also be a subtle reference to the Romantic landscape of the previous generation. One of Thomas Cole's most celebrated paintings was *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm*, of 1836, known as *The Oxbow* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), a parable of

modern America in which the oxbow of the Connecticut River in Northampton becomes a site for the enactment of the drama of nature versus culture. The painting contrasts a storm over the wilderness with peace and prosperity over the agricultural lands of the plains, and Cole portrays himself, top-hatted in the foreground, as a chronicler of historical change and a lover of nature. Heade may be claiming some such role for himself in *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes*, but the artist himself is no longer a physical presence. Cole's dramatic staging of historical and moral issues through a representation of the natural environment gives way to a more subtle, quietist approach.

As well as the double oxbow, a second and perhaps conflicting system operates to create space. The seven haystacks are deployed within the composition with extreme care. If one were to plot a map of the layout of the haystacks, as if from directly above, one would find that they, too, follow a double oxbow shape. But the effect of these curious, uncanny shapes, larger or smaller depending upon their distance from the artist, makes a striking impression on the viewer. The whole painting, of course, employs an Albertian perspective scheme, which leads to a vanishing point. All the objects in the picture fit perfectly into that scheme; one tiny error and the magic of the illusion would be lost. But by repeating a highly distinctive motif—in whose outline I see an uncanny echo of the great baptistery at Pisa—in different scales and registers, Heade alludes to a much older form of perspective, in which the size of objects simply is reduced to indicate distance. In the *Bayeux Tapestry*, Gothic illuminated manuscripts, or early Sienese panel paintings, tiny figures are juxtaposed directly with larger ones to indicate distance between them. Heade uses this device here, in addition to vanishing-point perspective, in order to create a massive plain over which the

storm can pass. In this way, he creates the vast, solemn emptiness that provides the picture's overwhelming power.

Heade also uses a device beloved of all landscape painters, whether the chilliest imitator of Nicolas Poussin or the most bombastic Turnerian Romantic: chiaroscuro. Without the play of light and shade, landscape tends to become meaningless, a mere catalogue of objects. However, Heade does not adopt the traditional use of regular bands of light and dark to vary his composition. He doesn't cast features at either side into the shadow and allow a patch of light to enliven the foreground. Rather, he throws over the bottom third of his composition a great band of darkness; the storm is upon us and is encroaching rapidly upon the plain. In minutes, the storm clouds will cast the entire vista into deep shadow. The drama of the natural scene determines Heade's innovative composition.

Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes makes a complex and multiple appeal to the senses. I've alluded to Heade's silence, but his is a silence invaded by the sound of rain falling on water and reeds, an uncanny sound that envelops the listener on all sides. And we should also consider another sense: smell. The olfactory associations evoked by this painting are powerful. There's a strange brackish odor of salt water about these marshes; the water in Heade's foreground slips into the landscape and pervades it with a saline marine smell that mixes vegetation, mosses, roots, and reeds. And finally there is touch. The idea of touch in relation to Heade is paradoxical. Unlike Monet's surfaces, which resemble ice cream or yogurt, the surface of Heade's painting has no texture at all. This frustrated the Modernist critics in the London showing of *American Sublime*, who were brought up to value surface texture in nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting. Yet in American mid-nineteenth-century painting there is very little to enjoy in the actual texture of the

paint. The paint is thin, the glazes almost invisible to the naked eye, the brushstrokes tiny and evasive. That very fact, however, allows Heade to concentrate on textures that are actually properties of the objects he's representing. Look closely at this painting and you will see an extraordinary range of tactile effects, from the freshly cut hay on the wagon to the water disturbed by falling rain to the reeds and the mossy post in the foreground. In the distance, the eye can explore among the rich and dense foliage all kinds of textures and two or three different kinds of cloud, carefully defined and described. This form of realism is not casual, not a mere banal cataloguing of lumps of matter. It is not the slick illusionism of the academic showman. Heade's is a pious realism that appeals not just to our sense of sight but to the way our imagination decodes visual information and then creates images in the mind from it. The objects in Heade's painting are, I believe, described in a manner both religious and scientific, in which, to quote John Ruskin in *Modern Painters*, to paint accurately is "following in the steps of nature and tracing the finger of God."² The two things were not in any kind of collision for Martin Johnson Heade.

This painting is not merely a natural drama, however, nor a study of nature alone. On this great plain there is a key element of human activity. Agriculture has shaped the natural world; the hay is being harvested, even from this marshy and difficult terrain. And while there are only two tiny figures here, indicated slightly, they are clearly enough denoted for us to conclude that one is male and one female. We may wonder whether these figures represent an Adam and an Eve, primeval American figures ready to repopulate a new world, though to do so on the basis of an original sin that might find its echo in the oncoming storm. But such a reading would, in my view, be far-fetched. There was no labor in Eden;

harvesting is a feature of the postlapsarian world, a result of the curse of Adam: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Gen. 3:19).

It would be perfectly historically appropriate for Heade to represent male and female figures at work in the harvest. In contrast to Britain, where painters had been celebrating fields full of busy haymakers and harvesters since the early eighteenth century, in America the problem was that of a small population; women were needed in the workforce. In the overcrowded British Isles, the problem was scarcity of food; in America there were too few people to harvest the bounty of nature, a point that Heade nicely symbolized in this painting. It is no surprise that the first effective harvesting machinery was exhibited in London by Americans at the Great Exhibition of 1851, perhaps a decade before Heade completed this painting. There is no machinery here, however—on these treacherous salt marshes, any mechanization would be impossible. Unlike the great open fields of the Midwest, which were being brought under cultivation by the 1850s, such land produced only minimal profits and could not sustain the major investment that machinery would entail. It’s absolutely impossible, however, that these two people could have cut enough hay to make the seven great haystacks here, let alone what’s just been left on the wagon. So these figures are emblems of a bigger labor force, perhaps departed now for other hay fields.

Heade’s painting is insistently rural, betraying no sign of modernity or industrialization. He shows us—in one sense—a prelapsarian scene, undisturbed by the ambivalent energies of modernization. This point is eloquently made in the present hang at Yale, which juxtaposes *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* with another work by Heade, *Lynn Meadows*, from 1863. In *Lynn Meadows*, beneath the sunset,

a railroad cuts a horrible geometric line, a gash, across the center of the composition, and a train pollutes the air with filthy coal smoke. The sunset becomes an apocalypse, and the tiny human figures in the middle ground appear completely lost. Maybe they're digging shellfish out of the sand. But they look squalid and neglected in contrast to the rooted, stoic, even heroic pair working among the great haystacks in *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes*. If the latter painting is an Eden, *Lynn Meadows* offers us a taste of an industrial hell. In this regard, Heade was better placed than many to comment on the effects of urbanization, since, unlike most American artists, he actually had traveled to nearly every significant industrial city in the United States. He knew what was happening in the industrial centers in the Northeast and increasingly in the Midwest. The fragility of Heade's rural ecology, the vulnerability of the farmers harvesting their bounty from the salt marshes, suddenly become apparent. Aspects of the composition emphasize this point. The haystack in the foreground has been built up on stilts, on a plinth, to avoid flooding from the tidal salt water, but it's not covered and still could be damaged by the rain. We realize that like the haystack, which appears initially to be a monumental form, the rural world is under threat.

All this might imply that Heade was a mere recidivist, a conservative who wished to preserve the old Jeffersonian ideals of the United States as a rural land of self-contained yeomen, rather than a modern American of the industrial era. But while he certainly saw the ecological threats posed by steam power and industry, Heade was undoubtedly a figure abreast of the culture of modernity, and it is with this point I wish to conclude. I contested earlier the accepted idea of a contrast between Monet and Heade as being that of modern versus premodern or "unmodern" painting. Rather, in these two

artists we confront two competing forms of modern visual culture. I'd like to situate *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* as a marker of a moment of modernity in which the relationship between human-kind and the environment was being renegotiated. Heade's pictorial puritanism is, in itself, a gesture of radical visual change, a visual reformation that parallels Modernism's claims to have effected a radical cleansing of a decadent academic tradition. Furthermore, in his cleansing of the pictorial lens, Heade references the most modern forms of visual culture available to him.

The research of Theodore Stebbins has revealed that Heade only took up landscape painting in the mid-1850s, in his midthirties, having worked before that mainly as a portraitist. It was only after he installed himself in the Tenth Street Studio Building in New York, in the fall of 1858, that Heade devoted himself fully to landscape painting. His fellow tenants included Frederic Edwin Church, the leading landscape painter of the day, Sanford Gifford, and John W. Casilear. Much of Heade's earlier work drew inspiration from various provincial forms of art making, from Hicks's *Peaceable Kingdom* series to traditional, workmanlike forms of portraiture. But in 1858 he found himself surrounded not only by landscape paintings of the highest sophistication and modernity, such as Church's great *Niagara*, of 1857 (Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), but also by the visual culture of modernity in all its riotous novelty: photography, the panorama, graphic journalism, and advertising. It is possible, too, that he saw, perhaps in Boston, the touring Pre-Raphaelite exhibition of 1857 to 1858, which included landmarks of modern landscape painting such as Ford Madox Brown's *English Autumn Afternoon*, of 1853 (Birmingham City Museums). Brown's painting, like Church's *Niagara*, eschews the Claudean *repoussoir* and attempts a fidelity of representation quite unprecedented in the history of art,

informed by photography and new forms of scientific notation and analysis. Where Brown selected an oval, eye-shaped composition, Church drew from the wildly popular medium of the panorama the idea of a broad, low canvas, only half as tall as it was wide. Heade, too, must have seen the panoramas at Niblo's Theatre in New York and have absorbed the idea of a continual horizon, not framed by *repoussoirs* but extending forever and surrounding the viewer. The protocinematic excitement of such panoramas was a key element in the popular visual culture of New York. The 1850s also saw the proliferation of the daguerreotype and other forms of photography in New York. By the time *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* was painted (after 1858), many artists were adept in the use of the camera, and all had learned to look at the natural world through the new, interrogatory gaze of the photographic lens.

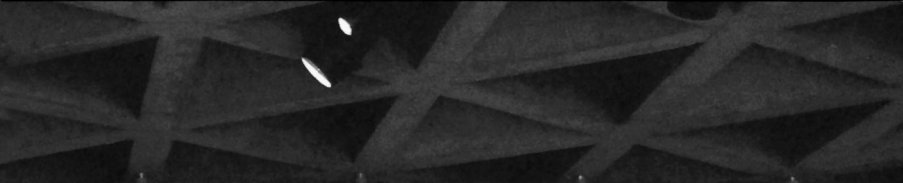
Armed with these avant-garde visual strategies, Heade was able to pursue his own path. Unlike Brown, who celebrated the unexpected beauty of the hinterlands of the modern city, or Church and his competitor Albert Bierstadt, who sought out the most grandiose effects of New World nature, Heade's Quaker instincts drove him to seek beauty in the simplest subjects. Looking, paradoxically, with both the intensity of the camera and the broad inclusiveness of the endless panorama, Heade was able to reexamine the most basic elements of landscape—water, earth, and air; the harvesting of hay; a coming storm—to dramatic, modern effect.

Yet this vigorous new interrogation of the world provided Heade with the materials for a very Protestant meditation on human life (with the two harvesters going about their appointed tasks); the presence of God in nature; and, perhaps—in those oncoming storm clouds—the mysteries of divine providence. In the Puritan-influenced world of Heade's youth, signs of God's handiwork were

sought in everyday events, and many Northerners felt that the Civil War represented yet one more act in a divinely inspired history. While the dating of *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* is a matter of speculation, Heade certainly painted it after 1858, when he began to work in Massachusetts. By that time, the shadow of an inevitable war was already upon the American polity, a shadow that Heade surely acknowledged in his great, black painting *Approaching Thunder Storm*, of 1859 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Here a change in the weather is surely a signal (as it was so often in the works of Cole and Church) of a storm of more symbolic and apocalyptic dimensions. And perhaps Heade indicates in *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes*, using the most modern methods available to him, that the sacramental calm of the distant scene, of the Puritan America of his youth, is to be subject to a terrible disruption. It is entirely typical of Heade, so quiet and nonintrusive an artist, that he devolves to the viewer the decision as to whether the oncoming storm symbolizes the war or simply the depredations of modernity and industrialization, or whether this exquisite small canvas merely chronicles the momentary changes of meteorology over a coastal plain. Heade's Quakerish refusal of exegesis and dogma leaves the viewer to ponder, to experience, and to worship—in silence.

- 1 For a definitive account of Heade's life and work, see Theodore E. Stebbins, *The Life and Work of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). See also Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820–1880* (London: Tate, 2002). Aspects of the New York context can be explored in the excellent catalogue: *Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds., Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825–1861* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).
- 2 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (originally published in 1843), in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: G. Allen, 1903–12), 3:623.





Karsten Harries
Why Cézanne Matters

Cézanne's art resists theorizing. To be sure, it is difficult to write about the progress of modern art, particularly about Cubism, without mentioning Paul Cézanne. One could thus situate the painting before us within the development of Cézanne's art, and that development in turn within a progress that reached a first culmination in the Cubist compositions of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. But such an approach is inattentive to Cézanne's distinctive passion or voice, to the way his paintings engage nature in a very personal dialogue. Yet the nature of this dialogue I find difficult to understand. This helps to explain why I have been reluctant to write about Cézanne: for lack of words.

So why did I choose this particular painting, *The House of Dr. Gachet at Auvers-sur-Oise* (plate 2)? I could speak of the architecture of the painting, of the way the black mark crowning the roof of the doctor's house seems to me to offer a key to the architecture of the whole; of the way the broken ochers and browns speak to each other; of the way in which colors, even as they serve the task of representation, seem oblivious to such service. Note how Cézanne deals, or rather does not really deal, with light and shadow, flattening the represented townscape: there is tension between this conversation of paint and the task of representation. Or I could point to the way paint here relates to the canvas, the way it presents an obstacle to

the easy passage from pictorial representation to represented reality. It was precisely this that outraged so many when paintings by Cézanne were first exhibited. Why should a painting present such obstacles, obstacles that, given the expectations formed by nineteenth-century academic painting, had to make it seem not quite finished, an unresolved, preparatory sketch?

There are, of course, a great many works in our gallery, and a number of these may seem more obviously important than this rather modest Cézanne. That appears especially true given the current state of our art world, which for the most part seems to have turned its back on the painterly representation that still invites one to visit this place to consider how Cézanne dealt with it, or to look at some old photograph showing the house of Dr. Gachet, with its distinctive roof and prominent chimneys.¹ But I feel no need to follow this invitation here, even as, looking at this painting, I find it difficult not to think of what is represented, or rather of the abyss that separates the object before us, canvas and paint, from what it represents—an abyss that seems at once crucially important and quite unimportant.

Cézanne painted this house at least three times. One very similar version hangs now in the Musée d'Orsay, in Paris, a gift of the doctor's son to his country. It is from a very similar point of view, although a bit farther down the road and a bit to the left. That Cézanne so often painted the same motif over and over—think of Mont Sainte-Victoire or the Bibémus Quarry—seems significant. One senses a kind of struggle. But the goal of this struggle would not seem to be faithful representation. Cézanne is concerned with a different kind of faithfulness. Consider once more the black mark at the peak of the doctor's house in our painting. What does it represent? It has no counterpart in the Paris version. Suppose it were

eliminated? Would it matter? The way it rhymes with the edge of the house below and the edge of the road helps to establish a strong vertical that, in turn, lets the diagonals speak more loudly. And what are we to make of the white or whitish strokes around the roof of the doctor's house? How does their very material presence serve the task of representing the sky? One can almost understand why Cézanne should have been singled out for ridicule by critics who saw his work at the 1874 exhibition of the Société Anonyme des Artistes, Peintres, Sculpteurs, Graveurs: "Of all known juries," mocked the reviewer for *Le rappel*, "none ever imagined, even in a dream, the possibility of accepting any work by this painter, who used to present himself at the Salon carting his canvases on his back like Jesus his cross."² Today we may find it difficult to understand this sort of response, although given the then-prevalent expectations about the qualities a finished painting should possess, a painting such as this had to seem unfinished; for example, in the way canvas and paint are obtrusively present. What is the point of the ocher slab of paint below the tree trunk on the left? The way the paint is applied, the way it sits on the canvas, is much too willful for faithful representation. We become aware of paint as much as we do of the representational function of paint. And the two are in tension, tension that the painting keeps alive and does not seek to resolve.

So Cézanne seems to struggle in this picture. But what was the point of the struggle? I don't think the reviewer's comparison of Cézanne with Jesus should simply be dismissed. Especially in the first half of his life, Cézanne would seem to have experienced painting rather like a cross he had to bear. The art establishment had told him over and over that art was not something he was particularly good at. In school his close friend Émile Zola was considered the more gifted draftsman. But painting was a burden of which Cézanne could

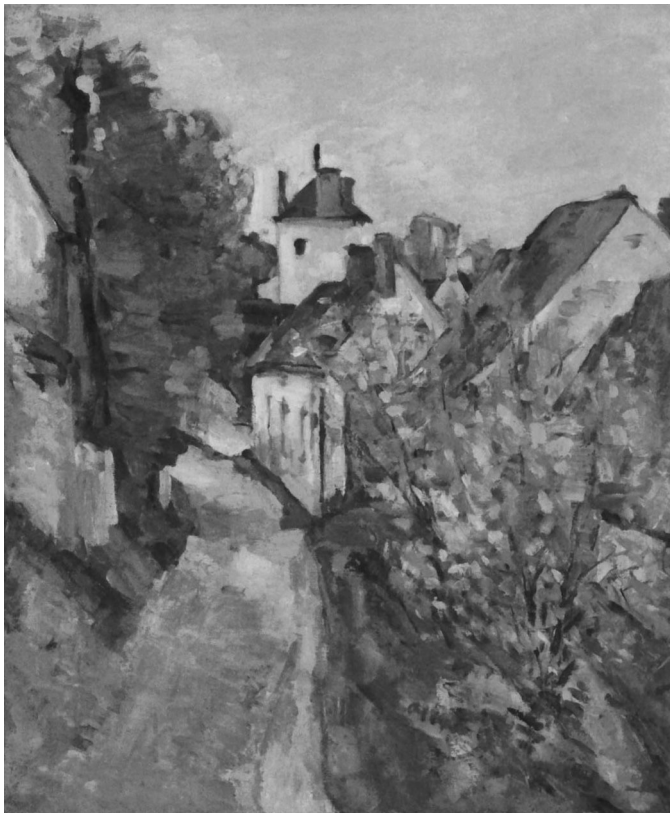


Plate 2

not rid himself. In painting, he wrestled with some very personal demons that kept visiting him. Cézanne needed art to heal himself.

I began by saying that I find it hard to speak about the picture before us. Yet to be sure, many things about it are easily said. For example: that the painting was probably made in 1873; that Auvers is close to Paris; that Dr. Gachet, homeopath and psychiatrist, Darwinian and Socialist, sometime artist and always-generous patron of the arts, bought the house in the picture for his ailing wife on April 9, 1872; that many artists visited the house, including Cézanne, who, as I mentioned, painted it a number of times. I could add that much later, on May 20, 1890, van Gogh visited Dr. Gachet in this very same house, both painter and doctor weary and sick. Van Gogh, who painted a famous portrait of the doctor, was to shoot himself two months later; the doctor, who had never gotten over the death of his wife in 1875, sketched the artist from his deathbed. This, then, is a storied house, and one could continue to relate stories about it. But in the presence of the picture, such stories seem hardly worth telling. Do they have anything to do with the painting's success or failure? Would it matter if this were some other house, in some other town, owned by a different person? But what then can I say about this painting that will not seem trivial? Talk about paint strokes and canvas? About greens and tans, blues and grays? Would I not have done better to pick some work that is easier to talk about and that addresses far more directly the issues that matter to today's artists?

For example, a work by Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp has, of course, become one of the patron saints of contemporary art. Picking one of his works, I could have addressed the question, Just what made the art world embrace Duchamp as it has? Presupposed is a profound dissatisfaction with just the kind of art exemplified

by this Cézanne. No one gave clearer expression to such dissatisfaction than Duchamp. Consider what he had to say about what distinguished his art from Futurist painting, a statement that also suggests what separated it from the art of Cézanne: "Futurism was an impression of the mechanical world. It was strictly a continuation of the Impressionist movement. I was not interested in that. I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. I was much more interested in recreating ideas in painting."³ Duchamp went on to assert that "until the last hundred years all painting had been literary or religious," that is to say, had been at the service of words or the Word, and explained his own work as an attempt to restore to painting its lost literary dimension, to lead it back to a tradition it had forsaken sometime in the nineteenth century.

Cézanne, it would seem, moves very much within the orbit Duchamp wanted to leave behind. In the painting before us the physical aspect is all-important: the way paint sits on the canvas but also the way the painting responds to the seen. By the time he made this picture, Cézanne had learned that passion and imagination were not enough to produce significant art, that his impetuous attempts to paint dream-visions without checking himself through careful and patient observation of nature were trapping him within himself and leading his art into a dead end. Cézanne desperately needed to get outside himself. And that outside was furnished not by words but by nature.

Cézanne, to be sure, disliked the modern mechanical world and railed against it, against the way the new technology had violated and threatened to transform the land he loved and had explored as a boy on long hikes with his friends Baptistin Baille and Zola. This fact has more than mere anecdotal significance. It may invite a charge of nostalgia, but Cézanne clung to such nostalgia, always dreaming of

a Provence somehow beyond the modern world. The industrialization beginning to take shape around him and that had just exploded in the Franco-Prussian War is given little space in his paintings: the brutal gash of *The Railway Cutting*, of 1870 (Neue Pinakothek, Munich), a gash violating his beloved Mont Sainte-Victoire, comes to mind.

Cézanne was suspicious of words, cared little for theory. And standing before this Cézanne one senses that words do not matter all that much. What matters is that we look, that we explore the way paint occupies the canvas and answers paint. But that is not quite right either: When I consider this painting, I get a sense of Cézanne's looking and looking at what he saw before him—deeply moved by light playing on some wall, on the road, in the sky, or by the green grass—not in order to capture what he sees in an accurate representation but to respond to it with something that would have an analogous power to move us. I sense Cézanne looking and working on his painting, using strokes of paint as building blocks but not mute material, rather like voices breaking the silence of the canvas, joining in a conversation. But throughout, this conversation of paint remains very much a response to what the painter sees and feels. Six weeks before his death, Cézanne wrote, “As a painter I am becoming more lucid before nature, but for me the realization of my sensations is always very difficult. I am not able to arrive at the intensity which unfolds before my senses; I do not have that magnificent richness of color which animates nature.”⁴ The painter here suggests a continuing struggle to rid himself of the clichés and all-too-personal obsessions, longings, and imaginings that cloud the desired lucidity. Such lucidity unfolds sensations of an extraordinary intensity. It is these sensations that the painting tries and forever fails to capture; yet in this very failure Cézanne leads us to an awareness of the abyss that separates the “magnificent richness of color which animates

nature” from whatever the painter can put on canvas. His art helps us to become more lucid before nature.

Cézanne found it hard to express himself in words. And that is part of what draws me to his art: we are all caught today far too much in webs of words.

In this painting, Cézanne is not making a point. He is not demonstrating anything. He is responding to a not-particularly-memorable scene, a sloping road framed by modest houses, the whole towered over by the distant house of Dr. Gachet. These are things that do not assert themselves strongly. Nothing here screams. To properly respond to a picture such as this, we have to begin as Cézanne did when he looked at what was before him, at the inimitable way in which light fell on a wall, roof spoke to roof, greens answered tans. We have to begin as he did when he responded to this conversation with painted analogies that, like strong metaphors, refuse translation into a more literal discourse.

According to Wassily Kandinsky, traditional art can be understood as the product of a kind of dialogue between artist and world. The artist imposes a form on reality, not to conquer it but to reveal it. Ideally there is no tension between these two aspects of painting: The formal order helps reveal the essence of what is to be represented. Abstraction and representation are in perfect balance. If Kandinsky is right, the modern artist no longer strives for such balance. Abstraction and representation now go their separate ways.

How does this apply to the painting we are looking at? Are representation and abstraction in perfect balance here? How did people at the time react to paintings like this one? We heard already from the critic who claimed that no jury in its right mind would consider including a work by Cézanne in an exhibition. Was the task of art

not to offer idealized versions of the familiar? But Cézanne did not see things as did those who ridiculed his paintings. Nor can I quite agree with Maurice Merleau-Ponty when he suggested that Cézanne somehow remained more “faithful to the phenomena in his investigations of perspective.”⁵ In this painting, Cézanne is not overly concerned with perspective, with somehow doing greater justice to the way we actually see than academic painting does. Here a comparison with the same view in the Musée d’Orsay, dating from the same year, is instructive. It shows how free Cézanne was with details, such as the roof angles of the houses or the black mark on top of the house. His goal was not to get closer to what we actually experience, no matter how experience is construed. There is a sense in which paint here begins to function in ways quite independent of concerns of doing justice to what or the way we perceive. What matters is the way Cézanne felt and perceived. It is easy to understand why Cubists should have claimed Cézanne as a precursor.

It is indeed easy to imagine a Cubist response to the painting we are looking at. Consider the houses. And some later paintings by Cézanne seem much closer to what the Cubists wanted. As I pointed out, this is indeed a common way to teach Cézanne. But I am interested here in what such an approach misses; that seems to me more important today than to see in Cézanne the precursor of Cubism, for the glorious experiment that was Cubism had to come to a depressing end. Cubism, as T. J. Clark remarks, thinking especially of Picasso’s and Braque’s pictures from 1911 and 1912, “is painting at the end of its tether. . . . We can best lay hold of these pictures’ overweening ambition . . . if we see them under the sign of failure. They should be looked at in the light of—better still, by the measure of—their inability to conclude the remaking of representation that was their goal.”⁶

But in what sense was Cubist painting a remaking of representation? To be sure, Picasso's works of these years still relate to the things of the world. Kierkegaard might have said that these things still provide the occasions the artist needs to demonstrate his ingenuity, his creativity and originality. But painting here is no longer in the service of representing what these things are. It only pretends to be, and I agree with Clark "that pretense is necessary precisely in order to keep 'painting' alive, since painting in Picasso's view is a set of means generated out of imitation and unthinkable—empty, unconstrained—without it."⁷

Clark speaks here of pretense and failure. We may ask, why failure? Why not celebrate such art as a triumph of the artist's inventiveness, of human freedom, over reality? It is precisely here that we glimpse the gulf that separates Cubist abstraction from the Cézanne before us. Reality provides an artist like Picasso only with occasions that get him going, to be played with as he sees fit, fashioning out of them an artificial, self-sufficient world that possesses its own glittering beauty.

Looking at this Cézanne, on the other hand, I get a sense that the artist was always looking at the things before him; he struggled with what he saw, was in love with it, and attempted to answer with a very personal gift: the gift of what he saw. Cézanne seems little concerned with originality, with novelty. How different in this respect is Picasso, whom Hans Sedlmayr, taking his cues from Kierkegaard, presents as a virtuoso of the interesting, an artist who delights us again and again by leaving behind the established and accepted in unexpected ways.⁸

Picasso called van Gogh's individual "essentially solitary and tragic adventure . . . the archetype of our times."⁹ This description also brings Jackson Pollock to mind. But Cézanne, too, seemed

destined for a variant of the same adventure. That Zola, in *L'oeuvre*, should have the painter Claude Lantier, modeled on Cézanne, hang himself shows that the writer who had been Cézanne's best friend was very much aware of this side of the painter, even if the latter saw only a "disgusting distortion."¹⁰ And it is of interest that, as Sidney Geist notes, Cézanne himself had the curious nickname *Le Pendu* "The Hanged Man" in an artists' circle that met in Dr. Gachet's house in 1873 and "at that time signed an etching (V.1159) with a small hanged man."¹¹ Cézanne did prove Zola wrong; he did not commit suicide, he died painting. But Zola would seem to have been not altogether off the mark. There was that side to Cézanne. Picasso observed that "what forces our attention is Cézanne's anxiety—that's Cézanne's lesson; the torments of van Gogh—that is the actual drama of the man. The rest is sham."¹² These torments are all too apparent in Cézanne's many figural compositions with more or less explicit erotic themes, themes that preoccupied him to the very end. Cézanne began as a proto-Expressionist. Full of ambition and, like Pollock, not an especially gifted draftsman, he gave free reign to a baroque, erotically charged imagination, hoping that passionate intensity would suffice, only to be dissatisfied by what he created. At this stage in his life, Cézanne was in danger of burying himself within himself, feeding on his own dream-visions. His might well have been another solitary and tragic adventure, like that of van Gogh, who shot himself not all that far from the house in our picture. What saved Cézanne was his love of nature, which prevented him from using nature as a mere reservoir of occasions, to be played with as one saw fit, as points of departure for interesting, personally charged painterly constructions. The present picture suggests nothing of that. Painting here is not so much play as a struggle to get things right.

What is the measure of such rightness? It is not so much the look of things as the way the artist found himself profoundly moved by what he saw, moved in ways he could not put into words. Portraits, still lifes, and, increasingly, landscapes forced him to get outside himself. In helping him find this path, Camille Pissarro was no doubt a crucial mentor, especially in the months leading up to our painting. And so I want to conclude with what Pissarro's friend, the novelist Octave Mirbeau, had to say about one of Pissarro's paintings, his *Cowherd at Valhermeil, Auvers-sur-Oise*, of 1874 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York): "I've been thinking about your cowherd and her cow and about the stained glass window behind it. The project gave me a religious sensation . . . of that religion the two of us love, in which God is replaced by matter Eternal and splendid, and by the infinite!"¹³ The simile of stained glass attributes to paint the power of transfiguration. Cézanne's paint, too, possesses such power. Nature spoke to him, spoke to him in ways that, while full of meaning, still resisted being put into words. All he could offer were painted metaphors of the silent speech of things.

- 1 See Pavel Machotka, *Cézanne: Landscape into Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
- 2 Quoted in John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne: A Biography* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 101.
- 3 Marcel Duchamp, "Painting . . . at the Service of the Mind," in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, comp. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 393–94.
- 4 Cézanne to his son, September 8, 1906, quoted in Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 104.
- 5 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 13.
- 6 T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 187.
- 7 Ibid., 185.
- 8 Hans Sedlmayr, "Kierkegaard über Picasso," in *Der Tod des Lichtes* (Salzburg, Austria: Otto Müller, 1964), 63–85.
- 9 Picasso, as recalled by Françoise Gilot, quoted in Clark, *Farewell*, 222.
- 10 Frank Elgar, *Cézanne* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 110. For an illuminating if exaggerated discussion of these torments, see Sidney Geist, *Interpreting Cézanne* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).
- 11 Geist, *Interpreting Cézanne*, 78.
- 12 Quoted in Judith Wechsler, ed., *Cézanne in Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975), 77.
- 13 Mirbeau, quoted in Clark, *Farewell*, 61.

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Jeffrey C. Alexander
Iconic Experience in Art
and Life: Standing before
Giacometti's *Standing
Woman*

Can the experience of art offer a window into social life? This depends on how we understand art and society in turn.

“Art and society” is a venerable topic usually addressed in a literal way. Artists are esteemed as sensitive social observers, and their product is incorporated into the social sciences as a special kind of data, one that opens the door to less accessible dimensions of history and society.¹ I will resist such a reductionist approach and try to move farther along an alternative path that Friedrich Nietzsche laid out.

Surface/Depth in Nietzsche

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche proclaims that “art is not an imitation of nature but its metaphysical supplement, raised up beside it in order to overcome it.”² Explaining that “I am speaking of esthetic delight,” he insists that “these images yield a moral delight . . . in the form of compassion or ethical triumph.”

If art is not a simple representation of the natural world, then we can say, in the language of social science, that the aesthetic dimension has autonomy. But Nietzsche is not an aesthete. He proclaims for art not only a symbolic but also a metaphysical status. The form of art carries a moral message. Moralizing, abstract discourse is not the only model of ethical communication.

Revisiting classical art, Nietzsche acknowledges that Greek sculpture succeeds because it is “able to . . . force the contemplative eye to a tranquil delight in individual forms.” But Greek art disturbs this purely aesthetic pleasure. It forces us to look for deeper meanings that the surface simultaneously hides and reveals. Nietzsche plays with the contrast between surface and depth, clarity and mystery, challenging the Modernist separation of aesthetics and morality, the two domains that Kant said must never get in each other’s way. With that rationalist position Nietzsche totally disagrees. Classical Greek drama, he writes, “penetrated the tumultuous world,” so that we “felt as though what was passing before us was merely a symbolic image, whose deepest meaning we almost divined and which we longed to tear away in order to reveal the original image behind it.” On the one hand, “the intense clarity of the image failed to satisfy us, for it seemed to hide as much as it revealed.” On the other, while the image seemed to invite us to “pierce the veil and examine the mystery behind it, its luminous concreteness nevertheless held the eye entranced and kept it from probing deeper.”

Surface/Depth in the Icons of Giacometti

If we consider a work such as Alberto Giacometti’s *Standing Woman* (plate 3), we are struck by its tactile, textured, worked-over, kneaded quality. Its extraordinary craftsmanship marks one of the high achievements in the plastic arts. As Nietzsche explains, however, this arresting surface texture plays a dual role. The “luminous concreteness” of its sculptural surface—the clarity of its image—keeps our eye entranced. Indeed, it gives us such aesthetic delight that it (almost) keeps us from probing any further. We become contemplative before such an engrossing image and are (almost) satisfied.

But not quite. When we look at *Standing Woman*, we are also seized by an almost irresistible desire to tear this finely textured surface away. Its sculptural form convinces us that there is actually an original and somehow deeper meaning behind it. Rather than clarifying, its luminous image confounds.

This is what Giacometti intended. The tension between surface, physical form, and the deeper structure of metaphysical meaning defines the greatness of his later art. As the artist and critic Alexander Liberman once remarked upon visiting Giacometti in his studio, the sculptor “is obsessed with the unattainable. . . . How to express in art, an idea, the idea of man?”³

Giacometti gave up conventional painting in the mid-1920s, embracing Surrealism and Symbolism, the styles that first brought him public acclaim. Twenty years later, in 1947, Giacometti explained this transition, saying he had wanted to get rid of resemblance, because it allowed the viewer to dwell too much on surface form.

It was no longer the exterior form of people that interested me, but the emotional things... To copy a body at a certain time—and one that was not important to me—[now] seemed to me completely wrong and stupid, and wasted hours of my life. It was no longer a question of producing a figure with a superficial likeness.⁴

After a decade, Giacometti gave up his adventure in Surrealism. His last effort was the Cubist sculpture of a standing woman, *The Invisible Object*, of 1934 (Museum of Modern Art, New York), which provides an antonymous gloss on *Standing Woman*, the sculpture from 1956 that is our object of interest today. When *The Invisible Object* was unveiled, André Breton heralded it as one of the greatest achievements of the era. Why did Giacometti turn so abruptly away? The answer can only be that he was not yet satisfied with his movement



Plate 3



from surface to depth. He wanted to develop a form that would take us beneath the surface in an even more compelling way.

From 1935, Giacometti began to work only with live models, sculpting and painting face-to-face with people virtually every day for the last three decades of his life. His disappointed Surrealist comrades complained that Giacometti was returning to mere representation, to more accurately portraying the surface of life. What Giacometti wanted, in fact, was to do away with formalist obstruction, to explore not formal types but archetypes of the human being. This second transition was motivated by the same desire as the earlier one; it marked a further effort to find a surface that would yield depth.

I saw again bodies that drew me back to reality, and abstract forms that seemed true in sculpture, but in a nutshell, I wanted to do the one without losing the other. [So] then I wanted to make compositions with figures. For that I had to do one or two life studies . . . and in 1935 I hired a model. These studies took me about a fortnight [but] I worked daily with a model from 1935 to 1940. Nothing was as I had thought. A head (I soon stopped doing figures, there was too much of them) became a completely unknown and immeasurable object for me.⁵

From this point on, Giacometti employed the same few models, time after time, for the rest of his life. At first it was his brother, Diego. He “has posed ten thousand times for me,” Giacometti once remarked.⁶ We are not surprised at the explanation Giacometti offered for this artistic choice: “When he poses I don’t recognize him. I want him to pose so that I can see what I see.” With Diego, Giacometti could more easily get beyond the exterior surface of the model’s face.

When his future wife, Annette, became Giacometti's other regular model, in the early 1940s, his explanation was the same: "When my wife poses for me, after three days she doesn't look like herself. I simply don't recognize her."⁷ Recalling an evening with the Giacomettis in the 1950s, the poet Jacques Dupin recounted that Annette had been posing for Giacometti all afternoon. Over dinner, she asked her husband why he was looking at her in such an intense manner. He replied, "Because I haven't seen you all day."⁸ If, as a recent biographer has remarked, "Diego became all men to Giacometti,"⁹ then Annette became for him all women. Bernard Lamarche-Vadel noted that Giacometti's famous "nine busts of Annette are a collection of idols."¹⁰ The artist had transformed his wife from familiar woman to mysterious archetype. Before Giacometti met Annette, he was famous for regular late-night visits to Parisian brothels. His close friend Jean Genet later suggested that his sexual behavior could be viewed in a metaphysical way.

It seems to me he went to them almost as a worshipper. He went there to see himself kneeling in front of an implacable, distant goddess. Between each naked whore and him there was perhaps the same kind of distance that his statues always keep with us.¹¹

"You never copy the glass on the table," Giacometti once told an interviewer, "You copy the residue of a vision. . . . One sees it disappear, then reappear."¹² Employing the existentialist language of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Giacometti continued that "it is really always between being and non-being." When Giacometti first moved beyond Surrealism, in 1935, he produced a series of sculpted heads that prompted Breton to exclaim, "A head! Everybody knows what a head is."¹⁴ How little he understood what Giacometti was searching for!

This effort to plumb the depth by immersion into and through the surface, to sculpt and paint from models but to create anything but a model in art, set the aesthetic challenge that defined Giacometti's mature style, which he achieved only after 1945, when he returned to postwar Paris from self-imposed exile in Switzerland. Still, while he found a plastic form to capture the tension between surface and depth, for him it could never be resolved. "I shall never succeed," he once lamented, "in putting into a portrait all the power a head contains. . . . to be able to make a head, one head, just once."¹⁴

What were the depths that Giacometti wanted to explore? Certainly, his philosophical interpreters are right that his shockingly dark, gaunt, distant, and intensely worrying figures communicated, in the first place, the social and existential anxiety of European society after the most destructive and antihuman conflict in history.¹⁵ But for Giacometti, just as for his close friend Samuel Beckett, such a historical and generic understanding was not enough. Their art reveals the dark and uncertain fate of humanity in an archetypal way. As Lamarche-Vadel wrote about the later busts, "the iconography of Giacometti's face is an endless catalogue of the unfolding of anxiety and care, of grief and of the stamp of age upon character."¹⁶

The new form that Giacometti created when he returned to Paris was triggered by an extraordinary epiphany, which Michael Peppiatt calls Giacometti's "Pauline experience" and Freud would likely have described as derealization. One evening, while the sculptor sat at the cinema immersed in a film, he felt himself descending below the surface of the screen into iconography itself.

Instead of seeing a person on the screen, I saw vague black blobs moving. I looked at the people around me and as

a result I saw them as I had never seen them before. . . .
I remember very clearly coming out on the Boulevard du
Montparnasse and seeing the Boulevard as I had never seen it
before. Everything was different: depth, objects, colours and
the silence. . . . That day reality was completely revalued for
me; it became the unknown.¹⁸

In an autobiographical essay published one year later, Giacometti suggested that the aesthetic framework within which he was experiencing the outside world had become transformed. It had become iconic, giving him access to the mystical but more realistic underside of social objects.¹⁸ In his description, we can understand the origins of his later art.

During that period I had begun to see heads in the void, in the space that surrounded them. The first time I saw a head I was looking at freeze, become fixed in that single instance forever, I trembled with terror as never before in my life, and a cold sweat ran down my back. This was no longer a living head, but an object which I looked at as I would at any other thing that was dead and alive at the same time. I let out a cry of terror as if I had just crossed over a threshold, as if I had gone into a world that nobody had seen before. . . . This vision came back often, in the metro, in the street, in restaurants or with friends. That waiter at the Brasserie Lipp who stood motionless, bending over me, his mouth open, with no connection with the previous moment or with the following moment, his mouth open, his eyes fixed and unwavering. . . . There was no connection any more between these objects separated by immeasurable chasms of emptiness.¹⁹

The formal innovation that marked Giacometti's later work turned on creating and closing distance. In its solitude and emptiness,

the human being is distant from our feelings, from our touch, from our love, cut off from the solidarity of others. Giacometti sculpts this distance by keeping his famous figures, like *Standing Woman*, far away, naked but desexualized, in full figure but disembodied, sometimes looking or walking toward us but seeming always to be looking and walking away. Yet, at the same time, Giacometti also draws us into this separate space. He allows us to cross the distance he has created, via the soft, worked-over, kneaded texture of his form. His heads seem to be looking inward and outward at the same time, beckoning us inside while keeping us out. His figures, as Lamarche-Vadel remarked, can be seen as “de-materializing and un-making the figure,” even while they communicate materiality in a powerful way.²⁰

Giacometti wrote that, after the war, he wanted to make “larger figures,” in contrast to the tiny, compressed, and obsessive miniatures he created during the war years in Switzerland, which he carried with him to Paris in 1945 in a shoebox. “But to my surprise,” he testified, “they only seemed likenesses if they were long and thin.” Only immensely long and thin forms could seem likenesses of the powerful, anxious, and iconic associations that Giacometti had more deeply in mind. Genet beautifully captured the manner in which the formal structure of the sculptor’s later work allowed him to communicate being and nothingness.

Not only do his statues come upon us from very far away, from a remote horizon, but wherever you are in regard to them, they make it seem that you are looking up at them, are below. They are on a remote horizon, elevated, and you are at the bottom of the hill. They come hurrying to meet you and to pass beyond you.²¹

Surface/Depth in the Icons of Society

The artist tells the truth about an object by using surface form as a device to draw us deeper, into iconic meaning. If he succeeds, the specifics of the object and its production fall away. We are unconcerned with who the model was, what the artist felt like, where he did his work, or the political events of his day. As the artist draws us into this deeper level, the aesthetic object becomes a symbol, not a specific referent for some specific thing but a signifier that points to all “such things.” It becomes a collective representation, an ideal type of object, person, or situation. By its very uniqueness, it triggers a process of typification. Esoteric aesthetic objects become iconic by drawing us into the heart of the world.

Such materiality is just as crucial for establishing normative “types” in social as in artistic life. So is the same deceptive relation between surface and depth. In the course of everyday life, we are drawn into the experience of meaning and emotionality by surface forms. We experience these forms in a tactile way. They have an expressive texture that we “feel” in our unconscious minds and associate with other ideas and things. These ideas and things are simultaneously personal and social.

In contrast to the quintessential modern conditions of impersonality and withdrawal, this movement from surface to depth represents immersion into the materiality of social life. It is immersion into an aesthetic object that makes it into an icon.

Immersion is a dual process, a dialectic between “subjectification” and “materialization.” By subjectification, I mean the drawing of the object, seemingly external, into oneself. In this movement from object to subject, a thing becomes alive, or seems to take on life. Becoming us, it loses its “objectness.” One no longer sees the object but oneself, one’s projections, one’s own convictions and

beliefs. By materialization, I mean to suggest the opposite experience, the process by which the subject falls into the object and loses one-self. One becomes the thing, existing inside it. One lives and breathes the object, looking outside to the world from inside it. Its texture is your texture. Thus Flaubert's remark: "I am Madame Bovary."

If immersion creates icons, then it is icons that allow immersion. This is a "mystical" experience in that the distinction between subject and object dissolves. There is oneness, not duality. As the Beatles sang in "I Am the Walrus": "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together."

Iconic consciousness is not entirely mystical, for there is also referentiality. The subject loses itself in the experience of immersion, but the icon points outside itself and outside the subject to something else, something in the world. We have seen how, for Giacometti, the sculptural icon points to the dark side of the human condition. Any powerful artistic symbol points outside itself in this archetypal way. It can remind us of the stillness of a moment of domestic life, as in Cézanne or Johannes Vermeer, or of erotic excess and pleasure, as in Peter Paul Rubens's women. It can clutch tightly to moral significance, as in Picasso's doves, which also suggest vulnerability and loneliness. Mary Cassatt's woman sitting in an opera box, with her exposed shoulders and still fan, represents allure and elegance but also the privacy, even isolation, of women in the privileged class. Artistic archetypes have denoted men hunting, fishing, posing, and dressing; medieval children ice-skating; our forebears eating, partying, marrying, and dying; peasants bundling hay and raking grain; burghers busting with pride; workers sweating under their burdens; aristocrats priming; celebrating students, sweating actors, and coldly angular machines; bustling and fetching cityscapes, warm seascapes, and the darkly lit snowscapes of wintry days.

Can such iconographic experience be at the basis of social life, even in the modern, deracinated, secularized, technological, and materialistic world we live in today? Recently I have begun to think that it is. It seems to me that iconographic experience explains how we feel part of our social and physical surroundings, how we experience the reality of the ties that bind us to people we know and people we don't know, and how we develop a sense of place, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, our vocation, indeed our very selves.

Let me throw out some mundane examples of social iconography in its everyday forms.

Family photos. They embody those whom we have experienced and loved. The tactile representations bring them into us and we into them. As we proceed through the life cycle, and separate from what sometimes seems an infinite series of groups and individuals, we keep these loved ones with us, not only through memories but through such icons. Home and office spaces are filled with photographs, as are the wallets we carry everywhere with us. They recall, through their material surfaces, those with whom we are most connected in our social lives.

What is the difference between such humble snapshots and the magnificent portraits and busts that fill museums? They are looked at just as reverently; they are remarked upon, embraced, and circulated, generating intense feelings, sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet.

Household and domestic objects. What does it mean to have furniture? To decorate a living room or bedroom, or to remodel a kitchen? To choose towels, carpets, upholstery, paint? It is not just a utilitarian matter of covering the floor to keep it warm or providing places to work and sit. It is a matter also of surrounding ourselves with material objects that represent our values, standards, and beliefs.

In doing so, these domestic icons provide continuous, if relatively subdued and routinized, experiences of subjectification.

Advertisements and commercials. Advertisements are designed to sell things, but they do so by presenting and facilitating just such a subjectifying process. They connect newly produced or marketed objects with earlier iconic ones. If automobiles and their ads are vigorously and effectively shaped, consumers immerse themselves inside their images, identifying themselves with the emotions that seethe just beneath their surface and with the objects to which they refer. As we immerse ourselves in their materiality, their materiality disappears. Is the process the commodification of persons or the subjectification of commodities? Think of the mysteries and sexualities of the Corvette, the BMW, the Jaguar; how the Volkswagen Beetle came to embody and signify asceticism, nonconformity, and even antimaterialism. There are, of course, direct parallels for these iconic social experiences in the history of art, which is filled with representations of household objects. One thinks immediately of Ed Kienholz's automobile installations, linking car icons with the sex, drinking, and gang cultures of the 1950s, or Andy Warhol's cans of Campbell's soup.

Movie stars and celebrity heroes. We make icons out of human beings in everyday society. They are collective representations of people whom we don't know, whom we will never know, but whom we adore and sometimes even worship. Whether bathed in darkness and sidling right up beside our fellow anonymous human beings in a movie theater or watching television alone in our living or bedrooms, we enter into mass-mediated entertainment in order to come into contact with these iconic figures, to have the experience of immersion vis-à-vis figures who are literally and figuratively larger than life. Many of us cut out their pictures from magazines or buy posters and attach their images to the walls of our offices and

homes. Do we watch TV only to be entertained, to laugh or cry? We watch also to become one with our celebrity heroes, to become them and for them to become us, and to be connected with the things/ideas/beliefs/feelings to which their images refer.

Clothing and makeup. The function of fashion/style is to drape ourselves in an image, to immerse ourselves in material forms that transform us into the “types” that we have seen and would like to be. “Clothes make the man.” And combing hair, getting a tan, applying lipstick, adjusting our faces in every conceivable conventionalized way: What better example could there be of this dialectic of subjectification and materialization that makes up iconic life?

What are the feelings that social icons generate? They are aesthetic forms, but they draw us beneath the surface into the languages and feelings of social things. Social icons are full of emotion, knowledge, and evaluation. We “worship” them, “yearn” for them, would “die” for them. More than mere material things, they are collective representations of the social sacred and sometimes also the profane. They are divas, queens, sex symbols, and he-men. The mistress of song, the chairman of the board, the king of swing. We want to touch them, swallow them, run our fingers along them, feast visually inside of them. We want to “be” them.

In recent decades, since the cultural turn that transformed the human sciences, sociologists have learned that a society’s normative standards are not established primarily by formal rules or even by such general and diffuse things as social values. Rather, they are established through collective discourses built from codes, narratives, and metaphors. In view of the present discussion, we can extend this new understanding one step further still. Collective discourses also assume an iconic form. Their meanings are learned through subjective immersion and projected through materiality.

How do we know what we should strive for in our chosen roles, in our occupations, as husband and wife, as player, as scholar, as artist? Might it not be through iconic experience that social standards of work, behavior, self, and meaning are created, communicated, and maintained?

Not only art objects but social icons can be hierarchically arranged by proximity to some archetype, some ideal of the sublime, defined not intellectually but by reference to some actual material object, to its shape, its feel. We judge authenticity by such proximity, when an iconic re-representation captures something of the archetype that lies beneath. Imitations, by contrast, are kitsch, icons that do not stimulate or facilitate immersion and identification.

We are perfectly aware, of course, that art objects are subject to such hierarchies, and that it is the desire to replicate iconic sublimity that motivates achievement from those who are newly arrived on the scene. Is everyday life all that different? An apprentice admires a great carpenter: "If I could only learn to turn a joint like Smithie." A young athlete fixates on an older, much more accomplished one, who in turn has "fallen in love" with a great professional. A young scholar has her personal icons in her chosen discipline. So do chefs. We all "know," we feel in our bones, the standard of goodness or greatness in whatever we try to do, whether it is combing our hair, knotting our tie, moving into the passing lane, baling hay, playing the guitar, swinging a tennis racket, making an incision, or making love. We also feel, for we have also seen and touched, the standards of deviation and degradation from the ideal that we fervently wish to avoid. We know what an honest man looks like. We have icons of honesty as well as deceit, and popular culture reproduces new and old versions of them all the time. We demand that society create icons when we wish to remember some particularly outstanding

individual, event, or thing or to memorialize our recovery from some tortuous social trauma. For such situations, private photos and personal icons are not sufficient. We need something more formally constructed, more public, more compelling.

Radical and reactionary thinking alike have tended toward a nostalgic conviction that iconographic experience is only available in earlier societies, in traditional life. We are supposed not to have time for such experiences today because we are modernists, affected by the usual suspects of materialism, reification, and objectification. Has not modernity eliminated contact with the sacred “aura” of traditional art, which, according to Walter Benjamin, is available only through contact with the real thing? ²²

What I wish to suggest here is that the expressive dimension is also fundamental in modern societies, that it communicates through material forms whose surface draws an actor inward toward deeper moral and emotional depths. If this is so, then our experience of art is not marginal but central to our experience of modern and even postmodern life.

An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Studi Culturali* 2 (2004): 253–66 and a more theoretically elaborated version is forthcoming in *Theory, Culture, and Society*.

- 1 See, for example, Lewis Coser, *Sociology through Literature: An Introductory Reader* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963); and Robert Nisbet, *Sociology as an Art Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- 2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872; New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 141–42. This and following quotations are from these pages.
- 3 Alexander Liberman, *The Artist in His Studio* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 69.
- 4 Giacometti to Pierre Matisse, in Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, *Alberto Giacometti* (Secaucus, N.J.: Wellfleet Press, n.d.), 175.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 176.
- 6 Giacometti, quoted in Michael Peppiatt, *Giacometti in Postwar Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 12.
- 7 Giacometti, quoted in *ibid.*
- 8 Giacometti, quoted in *ibid.*, 13.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 10 Lamarche-Vadel, *Alberto Giacometti*, 154.
- 11 Jean Genet, *L'atelier d'Alberto Giacometti* (Paris: Isère, 1958), quoted in Peppiatt, *Giacometti*, 19 n.10.
- 12 Andres Parinaud, "Entretien avec Giacometti—Pourquoi je suis sculpteur," *Arts*, no. 873 (1962): 13–19, quoted in Peppiatt, *Giacometti*, 19 n.7.
- 13 Quoted in Lamarche-Vadel, *Alberto Giacometti*, 73.
- 14 Quoted in Peppiatt, *Giacometti*, 162; and Lamarche-Vadel, *Alberto Giacometti*, 7.
- 15 See, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Search for the Absolute," in *Alberto Giacometti* (New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1948); and Peppiatt, *Giacometti*, 5.
- 16 Lamarche-Vadel, *Alberto Giacometti*, 7.
- 17 From an interview in Georges Charbonnier, *Le monologue du peintre* (Paris: R. Julliard, 1959), quoted in Peppiatt, *Giacometti*, 7.
- 18 For the ambiguities of realism, see Roman Jacobson, "On Realism in Art," in *Language in Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 19–27.
- 19 Alberto Giacometti, "The Dream, The Sphinx, and the Death of T.," *Labyrinthe*, no. 22/23 (December 1946), quoted in Peppiatt, *Giacometti*, 31–32.
- 20 Lamarche-Vadel, *Alberto Giacometti*, 130 and *passim*, for a discussion of the role of distance in Giacometti's aesthetic.
- 21 Jean Genet, *L'atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, quoted in Lamarche-Vadel, *Alberto Giacometti*, 148.
- 22 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217–52.

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Jessica Stockholder

Unfolding Drama

Invited to choose a work to respond to in the Yale University Art Gallery, I came up to the third floor. I've always been most engaged with the art of my time. The conversation of today is vital to my life. My work grows from it, and art making is part and parcel of the fluid movement that is our life, the life of each one of us. Still, I also thought briefly of heading to the basement, because I love some things down there, too—things so far away from us in time that they may as well be in outer space, even while they resonate harmoniously with being human today.

I had no idea which work I would choose, and I walked around the third floor taking note, wondering where I would be in my quest half an hour hence, knowing that I would have made a decision. It is a wonderful charged moment, not so unlike being in my studio. I have always liked Piet Mondrian, so I spent some time with *Fox Trot B*, from 1929. I enjoyed Constantin Brancusi's 1919 *Yellow Bird*, and Georges Seurat's *Black Cow in a Meadow*, from 1881, stopped me for a moment. And I once saw an Edouard Vuillard exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum that I loved, so I lingered in front of his *Kitchen*, from 1891–92, but I don't think it's one of his best. The space in Giorgio de Chirico's paintings of plazas sometimes seems like a point of reference in my own work, but I couldn't find that in the Gallery's *The Lovers*, from 1925. Adolph Gottlieb's *Red and Green*, 1961,

now that is a painting! I was surprised to find it so engaging—the play with the retina, the constant shifting of foreground and background. Maybe I could get into that.

I had walked past the Robert Morris felt piece, *Untitled (Version 1 in 19 Parts)* (plate 4), and the Alan Saret. There is something about those Sarets that is always engaging, kind of mystical, beautiful, retinal, and unyielding. But that felt piece: I'd never really understood it. Morris's work has been a part of my landscape from the beginning, but nothing in my travels had led me to spend time with it; I found it confusing. It became the most demanding and engaging object in the room. So here it goes.

This work has always had a bit of an “emperor's-new-clothes” quality for me. A pile of felt hanging on the wall: Yeah, right! And I know that pictorial evocations are not what are being pointed to, not what Morris is obsessed with; but, nevertheless, that's where I begin looking at this work. This is a little curious to me, in light of the fact that, though my own work is clearly pictorial, I am not generally concerned with how my work is evocative. Perhaps with this felt piece, my desire to read the picture stems from an adversarial relationship to the work. Knowing that's not the point, I'm going to insist that there is a picture there!

Though this work hangs on the wall, it is a sculpture, a sculpture limply taking up the space of painting. It is relatively flat against the wall and falling onto the floor. The wall is the site of picture making, and it is impossible not to read the work as a kind of picture, even while it insists on itself as an object or collection of felt pieces. It looks like a scary hooded sorcerer from a fantasy movie, but not a horror movie; it's too nice for that. It is soft like a body and has the eccentricity of the body. I am reminded of the snakes and slithering things that grow out of mundane objects at night. Reminded of

nightmares growing from shadows. Reminded of child's play, theater, and play acting. These parts of being human are very present in the work.

Yet being partly on the floor emphasizes the "objectness" of the work. It cannot disappear into the pictorial hole that the wall affords. It is part of the space and time my feet are planted in. It seems as if the work is hanging from one hook underneath the felt on the wall. The wall is white, typical for most galleries. This quiet, white, unchanging wall frames the work, and the work was meant for this situation. It was not made to be hung on a pink wall, or the wall of a mechanic's garage, or in Bloomingdale's, or from a tree.

The wall and the building are strong, and the white museum wall has authority. I am to look at this pile of felt. It would be a very different thing hung someplace else. So part of this work's meaning arises from its relation to the museum wall. This wall presents this slightly larger-than-life sculpture as grand and important and separate from the normal flow of time.

The felt as body, soft and eccentric, and the vulnerable and meandering hand suggested by this work collide with the solid strength of the architecture, whose job is to protect us from the elements. That brings me to imagine a cold, vulnerable body curled up in the rain, wrapped in felt, shivering and decrepit. . . . Yes, yes, I know, it's just a pile of felt, casually, albeit with effort, draped on the wall.

The vulnerable body leads my mind to the work of Joseph Beuys. He, too, used a lot of felt. Yet he, unlike Morris, mined the evocative field of the felt. It is warm, it insulates, it easily looks old and engenders nostalgia, it can be used to muffle, it has an indistinct outline.

Morris's work does have an outline that keeps it separate from the wall. Felt, by its nature, has a soft edge, and this fact of the material enters the dialogue the work has with its environment.



Plate 4

Is it a whole thing or a collection of parts that happen to overlap right here? Yet this work feels like an object. It is a contained and coherent lump on the wall and the floor, though it does seem to have some problems with structure.

The felt is about one inch thick. The center of the work is pictorially solid, all filled up, and the white wall enters around the edges, bringing the architecture into the picture, so to speak. The internal felt shapes reference the rectangle, the same rectangle that is framing this work, which is the wall, again the site of both picture making and architecture. The work itself is a weak, droopy, floppy, and rectangular kind of a thing!

The overall shape of the work mimics the body. It is smaller at the top, like our heads; it stands on the ground, like our feet, though it appears to be having a much harder time standing upright than we do for most of our lives. The work is made up of layers of felt, and there are several folds in the layers that serve to build up an object and create volume, even as they act as the foreground, middle ground, and background of pictorial space. The folds in this body, as in ours, give rise to complex emotional structures. There is the fact of our physical insides filled with blood, organs, muscle, and bone. And our insides serve as metaphor for our felt lives, our feelings and thoughts, the space of experience and memory.

There is a small, knotted bundle on the floor on top of larger shapes. There is a bigger knotted bundle on the wall up high. The smaller knotted form has a geometry that mirrors the geometry of the larger shapes it sits on. The scale shifts within the work match the scale shifts within the body—feet and hands to head and torso—only a little larger than life. This slightly larger-than-life quality seems important as it provides a jumping-off point to the world of our imagination and fantasy.

Wafting from those draped and weighty pieces of felt are arrows pointing at the imaginative possibilities of my mind. It is those arrows that are most interesting. The particularity of the evocations arising in my mind is less interesting than the relationship between my narrative, imagistic, emotionally layered mind and this felt on the wall. There is a frame around the meeting of my inner life with this felt on the wall. Here I am with a larger-than-life pile of felt on a grand wall. The wall is grand because “we” say so; “my” fantasies bounce off of “our” wall.

And there is evidence of the hand, of the person cutting up the felt and placing it precisely, even though I have the feeling that this work, in the end, asks me not to pay attention to this. This work is not about personal “expression.” It is dry, conceptual, part of a conversation directed against the notion that art is expressive of feelings and character. I know this, and yet Robert Morris, a person, made the work. And there is evidence of his hand. The ends of the felt are cut as if with scissors, reminding me of sitting at a table cutting paper, using just the hands and the wrists. But here the felt is heavy, and cutting it like that involved a struggle with gravity and twisting the muscles of the whole body. I have two senses of scale colliding in my head.

The shapes are at once eccentric and random. The pieces of felt look like they might have been leftovers from the floor of a factory, bits and pieces of stuff cast off from the making of something else. And the way they are hung is at once precise and random. Again it is clear there was a struggle with gravity to get the pieces up on the wall. And though my mind might make much of the drapes and folds, the reference to clothing and to the history of drapery through art history, this work does not seem to be about the particularity of those things. The pieces of felt are precisely organized to be evocative

and at the same time unclear and open in that evocation. Yet I know that Robert Morris made a lot of these felt pieces. So something about the difference between one work and another must have engaged him, and I wonder what this might be. It is here that the question of the particular becomes more charged. Maybe there is something quirky, some personal experience being splattered, smeared, smudged, and punched into this wall that is our shared public space.

Felt, by its nature, is a collection of parts, made from nondescript fibers that might come from many different aspects of life and contain different chemical structures. There is a leveling involved in the making of felt: The individual qualities of its various fibers are subsumed. What matters is that the fibers all be close in form and long and stringy. In the end, felt results from the processing of those fibers.

This inherent nature of felt parallels Morris's use of it. His work evokes and is composed of a range of narrative particulars. These particulars both feed and are subsumed by a structure that rests on the fact of their existence but does not need to acknowledge their particularity. The specific nature of Robert Morris's fantasy life or my fantasy life doesn't matter to the work in the end.

In its relationship to the wall, this work is at once strong and weak. It is larger than life and grand, and it definitely is art, struggling to be set apart from the flow of time around it. It seems masculine in its assertion of strength. The institution that literally supports it is weighted toward the patriarchal part of culture. It is made with industrial materials and is engaged in battle—a battle with gravity. The felt is heavy. But it is being pulled down and is without structure; in this regard, it seems impotent and weak. The wall does not let us see the working of gravity; it seems to stand without effort. In contrast, the felt reveals its struggle. It is aggressive in its passivity.

Yet the felt also seems feminine. It is voluptuous, curvaceous and soft, a fabric with folds and crevasses. Fabric is stereotypically women's work and building the work of men. The curved body belongs to women and the square one to men. The cut forms of the felt are straight edged and geometric but imprecise in their geometry. Questions about gender seem folded up with the felt. Each gender requires the other to exist as a category, and for each of us the two categories are essential to our sense of self. This work is very funny and tender in its exploration of our gender—all the struggle of working with felt, pushing that stuff up onto the wall, and the struggle to be a man and the struggle to be a woman. Our biology, the facts of our physical selves, and that pile of felt are playfully running around with the wispy whisperings of the narratives yet again.

In its play with gender, this work reminds me of Lynda Benglis's lead sculpture *Quartered Meteor*, from 1969. She, too, wove together the character of material with narratives about gender. At the outset, I read her work as being about the feminine, with its masculine attributes shifting or challenging definitions of femininity. And with Robert Morris also, knowing the gender of the artist, it is easy to read his work as being about masculinity. But in the end, I find it very rewarding and useful to look at these two works together and understand them both to be about the complex, intertwined relation between the genders.

The felt is gray, like an elephant, and weighty, droopy, and hanging like an elephant's trunk. Yet the work is made up of all kinds of grays; there are many grays within the felt, and there are many different intensities of gray shadow cast within the work as a result of all its folds, bumps, and lumps. And there is the white of the wall. I think of black-and-white photography, which like gray—and therefore like this work—can be construed to be without color. The black

and the white in the photograph are a pleasure because they make so clear the distance of the image from reality, even while the photo is so convincing. There is something similar at work in Morris's piece. The limited palette speaks to the crevasses of the mind and emotional life of each one of us, which are at once real and yet exist in a removed or fraught relation to what we collectively agree to understand as reality.

Coming to the end here, I'm thinking back to where I began, where I was wondering if this was a case of having the wool pulled over my eyes (so to speak!). Why did I fleetingly feel this might be a case of the emperor's new clothes? Perhaps the answer is because so much of this work has to do with illumination, shared assumptions so taken for granted that at first they seem invisible. The white cube and our capacity for projection are so omnipresent that they are difficult to notice. This work requires us to understand and appreciate how our minds are structured and how busy our minds are, structuring our perceptions in order to find significant and evocative.

Spending the time to better understand this work has been a real pleasure. Having taken it upon myself to articulate my experience here in the gallery, I am left wondering how Robert Morris finds himself propelled from one felt work to the next. It seems that the work insists that the particularity of these projections is not significant, and yet it is exactly the particularity of how those projections are inspired that change from one work to the next. I leave that question for another time, and I have faith that, given time and attention, jewels and treasures will be unfolded in that pursuit.

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Christine Mehring
Duck Hunting with
Dieter Roth

One could say that an entire “world” (social ENVIRONMENT) is present in and signified by food.

Roland Barthes, “Vers une psycho-sociologie de l’alimentation moderne” (1961)

—Do your materials—mayonnaise, chocolate, cocoa, sweets—have any symbolic meaning?

—I don’t think so. Maybe yes.

Dieter Roth, in conversation with Peter Hans Göpfert (1973)

Open this box (plate 5) and you laugh: about birds introduced as ducks but largely revealing themselves to be ordinary chickens dressed in white, black, gray, and brown feathers; about their heads stuck in a sea of chocolate, a move in keeping with their unrefined, dim-witted reputation yet utterly unsuitable for the ordered formations they ably perform here; about the role reversals of hunter and hunted, where tiny knights in heavy armor wade through chocolate swamps in a futile struggle to defend themselves with archaic weapons against an onslaught of giant bird armies; about a children’s toy turned reputable work of art in the Yale University Art Gallery.

Humor and play are central to the Swiss-German artist Dieter Roth, who, in keeping with an experience of himself as a “nebulous persona,”¹ alternately called himself Karl-Dietrich Roth, Diter Rot,

or Diterrot. Yet far from simple slapstick, *Duck Hunt*, like his whole oeuvre, requires a slow process of opening and unpacking in which we shall discover “an entire ‘world’ . . . signified by food,” by Roth’s signature use of chocolate in dialogue with other materials and motifs. Humor and play seduce viewers to enter into this process and then reappear in the dense nexus of meanings to be discovered along the way.

This work is about food, for it is a hunting scene set in a landscape of poured chocolate. In it, different levels of civilization clash by way of different types of food. That most primitive form of providing nutrition to humankind, the hunting of animals, complemented by slightly more recent medieval knights struggling to kill a simple chicken, suggests, to the contemporary eye, a sense of basic, desperate need. Chocolate, on the other hand, introduced to Western societies relatively recently, is a processed food, sometimes considered a specialty or luxury but always excessive for sure, as suggested here both by its sweet smell and waist-high levels. Roth’s food, then, spans the spectrum from archaic to modern, from bare necessity to gluttony. In characteristic Rothian fashion, as we will see, the apparently parallel relationship of these pairs is not fixed but reversible: excess can be basic and the basic, excessive. For one, chocolate here suggests not merely excess but pictorially provides the very ground of this scene, whereas the hunting efforts and instruments depicted are entirely disproportionate and excessive, if you will, in relation to the easy prey.

Roth has been known for his food, to insiders of the postwar European art world since his experiments with this new artistic material in the 1960s and to a broader international audience since his recent retrospectives in Basel, Cologne, and New York. In 1954, while still a young graphic designer and emerging Neo-

Constructivist artist, Roth won fourth prize in a competition for his design of a bakery window in downtown Bern, which featured a spiral formed from bread dough. But it was in the following decade that food became his material of choice. Among the first and legendary works are his *Literature Sausages*, begun in 1961, consisting of sausage skins filled with fat, spices, and shredded books he disliked or was jealous of, ranging from Günter Grass's novel *Hundejahre* to G. W. F. Hegel's collected writings; works on paper, featuring patterns of molding caused by sour milk accidentally spilled over pornographic drawings in 1962; a commissioned portrait of the Swiss collector Carl Laszlo dating from 1963 and made, as a conscious provocation, from a black-and-white photograph "painted" over with soft cheese; and a series of *Piles* and *Islands* consisting of various food stuffs mounted in central formations on wood boards, dating from about 1967.² The intertwining polarities that are associated with food and are central to *Duck Hunt* run through all these works, although their excessive accumulation of food is not so much paired with the basic as it is left to decay.

The chocolate so prominent in *Duck Hunt* is, of course, a specific kind of food. Beyond the sense of excess already mentioned, chocolate is associated with the expansion of territorial power and material gain, with its widely known origins as a Western import following the conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century. Of high value to Precolumbian cultures such as the Mayans and to its initial Western consumers at the European courts, chocolate gradually developed into a mass-produced commodity with, at best, a pretense of luxury. This is something that Roth picks up on, not only by making his chocolate look excessive, with the knights wading in it up to their torsos, but also by turning it into an apparent swamp, into mud. Enforcing this illusion are the chocolate's shades of brown

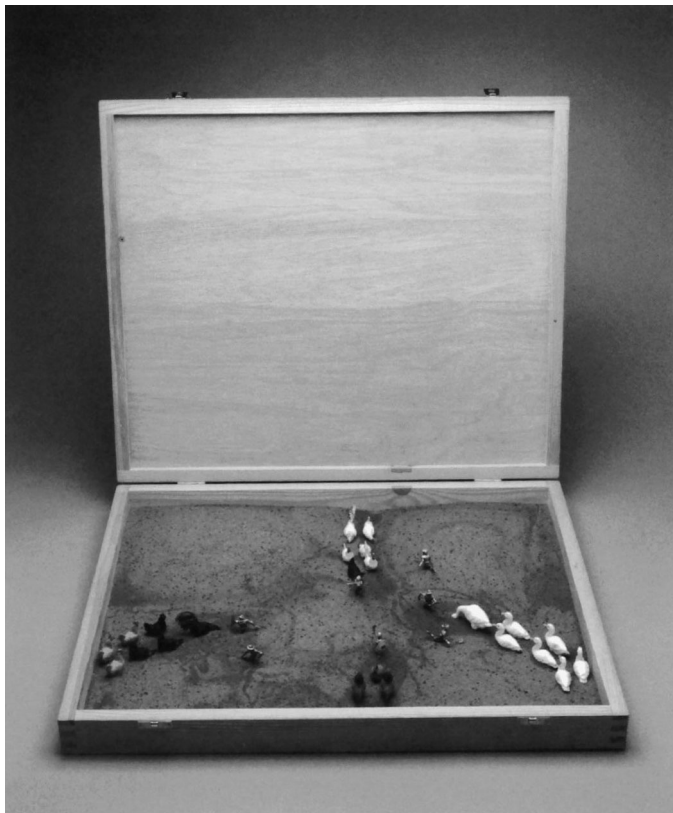


Plate 5

and its almost perforated texture, a result of the kind of deterioration the artist famously embraced, of the bloomed-out fat that has left mainly sugar and cocoa solids behind.³

Besides these broad historical connotations, there are nationally specific ones. In times of need and war, chocolate became a luxury once more, especially during and following World War II, which decisively shaped Roth's experiences as an adolescent. Chocolate, to most Germans in the postwar decades, carried memories of a valuable black-market currency used during inflation in the late 1940s and of desperately needed care packages sent by the Americans. To this day, several European countries take particular national pride in the chocolate manufactured by their industries, a pride stretching back to the nineteenth century, when the Cologne-based company Stollwerck received the German emperor's commissions for state monuments made of chocolate.⁴ With Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium each claiming chocolate as its very own specialty, that national preening reveals itself as absurd and misguided—of course, something hard to miss in this context given Roth's Swiss and German background. Chocolate, then, like Roth's food more generally, again plays with reversal, with true luxury turned into exploitation, decay, pretense, and false pride.

Duck Hunt is far from the only work of Roth's to use chocolate. Curiously, his first use of the material is linked to this object's current home at Yale. Following a four-day stint as a visiting critic at the University's architecture school in 1959, the artist returned five years later to teach the introductory course in architecture—only to resign quickly owing to difficulties with colleagues. It was about that time, while still in the United States, that Roth made a set of silkscreen prints with chocolate. The material subsequently featured prominently in about fifty objects made between 1966 and 1972. Among

these were lions and self-portraits cast in chocolate. He also made a series he called *Melancholischer Nippes*, or “Melancholic Knickknacks,” which came to an end with *Duck Hunt* and in which he placed kitschy items, like dwarfs and miniature tall buildings, or toys, like a motorcyclist, in chocolate environments. These motifs conjure up generally a sense of power, heroism, and machismo and, more specifically, a German variety of lower-middle-class pride. Yet such associations are also dampened—and not without a touch of melancholy—by the banal quality of the materials, by the chocolate’s similarity to feces, and by its susceptibility both to pests such as cocoa moths or mites and, less dramatically, to decay in the form of discoloration and rime.

The interpretive terms of the *Duck Hunt* laid out so far—power, conquest, pride, luxury, and their flip sides—are corroborated by further implications of the knights and the chickens. The former are historical embodiments of power, asserted visually through heavy armor and protective or combative gestures. Theirs is the power of a group as signaled by the emblems on their shields, a national power indicated by the Swiss flag, and a religious power: one thinks of the Crusades—the children’s crusades, given the toys—and notes the pikes, or *Hellebarden* in Swiss-German, known for their use at the end of the Middle Ages by Swiss foot soldiers who would later become the Swiss Guard at the Vatican. Yet here, the knights’ heroic power turns defensive, and, contrary to common expectations, the armored men are outsmarted by the birds. Luxury and value, too, are unstable and relative: chickens trigger memories of eggs as nutritious treats for the war generation, memories still present in the German psyche through the popular song from the late 1930s, *Ich wollt ich wär ein Huhn*;⁵ in *Duck Hunt*, the chickens resort to dressing up as ducks, considered more of a delicacy in an age of mass-produced poultry.

What about this Rothian collapse, then, of excess and decay; of luxury, banality, and scarceness; of power, pride, and pretense? Following the French philosopher Roland Barthes, Roth's food signifies an "entire world" or "social environment." This world of *Duck Hunt*, and by extension the world of Roth's oeuvre, is that of the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder*, Germany's period of "miraculous" economic recovery and boom during the 1950s and 1960s that resurrected the defeated nation from the rubble of war. The postwar experience in Germany and, less extremely, in other European nations devastated by World War II was one of sheer unfathomable contrast: between a time of horror, need, and defeat and a time of excess, extravagance, and empowerment.

The era of the German economic miracle witnessed the rapid rebuilding of war-ravaged industry; a historically low unemployment rate; the largest growth of gross national product in the country's history; an ever-increasing availability of goods, even luxury goods; and rising standards of living for average citizens. Their lives were filled with new apartment furnishings, decorative objects, televisions, washing machines, cars, vacations in foreign countries, and, important in this context, more food, better food, and a greater variety of food, sold in American-style supermarkets that gradually replaced the *Tante Emma Läden*, or neighborhood corner stores. The "miracle" was fed by American help in the form of the Marshall Plan, the currency reform of 1948, and the great demand for German exports in the wake of the Korean War. The "father of the economic miracle" was Ludwig Erhard, first economic minister of Bavaria during the Adenauer years and West German chancellor from 1963 to 1966, who single-handedly instituted classic liberal policies that allowed the economy "to play itself out."⁶ Then the miracle ended with a recession from 1966 to 1967. If the new prosperity had been

taken for granted and the war left behind, memories of need began to surface again. These were lessons once more about the deterioration of excess and the transitory nature of gluttony, especially for the lower middle class, which experienced these changes most intensely.

All this was the “world” of Roth’s audience in the 1960s, when most of his *Melancholischer Nippes* series was made and shown, and all this was Roth’s own experience. In 1943, his German mother and Swiss father sent their thirteen-year-old son from his native Hannover to Switzerland to shield him from the war. Nevertheless, the artist repeatedly recounted the war as traumatic:

When I was a young boy, I was scared of death. During the war. During the bombings of Hannover. I was scared. . . . It was terrible. I think I was very sensitive then and completely hysterical.⁷

Often, he talked about the war in terms of food:

It was bad during the war, yes, it was rotten. I couldn’t eat the way I wanted to. . . . First because I was a child, I had to be well behaved. . . . Sweets, chocolate, were rationed, so to speak. And later, when the war came, there was even less to eat.⁸

And:

My father had owned a sugar beet factory in Stuttgart, I remember the sugar beet factory very well. The factory was destroyed during the war. My father didn’t give up and built another one close to Dresden. But at the end of the war, this area was taken over by the East Germans and the factory was nationalized.⁹

Soon thereafter, Roth found himself in the midst of the rapid economic recovery and booming consumerism spreading all over Europe. In 1951, he completed a four-year apprenticeship as a graphic designer, having worked on advertisements for products

such as cheese, milk, and beer. Ever after, Roth felt comfortable, perhaps most comfortable, in the applied arts. He was a member of the Swiss Werkbund. He designed decorative fabrics that unmistakably bear the mark of the subdued but colorful palette of the 1950s and the decade's formal vocabulary featuring lines in irregular, busy patterns. He designed furniture, toys, woven carpets, jewelry, magazines, and, above all, books, which were his greatest, lifelong passion. Food often entered this commercial work as well—the baked-bread spiral as window display and the *Piles* series, actually made for an advertising agency. Roth was very aware that the Germans, himself usually explicitly included, shared certain qualities, such as the “fear of inefficiency” and the desire “to excel,” that helped bring the economic miracle about. And he specifically described the country as a place of excess: “When one lives there, one throws stuff around.”¹⁰

With all this in mind, Roth's frequent, nonsensical collapse of all kinds of binaries in all kinds of interviews makes sense. Often, as in *Duck Hunt*, those binaries revolve around excess and decay. “It is the same. Preserving is the same as throwing away.” Or, “I often feel like a shit pump, like a manure pump . . . but I am no manure pump. . . . Sugar. A sugar pump.” And, “This apartment, here, I leave messy. I only have things that I need. I don't clean up. But I have another apartment, which is the opposite, where I always do the dishes, clean . . .”¹¹

There is yet more to *Duck Hunt*. Its setting is a barren landscape out in the open, where wavy formations of poured chocolate in a range of browns create an expansive area of thick, earthy swamp. Landscapes like these are a common motif in Roth's art of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Three versions of a Rhine landscape appear most similar to *Duck Hunt*, with their expansive, model-like char-

acter and toys placed in colored icing. Many postcards depicting landscapes or city views were thickly painted or drawn over in selected areas. And a series of *Sunsets*—available in standard “small,” “medium,” and “large” sizes—featured salami slices as suns placed on horizon lines created by two abutting pieces of different-colored paper. Protected under transparent plastic bags, the slices nevertheless leaked fat and grew mold, spreading concentric circles that suggest the radiating sun.

In keeping with the historical, nationally specific context laid out above, landscape motifs align with a prominent tradition in German art, going back all the way to Albrecht Altdorfer but especially to German Romanticism, be it in the poetry of Goethe or in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. Landscapes also tie into the Rothian notion of *Melancholischer Nippes*, his embrace of a tacky, lower-middle-class taste. Landscapes are by far the most popular and accessible motif to postwar Western eyes, as has been empirically demonstrated by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s research on taste and amusingly confirmed by Russian artists Komar and Melamid, who concluded by using questionnaires that people’s “most wanted” paintings across the world, with the exception of the Netherlands, are in fact landscapes.¹² Roth was aware of this popularity, stating that “there are gigantic areas [in art] that are not elitist: kitsch, dirt, framing shops, landscapes, that is not elitist at all.” And he relished it. “I am a real *Kitscher*, a kind of sweet, sentimental ass licker.”¹³

Consistent with the popular landscape motif, Roth quasi-mass-produced twenty versions of *Duck Hunt* as so-called multiples. Important precedents for this new medium were object editions by Marcel Duchamp as well as the *Editions MAT*, which were produced by Roth’s close friend Daniel Spoerri and included Roth’s second

artist's book of 1959. The term then became widely used in the mid- to late 1960s, when multiples began to flood the German art market. As commonly understood during its peak period, which lasted into the early 1970s, a multiple was an art object conceptualized as and produced in a series. As opposed to traditional printing or casting, multiples did not involve originals or artists' proofs but simply a series of equally important works; these were often the same but sometimes slightly different, as in the case of the *Duck Hunt* series, where the toy animals and knights are arranged in twenty different configurations. Artists often delegated their production to specialists or assistants; most of Roth's multiples and chocolate works, for example, were made by the artist Rudolf Rieser, who was probably still producing the series just before he and Roth parted ways in 1972. Made in editions, multiples could be marketed to a large group of potential buyers, and with production costs distributed among objects, their prices could be fixed and made more affordable than one-of-a-kind artworks such as paintings. *Duck Hunt* was marketed by René Block in Berlin, an important young art dealer in the German 1960s with an equally important secondary business in multiples.

Multiples were part of a larger phenomenon that will turn out to be important for our understanding of *Duck Hunt*, that is, the rapid expansion of the German art market between the mid-1960s and early 1970s. This development took various forms: new galleries opened at a rapid pace (thirty in 1968 and fifty the following year); a yearly fair for contemporary art was founded in Cologne in 1967 (the precursor of today's contemporary art fairs); art, especially prints and multiples, was sold "off the rack," as one critic had it, in alternative venues such as department stores or magazines; and major national newspapers devoted weekly columns to coverage

of art-market developments. As a result, the audience buying art became larger and more diverse (including no longer just the affluent but also the middle class), and art was acquired as an investment (especially during the temporary recession around 1967 and 1968). As a further result, many extremely public debates ensued over the benefits and problems with this development, over criteria for gallery representation and prices, over the dominance of American art, and so forth. The most important consequence in this context was that artists became more conscious than ever of producing for a market. Whether they programmatically protested what they regarded as resulting creative constraints and unfair practices of exclusion, or whether they openly or quietly welcomed the economic benefits and critical interest the new market brought them, this consciousness found its way into most of the art produced at the time.

Roth, ever the maverick, embraced many positions, as evidenced by the *Duck Hunt* multiple. Like so much of his art, it was produced for a mass market, as an edition, and it appealed to popular taste, with its *Nippes* characters, landscape setting, and, one might add, enticingly sweet smell. But it also defied the logic of the multiple and its mass market by presenting twenty different quasi-unique configurations of ducks and knights and by involving a perishable material bound to undergo different changes in each version depending on different circumstances. And in a further twist, the work undermined the whole notion of value altogether because it was premised on the notion of decay—its odor sooner or later would no longer please. *Duck Hunt*'s position on the market, then, was extremely uncertain.

Correspondingly, we can see both an avowed support and opposition to the expanding art market in Roth's relationships with collectors and dealers. He accepted commissions only to subvert them, as in the cheese portrait of the collector Carl Laszlo, and he worked closely

with a handful of collectors, such as Philipp Buse in Hamburg, who were focused almost exclusively on Roth's work. While he developed nearly collaborative relationships with certain businessmen, like Hansjörg Mayer, who published Roth's books, he avoided being represented by one dealer exclusively, so that in 1972, when the *Duck Hunt* series was completed, no fewer than seventeen galleries presented his work at the Basel art fair. Roth tirelessly reflected on the art market, ranted about it, or embraced it in many interviews he gave; and he was well aware that making art for a living and making art with integrity and substance are entirely different projects that nevertheless often converge:

There are two industries (*Branchen*). One is for the money, the other one is fame. Both are almost the same. Sometimes it flips, then fame becomes money, and money becomes fame. I cannot get out of this prison anymore, I think. Why would I, it's alright.¹⁴

The central theme of *Duck Hunt* and Roth's oeuvre—the collapse of excess and decay; of luxury, banality, and scarceness; of power, pride, and pretense—thus points not only to the contrasting experiences of war, economic miracle, and recession but also to the complicated experiences of the rising art market of the late 1960s: the excessive production of art geared toward the ever-expanding market demand of investors and inexperienced, often lower-middle-class buyers; and the pressures of taking sides in the heated political debates about this development's significance, problems, and benefits. Roth, to take this a step further, was not one to proselytize, criticize, or celebrate, not one to come down on either the side of an in-your-face, critically engaged avant-garde, whose classic subjects he addressed, or the side of the seemingly disengaged art focused on formal expression, whose manner of working he adapted by making

his materials so densely meaningful. Both positions defined the German art world of the 1960s, so polarized over the prominent role of the art market. Roth was always interested in defying conceptual certainties. He felt most at home in the space between authentic and serious, on the one hand, and tongue-in-cheek and incidental, on the other. This is why he described his work so poignantly as “a mixture of melancholia and irony,” a “banal-romantic monumentalism.”¹⁵

Having come this long way, let us end where we began, with laughter and play. They have, in fact, been with us all along, for the process of interpretation in Roth’s art has turned out to be deeply and endlessly playful, with its constant intertwinement of polarities that, like laughter, disarm the rational mind. And these are perhaps most prominent in the Yale edition, for unlike most other versions, it is set up clearly like a game, where four teams enter the horizontal board from four directions, seeking to win the battle of the chickens and the knights.

Versions of this essay were presented at the Dieter Roth symposium held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in April 2004 and as part of the Object Lessons lecture series at the Yale University Art Gallery in April 2002. I would like to thank organizers and fellow speakers for their comments, in particular, Benjamin Buchloh, Gary Garrels, and John Paoletti, at MoMA, and Ellen Alvord, Tim Barringer, and Kris Canizeras at Yale University.

- 1 Dieter Roth, in an interview with Hans-Joachim Müller (1989), reprinted in *Dieter Roth, Gesammelte Interviews*, ed. Barbara Wien (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2002), 416. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.
- 2 Illustrations of these and other works mentioned in the following text can be found best in Dirk Dobke, *Dieter Roth, Frühe Objekte und Materialbilder, 1960–1975* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002), vol. 2, based on Dirk Dobke, “Melancholischer Nippes—Dieter Roths frühe Objekte und Materialbilder (1960–75),” diss., Philosophische Fakultät der Universität Hamburg, 1997; and Dirk Dobke and Bernadette Walter, *Roth Zeit: Eine Dieter Roth Retrospektive*, ed. Theodora Vischer and Bernadette Walter (Basel: Schaulager and Lars Müller Publishers, 2003). Likewise, biographical and other factual information mentioned throughout derives largely from this literature as well as from the collected interviews cited above.

There were no systematic, historical surveys of Roth’s work before Dobke’s groundbreaking scholarship appeared. My thinking about Roth is indebted to his work, and I am extremely grateful for the extensive tour he gave me of the Dieter Roth Foundation and the Schimmelmuseum in Hamburg in December 2000.

- 3 For details on the conservation issues of chocolate, see Helen Cox, “The Deterioration and Conservation of Chocolate from Museum Collections,” *Studies in Conservation* 38 (November 1993): esp. p. 220.

Roth decisively changed his attitude about the conservation of his work. Up to 1991, he insisted that the decay of his works, specifically those made from chocolate, was integral to them, “would be good for them”; Roth, in a handwritten note on file at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel, dated September 9, 1991, facsimile reproduced in Dobke, *Dieter Roth, Frühe Objekte*, “Dokument 22.” Toward the end of his life, he thought about the problem in a more dialectical way: “Restoring, I have come to believe, contributes to the decay, and I allow it (with difficulty)”; Roth, in a handwritten comment on Dobke’s writing, in *ibid.*, 121.

- 4 Dobke, *Dieter Roth, Frühe Objekte*, 1:152ff.
- 5 This is the section of the song in question: “Ich wollt ich wär ein Huhn, / ich hätt nicht viel zu tun, / ich legte täglich ein Ei / und Sonntags auch mal zwei. Juchei. /

Die Eier werden manchmal rar, / sie stehen auch gut im Preis, / drum ist das Huhn ein großer Star, / den man zu schätzen weiß." The song is by the Comedian Harmonists.

- 6 Peter Borowsky, "'Wirtschaftswunder,' soziale Marktwirtschaft, und Kanzlerdemokratie," in *Deutschland, 1945–1969* (Hannover: Fackelträger, 1993), 85–134; and Jennifer Loehlin, *From Rugs to Riches: Housework, Consumption, and Modernity in Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).
- 7 Roth, in an interview with Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann (1976 and 1979), reprinted in Wien, Dieter Roth, 18.
- 8 Roth, in an interview with Josef Helfenstein (1989), in *ibid.*, 409.
- 9 Roth, in an interview with Ingólfur Margeirsson (1978), in *ibid.*, 232.
- 10 Roth, in an interview with Richard Hamilton (1974), in *ibid.*, 197; and Roth, in an interview with Lebeer-Hossmann, in *ibid.*, 52.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 36, 107; Roth, in an interview with Mechthild Rausch (1981), in *ibid.*, 281. Roth agrees that his art comes out of these experiences. Asked whether his "art unconsciously [has] something to do with the bombings," he responded, "I think so. With the destruction that I experienced. And that fellow students, which sat next to me, suddenly weren't there anymore, because they disappeared in the night." Roth, in an interview with P. Schneider and Simon Maurer (1998), in *ibid.*, 482.
- 12 According to Bourdieu's empirical studies, landscapes and sunsets rank highest in popularity across class and educational differences. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Die feinen Unterschiede: Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*, trans. Bernd Schwibs and Achim Russer (1979; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 832; and Joann Wypijewski, ed., *Painting by Numbers: Komar and Melamid's Scientific Guide to Art* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997). Compare also Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Das Plebiszit der Verbraucher" (1960), [reprinted] in *Einzelheiten I: Bewußtseins-Industrie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964), 171.
- 13 Roth, in an interview with Dieter Schwarz (1985), reprinted in Wien, Dieter Roth, 338; and Roth, in an interview with Kees Broos (1981), in *ibid.*, 246.
- 14 Roth, in an interview with P. Schneider and Simon Maurer (1998), in *ibid.*, 479.
- 15 Roth, in an interview with Peter Nesweda (1995), in *ibid.*, 460; and Roth, in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 40: Bücher und Grafik (1. Teil)* (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1972), n.p.

Plate List

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Author Biographies

Jeffrey C. Alexander, the Lillian Chavenson Saden Professor of Sociology at Yale University, works in the areas of sociology, culture, and politics. An exponent of the “strong program” in cultural sociology, he has investigated the cultural codes and narratives that inform such diverse areas as computer technology, cultural trauma, and war making. His most recent publications are *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* and *The Civil Sphere*.

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Christine Mehring, Assistant Professor in the History of Art department at Yale University, specializes in twentieth-century European art and photography, postwar American art, and contemporary art. She is currently finishing a book on the German abstract painter Blinky Palermo and is at work on an examination of abstraction and decoration in the twentieth century. She has also curated exhibitions on the artist's books of Dieter Roth and on the photographs of the German-French artist Wols, for which she penned the catalogue, *Wols Photographs*. Her articles have appeared in magazines such as *Artforum*, *Texte zur Kunst*, and *History of Photography*.

Jessica Stockholder received her B.F.A. from the University of Victoria in Canada in 1982 and her M.F.A. from Yale University in 1985. She has exhibited widely in the United States and Europe, including at Dia Center for the Arts and the Mitchell-Inness & Nash gallery, in New York; the Centre Pompidou, in Paris; the Middelheim Open Air Museum of Sculpture, in Antwerp; and the Power Plant, in Toronto. Her work is represented in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, in New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Corcoran Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C.; the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York; and the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam. She has received

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Tim Barringer

Seeing Silence: Martin Johnson Heade,
Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes

Karsten Harries

Why Cézanne Matters

Jeffrey C. Alexander

Iconic Experience in Art and Life:
Standing before Giacometti's Standing Woman

Jessica Stockholder

Unfolding Drama

Christine Mehring

Duck Hunting with Dieter Roth