Issue 7 of *Shift: Graduate Journal of Visual and Material Culture* brings together articles from a wide range of disciplines. In this volume, our contributors explore topics relating to Modernist architecture and political ideology; eighteenth-century theater portraiture and the aesthetics of “sentiment”; the experimental film of Hollis Frampton and aesthetic meditations on the archive; underexplored genealogies of postwar painting; and the relation of mechanical arts to materialist philosophies of the Renaissance period.

In “Architecture as a Monument or Instrument?: The Mundaneum Project and the Polemic between Karel Teige and Le Corbusier,” Jana Beránková, a graduate student at Columbia University’s School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, traces the virtually unexplored link between Teige and Le Corbusier. Beránková delves into the misunderstanding between these two artists on aesthetics, constructivism, poetism, machinism and most recognizably form and function.

Kevin Chabot’s “Ash and Cinder: Photography, Film, and the Archive in Hollis Frampton’s *nostalgia* (1971)” approaches Hollis Frampton’s *nostalgia* as an example of the inherent tensions within the photographic medium as an indexical record of the past. Chabot, who is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto, juxtaposes the deceptive qualities of film alongside its documentary nature, which is explored through Derrida’s notion of the archive.

In “Renaissance Robotics: Leonardo da Vinci’s Lost Knight and Enlivened Materiality,” Anne Pasek, a doctoral student in New York University’s Media, Culture, and Communication department, reads Rene Descartes’ philosophical dualism against and through Leonardo da Vinci’s earlier studies on robotics and human anatomy. Pasek’s article delineates an alternative history of Renaissance materialist philosophy that moves away from strict dualism towards a theory of enlivened materiality.

Morgan Ridler’s “Sol LeWitt and Josef Albers: Parallel Squares and Kindred Concepts” traces the evolution of Albers’s influence on LeWitt. Though rarely discussed because of their opposing conceptual concerns, Ridler shows the formal affinity of their work. Ridler, who is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History at the CUNY Graduate Center, draws on LeWitt’s later homage to Albers to support her nuanced comparison.

Emily Leach’s “Seeing the Sentiment: Eighteenth Century Theatrical Portraiture and Garrick’s Adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*” uses theatrical portraiture to theorize the effects of the long-eighteenth century’s “cult of sentiment” on the reception history of late-Renaissance drama. Focusing on David Garrick’s influential adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, Leach, a Ph.D. student in English at Queen’s University, argues that theater portraiture from the play magnifies and distills the style and direction of Garrick’s adaptation.
This issue of Shift inaugurates our new “Reviews” section with Rachel Corbman’s review of Jennifer Nash’s *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Corbman’s review contextualizes Nash’s important work through recent debates surrounding bell hooks’ polemic against pop icon Beyoncé. Corbman, a Ph.D. student in Women's and Gender Studies at Stony Brook University, takes us beyond the purview of the conventional book review as she contextualizes this recent work of scholarship through conversations trending in the classroom, in print, on blogs and social media.

In our seventh issue of Shift, we are excited to see the acceptance of material culture as a methodology that many scholars now utilize. It is the focus on the object or material cultural data and its shifting societal contexts that enable us to develop a richer historical record. For this issue, we have also invited Alex Dodge to illustrate the number with his drawings and prints. Machine-made and handmade, they allude to the history of printmaking, which was historically a method of mass production and now resides in the fine art world as well. Like the study of material culture itself, which aimed to expand the field of humanistic and aesthetic studies, and to incorporate the high and low in order to better understand our rich cultural traditions, the articles in Shift’s Issue 7 address under-discussed materials and unlikely pairings to further develop their topics outside of the hermeticism that characterizes so much of academia.

Along with the new issue, we are excited to launch a co-hosted forum on the topic of digital archives in collaboration with H-Net Network on Material Culture. The forum (at https://networks.h-net.org/h-material-culture) opens with an article on “The Information Needs of Doctorate-Holding Scholars Relating to Images on the Websites of Collections of Classical Antiquities” by Sarah Vela of the University of Alberta and follows with invited and open-forum responses.

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Alex Dodge, “Human-Assisted Simulations of a Universal Will to Become (Simulation 15)”, 2014
graphite and earth pigment on synthetic paper, 20 x 26 inches

Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, NY
Abstract: René Descartes posits a curious anxiety his Second Meditation—that an otherwise convincing form might conceal a post-human robotic entity. Machinic and animalian bodies, in his dualistic perspective, were seen to exist on a lesser order than the soul of man. Yet, as Descartes himself seems to wonder, the maintenance of this divide is a fraught endeavor when automata can mimic human shape and movement. The question of animate materiality is curiously echoed in the earlier writings of Leonardo da Vinci. These fellow thinkers and tinkerers agreed on the analogous principles between bodies and machines, yet they are at odds as to the implications of these beliefs. What da Vinci's anatomical studies, robotic prototypes and treatises on art suggest is the far more radical possibility of material bodies and souls, conjoined in sensation and movement. In this flat ecology of bodies, machines and spirit, Leonardo's robots suggest a radical alternative to our Cartesian inheritance.

Keywords: New Materialism, The Moving Image, Post-Humanism, Leonardo da Vinci, Automata

René Descartes, the formative Enlightenment scholar and proponent of modern rationality, posits a strange question in the epistemological treatise of his Second Meditation (1637). Doubting the eye's capacity to deliver empirical knowledge solely through its material access to the world, the philosopher notes: "I chanced... to look out the window, and see men walking in the street; now I say in ordinary language that I 'see' them... [But] what can I see besides hats and coats
which may cover automata?" This curious anxiety—that an otherwise convincingly shaped human form might conceal a post-human robotic entity—was not a new feature of Descartes' era. Automata and trick statues were commonplace courtly objects in the aristocratic society of the time. The intellectual climate he helped cultivate, however, changed the automata's valence from an object of delight to an illustration of a rather more sinister possibility. A Cartesian Europe was one firmly entrenched in a dualistic approach to human and post-human life, whereby the material bodies of animate things were derivatively reducible to their technological and anatomical parts, save for the singular, transcendental and autonomous mind granted by God to mankind. Animals and machines, therefore, were seen to exist on a distinct and lesser order than man. Yet, as Descartes himself seems to wonder, the maintenance of this divide is a fraught endeavor when automata can mimic human shape and movement.

This question of animate materiality is curiously echoed in the earlier writings of another scholar of bodies and minds: Leonardo da Vinci, the famed Renaissance artist and engineer. Both thinkers saw intriguing parallels between the study of natural law and that of applied mechanics. To Descartes, the body was merely a machine designed by God, piloted by the autonomous mind and legitimated by mathematics. The relationship of the mind to the body was therefore often idealized as one of suspicion or remove. To Leonardo, the body was also a harmoniously proportioned “marvel of artifice,” but one that the soul departed from only with “great wailing and lamentation.” These fellow thinkers and tinkerers of automata thus agree on the analogous principles between body and machine, yet are at odds as to the implications of these beliefs. Whereas a dualistic divide between mind and body runs through the writings of both men, how they imagine the possibilities for a meaningful relationship between mechanical and spiritual matter stand in stark contrast. It is thus important to expand the history of automata to include the contributions of Leonardo da Vinci and other earlier thinkers so as to broaden our historical understanding of human materiality. What Leonardo's anatomical studies, robotic prototypes and treatises on art suggest is the far more radical possibility of an enlivened materiality that dramatically imbricates bodies and souls in conjoined sensation and movement. These implications, largely absent from the histories of art and science, start at the border between the two, and propose to animate the study of bodies in motion.
Automata and the Rational Body

The standard account of automata, as conveyed by scholars of the history of science, suggests a narrative of continuity that begins with the ritualistic automata of the Greeks, reached a turning point with Descartes’ mechanization of the body, and finally evolved into different and productive technologies through the triumph of reason over superstition. Silvio A. Bedini, for example, celebrates automata as the “first complex machines” of (Western) civilization, part of a teleological lineage of progress that links early puppets to space age cybernetics, thereby fulfilling the “original aims” of all technology: “the reduction or simplification of physical labour.” Derek de Solla Price, similarly, describes a linear “road of evolution” wherein automata serve as the “progenitors of the Industrial Revolution.”

According to this view, these technological marvels, while borne of a primitivist and animistic impulse, nevertheless provide the means though their mechanics to overcome pre-modern naiveté and embrace a rational and mechanistic world view. In this developmental history, Descartes’ role is one of a visionary and a transitional figure; “one who stands on a height scaled and begins the ascent to the next plateau.” As a key intellectual player at a moment of paradigmatic shift, Descartes’ view on automata ushered in an era that arguably extends to our own: an account of material skepticism and machinic automation against which the only exceptional object is that of the human soul.

Indeed, as is often the case when writing histories of teleological triumphs, the automata of Descartes’ period confirm this narrative of rational progress and industrialization. As Alexander Marr describes, the treatises and texts concerning automata in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century evince a shift in their approach to the technology and its accompanying wonders. As mechanical arts lost their esteem and the value of wonder came into tension with autonomous human reason, authors and inventors of automata developed an argumentative program to justify through noble curiosity and mathematical principles what might otherwise be seen as a duplicitous ruse. Moreover, the subsequent automata of the Enlightenment, Simon Schaffer notes, continued this call to reason heavily imbricated in the epistemic and economic project of industrial reform. Viewing the “active gesture” of workers as an embodied source of knowledge, the mechanization of such tasks was seen as an important way that labor could be rationalized and made visible.
This project led to a variety of mechanical and symbolic applications of automata, appearing variably as metaphors for social order, ideal workers, or Enlightened governmentality. This reformist program succeeded in promoting the machinic ethos of rationality to the extent that it began to arouse concerns from philosophers. The ascendency of the machine led to a rise in baleful androids in literature, theological reactionaries decrying the atheistic threat of human machines, and anxieties about the continued value of human life in the face of a seemingly perfect robotic ideal. The transformative potential of automatized systems and a concomitant resurgence of human exceptionalism thus characterizes the social and technological climate of a post-Cartesian Europe.

However, what has been crucially left out of this account is an attentive history of earlier automata in the context of their own time. This lacuna exists for multiple reasons: a poverty of surviving artifacts, the somewhat low-culture address of automata entertainment, and a rebuffing attitude from traditional art historians due to the works’ technological nature. Moreover, these mechanical curios, if not part of a narrative of progress and technological mastery, are somewhat embarrassing to traditional scholars of science, as they are decidedly antithetical in their relation towards the reduction or simplification of physical labor. Early modern automata are artfully complex, often serving no other purpose than to induce emotional reactions of wonder, delight and surprise. While the late Renaissance and Enlightenment automata can be seen to adapt and model their contemporary rational values, their origins do not lie there. These are the survivals of an earlier form, one whose purpose and expression can be traced back to the likes of Leonardo da Vinci.

The Renaissance’s Lost Robots

Leonardo’s contributions to this somewhat occluded field of early automata are fragmentary. Rather than an outlying curiosity, however, automata represent a logical subject of pursuit for this prototypical Renaissance man. Sketches of mechanical and kinesiological principles abound in Leonardo’s codices and inform his technological and artistic outputs in equal measure. Notes and anecdotes from his time suggest that several automated devices, from a moving lion to a bell-ringing hydraulic clock figurine, were planned and partially executed by the artist and inventor. Perhaps the most spectacular of these drafted robots lies in the designs for a
mechanical, articulated human in the Codex Atlanticus. Speculatively reconstituted by contemporary roboticist Mark Elling Rosheim with the assistance of Leonardo scholar Carlo Pedretti, "Leonardo’s Robotic Knight" has only recently become a physical and conceptual object of study (fig. 1). Described by Pedretti as “the first articulated humanoid robot in the history of Western Civilization,” it thus presents a fitting interlocutor through which to address the Cartesian anxiety about the human body and its mechanization.

The device, existing today only as fragmentary designs and modern recreations, is suspected to have been realized in 1495 under the patronage of Ludovico Sforza, then duke of Milan. Based on multiple sketches of gearing and pulleys, the fully realized knight is expected to have been able to independently sit up and open and close both its arms and helmet visor. While it features three degrees of freedom in the articulation of its legs and four degrees of freedom in the articulation of its arms and wrists, these components were all designed to move in unison. The knight, when activated, would spring upright while simultaneously closing its arms in a lateral, pectoral embrace. An analogue programmer made of a worm gear and rotating drum cam in its chest carefully controlled its movements and powered its arms, while the legs derived their force from an external crank and cable arrangement (fig. 2). Cloaked in a suit of armor, the robot’s mechanical nature was likely concealed, creating a surprising encounter between Sforza’s guests and this unknown entity. Perhaps banging a drum, revealing a gruesome face, or grabbing an unsuspecting passerby into a shocking embrace, Leonardo’s robotic knight might be seen to embody the humanist fear of an inhuman android seeking to menace its creators.

The deployment of such alarming tactics, however, should be contextualized into Europe’s larger history of palatial entertaining. As art historian Genevieve Warwick notes, villa decor of the fifteenth-century was often arranged as a theatre for interactive and

Figure 1. Mark Elling Rosheim, Knight Redrawn with Renaissance Armor, 1997. Leonardo’s Lost Robots. Image courtesy of Springer Verlag.
performative viewing. Guided by a knowing resident, visitors might be solicited into double-takes, visual traps, and embarrassing juxtapositions in a game of spatial trickery and artistic deceit. In and amongst accounts of shocking statues, interpretive poetry and titillating myths were a growing number of automata within this theatre of movement and emotion. The seventeenth-century Villa Borghese, for example, featured a frightening jack-in-the-box that forcefully competed for attention amidst the palace’s esteemed art collection. The furniture itself was also suspect; hapless users might become entrapped by one of the Borhese’s trick chairs.

The Château de Hesdein, conversely, enjoyed a long history of "frolicsome engines" stretching from the end of the thirteenth-century to the fifteenth, whereby statues and inconspicuous machines variably besmirched guests with squirts of water, flour, soot or even physical blows. As historian Jessica Riskin notes, sixteenth-century Europe was abuzz with such entertainments, which gradually became a commonplace device of aristocratic estates. Evermore astonishing to the modern reader, these somewhat malicious-seeming jokes neither ran thin nor were received in bad spirits. Present echoes of Cartesian anxiety are absent from such accounts. Instead, Riskin suggests that spectators and targets were enchanted by the whimsicality and vitality of such machines, “delighting in a base corporeality that they thought anchored even the very highest of human lives in an actively material world.”

**Sympathetic Movement**

This question of materiality is an interesting and oft-unexplored angle from which to approach Leonardo. While the artist was an
affirmed Catholic and never explicitly challenged the religious tenets of his time, his notebooks reveal a heterogeneous mixture of thoughts and suppositions about the material and metaphysical substances of the world. Given the porous nature of his interdisciplinary thinking, these writings are a rich resource with which to study the artistic and philosophical location of his automata, particularly in contrast with later Cartesian treatises concerning minds, bodies and machines. Reading the two against one another, the scholastic and artistic production of Leonardo da Vinci reveals an intriguing alternative to the problematic disembodiment of Enlightenment rationality.

As an anatomist, Leonardo developed unique and inventive theories about the interconnections between the body and soul. As Descartes would later suggest, Leonardo's description of nervous tissue also proposes a network in which one's spirit inhabits the body. This spirit, however, is a particular, interlinking intermediary between the soul and the body that is scarcely present in Descartes. Leonardo notes:

> The spirit of sentient animals moves through the limbs of their bodies and when the muscles it has entered are responsive it causes them to swell, and as they swell they shorten and in shortening they pull the tendons that are joined to them. Consequently material movement springs from the spiritual. [emphasis added].

Spirit, defined in his writings as "power united to a body," is thus on a different order of embodied importance than Descartes "animal spirits." The latter, which the philosopher assumes are generated in the heart, travel to the brain, and then propagate to the nerves and muscles, appear to have a fleeting and transitory lifecycle. Leonardo's spirits, common to all sentient creatures, are not generated and routed from within the body, but rather infuse and animate its materiality with far less ontological remove from the mind and soul.

These anatomical and metaphysical suggestions also affect Leonardo's consideration of represented bodies in art. In his treatise on painting, Leonardo advises his audience on the central importance of depicting the movement of a figure, thereby illustrating the movement of their spirit. Expertly captured motion thereby represented the "intention of his [subject's] mind" whereas the still
In this Renaissance attitude towards art, the material painting thereby gained liveliness when the empathic movements of the subject's spirit could be copied and transmitted into the eye of the beholder. Movement and spirit were animating, slipping across forms and materials to create sympathetic responses between viewers and artworks. This primacy of spiritual movement is also echoed in Leonardo's antecedent art theorist Leon Battista Alberti, who suggests, "the istoria will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted there clearly shows the movement of his own soul."  

This slip between souls and spirits is further clarified in Leonardo's anatomical studies, wherein he situates the soul within the body's "sensus communis" or "common sense": a joining point of all the five senses that he theorized to exist just behind the optic foramina of the eye. There the soul presided in a "seat of judgement" like a captain of a ship, arbitrating the direction and flow of the spirit, yet deeply immersed in the sensory world of the body. In this sense, the eyes really were the windows to the soul, and vision really could move a viewer's spirit. This location is a far remove from Descartes own unique answer to the problem of pinpointing the site of the soul in the brain. His candidate of the pineal gland accords with the logic of his model—the organ is centrally located next to the major arteries of the brain and thus better able to coordinate the flow of animal spirits—yet this location greatly distances the soul (and therefore the spiritual) from sensation and movement.

Unlike Descartes's machinic model, Leonardo's body was intimately partnered with its soul, and yet, critically, it also was not reducible to or moldable by it, as Neo-Platonic theories might otherwise suggest. In an intellectual climate that presumed a degree of isomorphism between physical beauty and morality or virtue, Leonardo da Vinci is somewhat unique in his rejection of these early physiognomic principles. Instead, the artist maintained that the shaping of the body only occurred on its own terms, through the repeated and duration wear of its material movements. Of the face, he notes:

The face shows some indications of the nature of men, their vices and their complexions; in the face the marks which separate the cheeks from the lips, the nostrils from the nose, and the sockets from the eyes, show
clearly whether these are cheerful men, often laughing; and those who show few such indications are men who engage in thought; and those, the planes of whose features are in great reliefs and hollows are bestial and angry men, of little reason; and those who have very clearly marked lines between the eyebrows are irascible; and those who have horizontal lines marked on their foreheads are men full of concealed or public lamentations; and similar things can be said of many parts of the face.\textsuperscript{35} These lines and reliefs are winkles: the animated material traces of the movements of the spirit through the body.

What's more, this enlivened materiality does not seem to be limited to humans, and indeed, Leonardo's writings and sketches make frequent links across species, arguing for continuities between the different bodies of animals. A proposed, but unrealized treatise would concern the movement of all four-legged animals (including humans, which, as Leonardo notes, also crawl on both hands and feet when they are infants).\textsuperscript{36} From the Windsor folios, sheet RL 12012 v features a study of the facial anatomy of muscle groups corresponding to different emotional states. In a note, Leonardo comments that the same muscle groups that govern expressions of anger are at work in both humans and horses.\textsuperscript{37} This is later illustrated in RL 1236 (fig. 3), which features sketches of men, horses and lions yelling angrily. The three animals are arranged in a vertical line and in profile, as if to better allow for heightened analogous comparisons. Intriguingly, the curl of the lower jaw of the lion bleeds into the swoop of the human's hair. At this level of material study, there is no human exceptionalism to be found.\textsuperscript{38}

The expressive qualities of animals and plants were also explored in the numerous riddles and allegories Leonardo wrote and collected. Part of the painter and inventor's social activities for a life in court, these stories are predicated upon a sympathetic identification with the emotions and mental processes of non-human life. “The Privet and the Blackbird,” for example, is a criticism of self-centered individuals told through a domineering bird.
and the berry bush it attacks and taunts. The bird receives his comeuppance when the bush is used in its capture and imprisonment, suggesting that the subordinate elements of a system are not without their value and agency.

More explicitly, Leonardo’s empathy with non-human animals found its material expression in his eating habits. In a rare example of Renaissance animal rights, this Renaissance vegetarian condemned meat-eaters as needlessly destructive, saying unto omnivores, “thou hast tried to make a sepulchre for all animals.” Sustenance, he maintained, could more righteously be found through plant foods and their infinite combinations. Whereas Descartes expresses no qualms that man should be the master over animals, Leonardo saw pronounced emotional and material links between human and non-human animals that morally prohibited such acts of domination and sovereignty.

This cross-species identification is imaginatively continued in Leonardo’s approach to the creation of chimeral creatures. In order to make new and fantastical animals “appear natural,” Leonardo suggests that the discerning artist should swap or combine parts of different beasts, thereby creating imaginary figures that maintained a material realism. This practice is echoed throughout Leonardo da Vinci’s sketches, and even finds its way into some of his more whimsical character portraits. The Leonine Man (fig. 4), for example, features pronounced and downcast jowls and a wild mane, which echoes those of the lion pelt he wears around his shoulders. His curled hair also resembles a metamorphosis into ivy leaves, bringing together man, animal and plant.

This substitution ethic transcends both animal and botanical anatomy and can be found in his approach to mechanics. Similar to his creature analogies, RL 19136-9v (fig. 5) visually juxtaposes the muscular movements of the leg and foot with that of a pulley while the page’s notes describe the principles of simple machines.
used to lighten loads. Leonardo expressly sought to glorify the esteem of mechanics, saying of this branch of science, it “is the noblest and useful above all others, since by means of it all animated bodies which have movement perform their actions.” A proposed plan for a book on mechanical principles was to consist firstly of their theoretical elements followed by their application within the bodies of men and animals. After all, he claims, “nature cannot give the power of movement to animals without mechanical instruments.” This claim was soon applied in the inventor's prototypes for a flying machine. By studying the mechanical principles by which birds moved through the air, Leonardo sought to create an artificial body that would achieve the same principles of movement. This was possible in the inventor's mind because:

a bird is an instrument working according to the mathematical law, which instrument it is in the capacity of man to reproduce... We may therefore say that such an instrument constructed by man is lacking nothing except the life of the bird, and this life must needs be imitated by the life of man, [sic].

As cultural historian Jonathan Sawday notes, rather than focusing on a contemporary calculus of power-to-weight ratios, this model of engineering is predicated upon an ethos of substitution: “‘fusing’ two 'machines' so that they have become one: an Ovidian fantasy of the transformation has become reality.”

This imagined porosity between machinic and organic bodies was also present in the wider intellectual and artistic community of Leonardo’s historical surrounds. Leonardo’s forerunner Alberti suggests in his *Ten Books of Architecture* that:

all engines may be looked upon to be a sort of Animals, with prodigious strong hands... they move Weights in the same Manner as we Men do with our Arms.... the same Distention and Contraction of the Members and Nerves, which we use in pulling, thrusting or lifting, we are to imitate in our Engines [sic].

The later engineer Augustino Ramelli, following closely on Leonardo's designs, illustrated his treatise of mechanical systems in a cut-away style, mimicking the language of popular anatomy books. These great machine bodies lead Sawday to suggest that by the fifteenth-century the divide between the natural and the artificial was quite effaced.
This point is further driven home in Cesare Ripa’s 1603 iconological portrait of Artifice, which describes the embodied concept as follows:

He is nobly clothed because Art is noble of itself. His Hand upon the screw shews that Engines have been contriv’d by Industry; that by them incredible Things like the perpetual Motion have been perform’d. The Hive declares the Industry of the Bees, which, being very inconsiderable, are nevertheless great as to their conduct [sic, emphasis original].

The accompanying illustration (fig. 6), attributed to Giovanni Guerra, depicts Artifice as a conduit between mechanic and insectile industries. One hand rests upon an Archimedes screw while the other is greeted by a phalanx of bees. The latter hand doesn’t quite touch the hive and the figure’s head is drawn looking towards this interaction with an astonished expression. The relation between the man and the insects thus suggests more of a mutual exchange than that of domination and subordination. With a depiction of the artificial that is equal parts organic, mechanical and artistic, such an account situates the possibility of biomechanics on amazing, but not fundamentally upsetting, terms.

Key to this intellectual climate of cross-species and cyborgic identifications is the Italian Renaissance’s unique understanding of invention, which finds its root in the word ingenium. Rather than seeking to create entirely new artifacts in a detached space of artificiality, a genius inventor would seek instead to find novel arrangements between objects and principles, quite irrespective of their origins. Like the irrational relationships between curios in a cabinet of curiosity or the chimerical creatures described by Leonardo, ingenium proposed...
a model of the imagination that was fixed to the free flow of principles evinced by material objects, while never being quite beholden to their prescribed categories of analysis. Rather than being the product of domination and control over nature on the part of a human inventor, ingenium instead inspired an ethos of adaptability, timeliness, and an acute responsiveness to the systems in which the inventor was imbricated. In his study of the term, philosopher Timothy D. Harfield concludes, “[o]f all the concepts in the Humanist repertoire, ingenium is the most powerful, not only because of the central place it appears to occupy in the rhetorical mode of thought, but also its ability to demonstrate the possibility of a non-anthropocentric humanism.”

Conflicting Humanism

This reading of the Italian Renaissance and its humanist worldview provides a strong point of contrast against the typical narrative of secular rationality inherent to the previously mentioned historians of technology and a wider body of post-Enlightenment humanist scholars and reformers. Indeed, the speculative roboticist

Figure 6. Attributed to Giovanni Guerra, “Artifice,” In Cesare Ripa's Iconologia, Rome 1603.
Marc Elling Rosheim is keen to place Leonardo da Vinci's knight in a position of human exceptionalism and glory. Suggesting that the robot was likely placed in Sforza Castle's Sala delle Asse, a domed room, which featured an intricate fresco of trees painted by Leonardo himself, Rosheim concludes that this juxtaposition of natural and artificial imagery enthroned the knight in a position of supremacy. The roboticist notes, “[i]n his humanist philosophy, man was the microcosm: the universe writ small. Leonardo's Knight, when viewed in a man-made microcosm such as the Sala delle Asse, would have embodied the Renaissance ideal of 'man as the measure,' the standard for which the world was designed.”

The exact definition of humanism and its (variable) historical location; however, is a point of scholarly debate. As Tony Davies's survey of the many humanisms across Western history attests, the word's meaning is muddled at best. Humanism was originally an educational term referring to a curricular program emphasizing Greek and Latin texts. This phenomenon started during the Italian Renaissance but didn't coalesce into a formal discipline or term until the nineteenth-century educational reforms of Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. By this point the valences of the word were far removed from Renaissance concerns, though subsequent thinkers were happy to mobilize this pedigree for the benefit of their contemporary and political sympathies. To Carl Jacob Christoph Burckhardt, Renaissance humanism could be characterized by a new species of free-determining, secular thinkers, whereas the Comte de Gobineau found inspiration therein for his proto-Nietzschean (and extremely racist) views. These forms of humanism, “demonstrably shaped by and inseparable from nineteenth-century conditions and concerns,” provided a vital narrative of human triumph and righteousness in the face of the chaos and brutality of a nascent modernity. Critically, however, these meanings largely failed to account for the interests and perspectives of Renaissance thinkers in and of themselves.

Modernity's humanism more recently has come under severe critique by anti-humanist and post-humanist thinkers seeking to expose and ameliorate a system of dangerous philosophical precepts inherent to its core values from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. Thinkers such as Martin Heidegger and Donna Haraway have attacked humanism's underlying essentialist metaphysics—Heidegger
for the assumption of ontological givenness and Haraway for the gendered Cartesian dualism of a humanism predicated on the separation of the human from natural and artificial categories. To ameliorate the situation, these thinkers propose forms of ontological performativity and cyborgic intermingling, respectfully. By attending to the responsiveness of human imbrication in material environments and by embracing an ethos of transformation and inter-corporeal substitution, these interventions stand to re-integrate the human into the material world, thus transforming what it means to be human.

That these critiques share much in common with the material play of Leonardo's Renaissance has escaped the vast majority of post-human and anti-humanist thinkers. Harfield, for instance, laments the perceived oversight on the part of radically-oriented post-humanist thinkers who would endorse the wholesale rejection of the humanist tradition in favor of articulating human worldviews radically anew. This intellectual demolition, he argues, risks repeating Enlightenment ahistoricism while also ignoring any potentially helpful alternative foundations scattered throughout history.

Renaissance humanism—which is to say, a study of how Renaissance thinkers conceived of the human in relation to its larger material and metaphysical environment—is thus still an understudied and underrepresented topic. However, within its boundaries and in the work and writing of Leonardo da Vinci, one such foundation may yet exist. Ingenium and the anti-essentialist, empathetic orientation between the artist, animals and his technological surrounds suggests a spirit of movement between types and modes of being that exceeds even Heidegger or Haraway's imagination.

Aligned with contemporary new materialist sympathies, this particular form of humanism troubles the metaphysical exceptionalism of Descartes by fostering a spirit of conviviality between objects and species. Through an emotive and sensory imbrication in the world, human animals are deeply situated in a material frame that moves between a variety of animate and inanimate forms. Similar to Timothy Morton's concept of "ecological thinking," the work of Leonardo da Vinci and his peers propose a perspective of nature that is far from external to the human, but in fact constitutes and dissolves this very division.
The Moving Horizon

What, then, are we to make of the spectacularly animated body of Leonardo’s knight? Rather than the specter of a robotic malefactor rising up against its human master, the perspective expressed by Leonardo and his cultural surrounds suggests a rather more material and far less calamitous reading.

Part technological (and perhaps part animal if the supposition of its ghoulish face proves true), Leonardo's knight engages in a play of passing as human, affecting a Renaissance Turing test (or, more to the point, a pop quiz). It is one that the device is designed to fail—the confusion between human and artifice is momentary and arresting, but ultimately gives way to jest. Antipodal to the typical Kantian mode of detached spectatorship, the work forcefully incites an emotional and bodily reaction that cannot be sustained. In the fallout of the ruse, however, are the conditions for an insightful (and perhaps even pleasurable) fellow-feeling.

The fragmentary nature of the object makes it difficult to faithfully reconstitute the possible experience of its use. Instead, one can speculatively imagine the encounter through a phenomenological and material lens: let us then conceive of a young gentleman walking through the Sforza palace, perhaps lost in thought. Suddenly, he is confronted by an empty suit of armor that leaps upwards out of the corner of his eye. Its cold, steel arms snap around the man’s body, freezing him in his steps. His pulse quickens, perhaps he shrieks as the knight’s helmet snaps open, holding his face up against its own gruesomely-rendered visage. And then, after the man’s death fails to materialize, he bursts out laughing at the reassurance of his safety and marvels at the artifice of the illusion. The Medusa-esque face, rather than turning the man to stone, has enlivened the inanimate body of the robot. In the arms of a machine, the spectator notes the similarity between his joints and those of the knight that holds him. Peeking through the cracks of its armor, the intimacy of its embrace allows him to catch glimpses of the cords, pulleys and gears that holds the figure upright. In order to exit, he will need to touch it in turn, pushing against its arms to ease its grip. The robot's body has a gentle resistance that reminds him of the muscles and tendons of his own. Departing from the robot, he moves his weight off the pressure plate on the floor that triggered the knight, causing it to collapse downwards again. It seems strangely lifeless now- its movement and
spirit are absent without his empathetic participation.

This imagined vignette hints at the possible interactions between viewer and artifice, suggesting a mode of interacting with art that is dramatically different from the contemplative study of the art historian or connoisseur. The laughter, chemical release of endorphins and physical arrest of this hypothetical spectator would intervene in his emotional, bodily and conceptual horizons, threatening to destabilize the solidity of anything remotely resembling a rational viewer. Its mode of engagement is neither discursive nor iconological, further confounding traditional art historical hermeneutics. Of the nascent theories of the moving image, it is also somewhat at odds. This movement is without the vertiginous psyche of Georges Didi-Huberman (for that would reinstate an anthropocentrism back into the ground so recently cleared by the robot's sweeping arms) and further resists the traumatic nature of horror suggested by Maria H. Loh (its ruse is rather more playful and easily defeated). Instead, the robot seems poised to work on much larger stakes, suggesting a mode of analysis that exists at the intersection of the histories of art, science and philosophy. Movement, not only of images but also of physical principles, biological forms and material horizons, animates human and non-human bodies, bringing forth the possibility of sympathetic alignments and ingenium.

Contrary to the Cartesian inheritance still writ into humanist and post-humanist accounts of materiality, Leonardo da Vinci and his historical peers suggest an alternative means of understanding and activating the environmental milieu. Movement and empathetic connections between bodies have the potential to enliven matter in a mode that is less deconstructive than it is radically collectivist. In this flat ecology of bodies, machines and spirit, Leonardo's robot can thus be seen as more than the forbearer of a modernity whose industry and inhumanity fed both the appetites of Enlightenment technologists and the fears of post-Enlightenment deriders of automata. Instead, the knight might contain the very means by which to undo this operation.
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Endnotes

1 René Descartes, as quoted in Anne Friedberg, The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2006), 52.


4 Ibid.


Alexander Marr, "Gentille curiosité: Wonder-working and the culture of automata in the Late Renaissance," in Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, ed. R.J.W. Evans and Alexander Marr (Aldershot, England: Ashdate, 2006), 150-156. Marr, however, does not address early Renaissance perspectives at length, and presents this late Renaissance turn as a departure from a seemingly continuous derision towards automata dating back to antiquity. This article, though brief and narrow in focus, attempts to trouble this assumption. Looking to the two centuries before Marr’s study it is evident that automata apologetics were neither as necessary nor as relevant to the epistemology concerns of the early Renaissance as his scholarship would suggest.


Roscheim, Leonardo’s Lost Robots, 69.

Genevieve Warwick, “Speaking Statues: Bernini’s Apollo and Daphne at the Villa Borghese,” Art History vol. 27, no. 3 (June 2004): 354.

Warwick suggests the Borghese Hermaphroditus may have formed one such trap, whereby the gendered ambiguity of the work is hidden and then revealed in the processes of circumlocution, thereby soliciting surprise and embarrassment. Ibid., 361.

Ibid., 375.


Descartes, *Discourse*, Part V, np. It should be noted, however, that the centrality of the heart and its heat in his anatomical model strikingly parallels the role of putrefaction and fermentation in Paracelsus’ alchemical research into the creation of homunculi. This strange continuity is somewhat at odds with the rational empiricism of Descartes and contradicts William Harvey’s pump model (upon which the rest of Descartes anatomical theories are based). This may be another early Renaissance survival, deserving further study. For more on Paracelsus and early modern homunculi, see Kevin LaGrandeur, "Do Medieval and Renaissance Androids Presage the Posthuman?" *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol 12, no. 3 (September 2010): article 3.


Clayton makes a critical distinction between Leonardo's horse and human studies, suggesting that Leonardo's pursuit of harmonious proportion vexed the study of the latter, whereas the former remained unburdened from such idealizations due to its lack of humanist importance. This claim seems poorly verified in the artist's studies, in which the subject of the horse conforms to a highly rigorous measurement and standardization that strikes me as very continuous with his treatment of human forms. Moreover, sheets such as RL 1012 v further problematize this claim by situating both subjects on a shared plain of representation and study. Clayton, *The Divine and the Grotesque*, 25.

For a mirrored account of this ecological interpretation of the human, see the following section of the Codex Leicester: “The earth has a vegetative soul in that its flesh is the soil, its bones are the arrangements of the connections of rocks of which the mountains are composed, its cartilage is the tufa, and its blood is the water in the veins; the lake of blood that is throughout the heart is the oceanic sea, and its breathing is the increase and decrease of the blood during its pulsing, just as the sea is the flow and ebb of the water; and the heart of the soul of the world is the fire that is infused throughout the earth, and the seat of the vegetative spirit is in the fires, which in various locations in the world breathe through baths and mines of sulphur and in [volcanoes],” as quoted in Kemp, *Leonardo*, 131.


Ibid., 348.

Kemp, *The Human Animal*, 43.

Leonardo da Vinci scholarship seems unable to place or account for this oddity. Martin Kemp suggests that it may form a rare exception to Leonardo’s otherwise total disengagement with physiognomic looking practices, whereas Clayton first dismisses the pelt as an afterthought, and then suggests that it may be linked to the association of lions with choleric humours. Both of these statements seem to be contradicted by the artist’s own writings on the relationship between temperament and the body. See Kemp, *The Human Animal*, 43 and Clayton, *The Divine and the Grotesque*, 64.


45 Leonardo, as quoted in Sawday, “Forms Such as Never Were,” 184.
46 Ibid.
49 Sawday, Engines of the Imagination, 178.
50 Sawday, “Forms Such as Never Were in Nature,” 181.
54 Ibid., 22.
55 Ibid.
56 Rosheim, Leonardo's Lost Robots, 71.
58 Ibid., 9.
59 Ibid., 10-17.
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63 Here one can recall the painter's famous Medusa and the playful opposition of effects between its namesake and the Pygmalion action of the automata.
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graphite, earth pigment, and gesso on synthetic paper, 40 x 26 inches

Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, NY
Architecture as a Monument or Instrument? :
The Mundaneum Project and the Polemic between Karel Teige and Le Corbusier

by Jana Beránková

Abstract: Focusing on the Mundaneum project, which took place at the end of the 1920s, this paper contests Le Corbusier’s polemical classing of Czechoslovak architect and theorist Karel Teige as a representative of Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) and retraces the genealogy of the polemic, arguing that the origins of the discord lay in their distinct aesthetic doctrines. Whereas Le Corbusier promoted mathematically-grounded eternal values of beauty, Teige believed beauty was a socially and historically determined product. The latter was strictly opposed to any idea of monumentality and saw architecture as an instrument rather than as a monument. The polemic between Teige and Le Corbusier merits the attention of contemporary scholarship because it elucidates the asymmetries in avant-garde architects’ approaches to politics. Le Corbusier saw architecture as specialized knowledge independent of political doctrines; his famous statement “architecture or revolution” can be read as an expression of the motive to use architecture in order to prevent revolution. On the contrary, Teige’s stance was far more radical; for him, a truly modern architecture should be preceded by a successful socialist revolution. In reviving the monument-instrument debate between Teige and Le Corbusier, my paper raises questions about the brittle relationship between politics and architectural practice.

Keywords: Le Corbusier, Karel Teige, Architecture, Mundaneum, Monumentality

The polemic on the Mundaneum project is a remarkable point in the history of Le Corbusier’s and Karel Teige’s architectural thinking.
According to a general interpretation of the dialogue of these two thinkers, Teige advocated *Sachlichkeit* and took Le Corbusier’s thinking too literally. However, this interpretation is saturated by Le Corbusier’s rhetoric and overlooks nuances present in the thinking of the Czechoslovak critic and crucial issues of this debate. Therefore, the polemic should be analyzed from the perspective of the aesthetic theories of both characters. Only this perspective can help to elucidate the crucial paradigms of the debate: the tension between the notion of *monument* and *instrument*, architecture and social tissue. The goal of this article is to highlight contrasting paradigms of this debate. How and why was Le Corbusier related to his young opposing colleague?

**Shifts and meetings**

In 1922, Karel Teige met Le Corbusier on a trip to Paris. Teige was a young critic whose career was embedded in ideas of proletarian poetry promoted by Karel Seifert and Jiří Wolker. He considered modern technology to be the cause of human alienation and criticized the spread of American culture, and the related cult of the engineer, in Europe. The first volume of the *Devětsil* anthology,¹ to which he significantly contributed, was still marked by these tendencies. It included criticism of the industrial civilization and the appraisal of a simple, *naïve* and tendentious art.

The meeting with Le Corbusier had a fundamental effect on Teige. At that time, Le Corbusier promoted his “esprit nouveau”: the new beauty of modern, industrially produced objects. It was after this meeting that Teige began to consider science as the rational apparatus able to fight the irrationality of capitalism. In Teige’s newly shaped view, science was a discipline using hypothesis verified by mathematic calculation, and its exact methods lead the whole humanity towards social progress. This notion of science defied common positivist ideas; science was a weapon in the struggle towards a new socialist society, and technological innovations were tools for defending an equitable social order.

In 1923, Teige presented the oeuvre of his French colleague in the *Stavba* review² and advertised him largely among the young Czechoslovak avant-garde. Le Corbusier visited Prague where he delivered a number of conferences under the name of the series *Purism and architecture*, which also sponsored visits by other famous archi-
tects like Gropius, Loos and Oud. In this manner, Le Corbusier established a close relationship with the Czechoslovak intellectual milieu.

Although Le Corbusier stimulated Teige’s interest in architecture, the French architect was not his definitive master. At the end of 1920s, the relationship between both personalities culminated in a significant clash preceding their separation. This dispute was already insinuated in Teige’s interview of Le Corbusier for Rozpravy Aventina and it found its climax in disagreement over the Mundaneum project. Although Teige was inspired by the French architect, he relegated him to the position of an old and antiquated master.

Mundaneum

The Mundaneum project became the pretext of discord. The commission for the Mundaneum project was sent to Le Corbusier in 1928 by Paul Otlet. Otlet, a champion of universalism, conceived the Mundaneum as a global museum materializing the unity of knowledge. He envisioned it as a visual three-dimensional encyclopedia, the goal of which was to emphasize the unity of all people around the globe. According to Wouter van Acker, the Mundaneum was “an atlas of knowledge that did not symbolize the Euclidian space of knowledge, but a semantic space.” Otlet was involved in research focused on giving a visual form to the knowledge. He shared with the avant-garde the conviction that the image was the most rapid and functional form of knowledge and he saw the predominance of the image as a direct expression of modern times. Yet, his thinking was also deeply embedded in occultism and platonlic metaphors of seeing and illumination. Rather than a mere museum, the Mundaneum was supposed to be a sanctuary of knowledge; it was monumental and functional at the same time.

The Mundaneum had four main functions: documentation (as a world library and bibliographical institute), a museum describing the progress of ideas of the whole of humanity, a university, and various world institutions. Otlet envisioned that the institution would have an extra-territorial status and would work to preserve world peace. It would be an instrument of communication between different cultures. Thus, the project inscribed itself into an ideology of humanitarian internationalism serving for the prevention of military conflicts.
Le Corbusier proposed a project for the Mundaneum’s design which contained a museum with a surprising pyramidal form. This step pyramid had no staircase; visitors had to enter it either by using elevators or exterior ramps. To reach the entrance at the top of the pyramid, visitors would have to traverse a two-thousand-and-five-hundred-meter walk. Visitors descended through an exhibition starting in pre-historic times and advancing towards the present era. Along the way, the halls of the museum contained apertures offering a panoramic view of natural settings. Finally, at the end of the walk, visitors were to enter the Sacrarium, a temple of ethics, philosophy, and religion containing a huge globe, which alluded to the international character of the project.

The architectural walk that Le Corbusier proposed may reflect Otlet’s own vision of knowledge. In his cosmological treatise The World, Essay of Universalism, Otlet describes three stages of knowledge that constitute the world: The first is analysis, a positive system, “a mere recording of facts and their classification according to a strictly experimental order, and observation.” The second stage is synthesis including logics as well as intuition, in which the spirit establishes preliminary answers. Finally, the third stage is religious thought in which “a natural order that the reason can access is doubled by a supernatural order, accessible only via belief, and via revealed truths.”

The architectural walk through the pyramid proposed by Le Corbusier may materialize Otlet’s understanding of knowledge. A walk through Mundaneum’s museum can be interpreted as a cognitive procedure divided into three main stages: ascending (analysis), reaching the top and descending (synthesis), and finally entering the Sacrarium without any natural daylight (religious revelation). The walk through the pyramid would evoke a pilgrimage, a sacred ceremony in which a human being moves from the external (positive) truths to inner truths of the soul. It would have a circular character, as one can imagine a visitor that would repeat this walk many times. The Mundaneum’s museum would thus materialize the eternal spiral of knowledge and vital cosmic energy described by Otlet.

The museum was to be completed by a library in a form of a massive prism on pilotis. Its first floor was to be divided by two entrances: one for employees, the other for visitors. It was supposed to contain lecture halls, offices and a restaurant situated in superior floors. On the southern side of the whole complex, a huge hall shaped
according to rules of acoustics evoked a similar facility proposed in Le Corbusier’s Tsentrosoyuz project. Finally, in the middle of the area, a university connected all the institutions and was completed by a large garden and temporary exhibition pavilions. The whole complex was equipped with a telegraph station, a parking lot, a hotel, university dormitories and botanical and mineralogical gardens. The urban scheme of the project was shaped in order to preserve a natural panorama of Lake Geneva.

Teige, Stavba, 1929

In 1929, Teige published a critique of Mundaneum in Stavba review⁹. While Teige respected Le Corbusier as a founder of modern architecture and appreciated the project’s solution of the university component, he remarked that the whole project created an archaic impression. In his view, it was impossible to give any functional justification for the pyramidal form of the museum, mainly due to the complicated access to the top of the building and due to the artificial lighting which was the only source of light inside the Sacrarium. He claimed the whole plan resembled an aerial photograph of an old archeological site.

According to Teige, “the first root of this misconception of the program lies in the program, the idea and theory of the Mundaneum. This idea is not alive, it does not originate from a vibrant, felt need; it is the fruit of the abstract and rarified speculation of intellectual coteries within the League of Nations.”¹⁰ What Teige criticized was not merely the architectural plan, but also the idealistic and religious vision of Paul Otlet. To him, Le Corbusier’s project was a mere academic utopia aligned to Otlet’s abstract vision. If a program was vaguely and incorrectly defined, a resulting architectural form could be only a sad compromise. The building could never be fully functional if its main “function” was an abstract symbolic one. The inner truths that one was to discover inside the symbolic space of the Sacrarium clearly contradicted the requirement for natural daylight to enter the exhibition space. In other words, Teige disapproved the symbolic dimension of the Mundaneum because it was antithetical to functional demands of the space.

The main error of the Mundaneum was the error of monumentality and of the Golden Section: the project’s compliance to compositional and astronomical symbolism. It was the “error of a palace.”¹¹ In-
stead of proposing a viable urban solution, the project promoted an abstract composition; tracé régulateur subjugated everything to an aesthetic *a priori* speculation. Teige believed this conception was false, because the goal of architecture was to create *instruments*, not *monuments*. In Teige’s conception, the instrument equaled the functionality of constructivist architecture. The architecture as an *instrument*, or a tool, was liberated from any aesthetic ambitions; it conveyed the definition of architecture as a science that Teige embraced in the late 1920s. On the contrary, the *monument* conveyed the artistic conception of architecture which Teige heavily criticized. Thus, the debate on monument-instrument also embodied the questioning of the role of architecture in the interwar period.

**Le Corbusier’s In Defense of Architecture**

Le Corbusier replied to Teige by a text written during his travels to Moscow and published for the first time in the Czech review *Musaión* in 1931. The French version was published only in 1933 in the *l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* review. In this response, Le Corbusier recycled Teige’s quotations (for instance from Hannes Meyer’s *Bauen* manifesto) and tried to turn them against him. Corbusier tried to persuade Teige that he could not be serious in pretending to be something what he was not: a scientist, and not a poet. In this manner, Le Corbusier misconstrued Teige’s conceptions, as the latter never renounced his role of writer and poet but only proclaimed a different conception of art and poetry. In fact, Teige, who was founder of the Poetist movement, believed that poetry was a quality inherent in the life of tomorrow and that life itself would become poetry. Teige believed it was necessary to construct buildings rationally in order to create a dialectical opposition to the current poetic disorder.

Le Corbusier labeled Teige’s approach as *sachlich*; he claimed that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was “a recent banner under which avant-gardes from Germany, the Netherlands and partly from Czechoslovakia assembled.”¹² This claim is particularly simplified since Teige never espoused positions of the “new objectivity.” If the new objectivity had a considerable impact on German art and architecture, its influence in Czechoslovakia was rather restricted. The origins of Teige’s critique of Le Corbusier’s design were broadly political and aesthetic; they were not related to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Le Corbusier’s rebuttal was ineffectual; he used the word *sachlich* as his principal weapon, but he did not manage to locate the crux of Teige’s critique.
Le Corbusier also asked Teige why he thought that the notion of composition was contradictory to architecture. Although it is not clear to what extent Le Corbusier was familiar with polemics inside the Soviet constructivist movement, his question insinuates either a lack of knowledge of the theoretical distinction between construction and composition or a defense of composition. According to the productivist group of Russian Constructivists, composition seeks eternal laws of beauty and for aesthetical a priori, while construction demonstrates faktura of the oeuvre, its fabrication process and the dialectical tensions it contains. While composition regards itself as a timeless practice, construction is deeply embedded in history. Varvara Stepanova, whose position is close to the productivist stance, defines the distinction thus:

Composition is the contemplative approach of the artist in his work. Technique and industry have confronted art with the problem of construction as an active process, and not contemplative reflection. The ‘sanctity’ of a work as a single entity is destroyed. The museum which was a treasury of this entity is now transformed into an archive.\textsuperscript{13}

Teige’s own reception of Constructivism was close to these productivist positions. His thinking can be generally associated with ideas of Varvara Stepanova, Alexander Rodchenko or with groups like ASNOVA (“Association of New Architects”) or OSA (“Organization of Contemporary Architects”). Some of his propositions concerning the liquidation of art seem to have been partly inspired by Aleksei Gan’s declaration of the end of art and a refusal to separate the form from its ideology. His interpretation of Constructivism could be linked with the productivist criticism of metaphysics and ideal artistic structures. Thus, it is clear that he must have had a little sympathy for Le Corbusier’s idealistic approach investigating eternal and pure aesthetic values. If composition and construction were isolated from the variety of issues inside the Russian constructivism, then Le Corbusier may be labeled a defender of composition while Teige would be rather a defender of construction.

According to Le Corbusier, composition was essential to architecture; it was the manifestation of human genius. He accused Teige from romanticizing machines and claimed that aesthetics was a fundamental human function. A human being was a dual being; it was a brain and a heart, reason and passion. For that reason, the rejection
of architecture as artistic practice was a mere repressive measure of the Sachlichkeit. Construction appeared as nothing more than a preliminary condition of architecture; then human genius was needed to compose. In order to support his claim, Le Corbusier mentioned an anecdote from his studio in which Alfred Roth gave a wastepaper basket a kick. The wastepaper basket buckled and its volume expanded. However, its form was hideous. This story illustrated the fact that “the function of beauty is independent on the function of utility; these are two things.”

Le Corbusier defended Paul Otlet’s conception and demonstrated the Mundaneum’s functionality: Its form was deduced from its function and the spiral was a useful attribute. Since it clarified the composition, he said tracé régulateur should be understood as “purification of a drawing” and he stated that a pyramid was not less academic than a cube. Le Corbusier mentioned the mixture of intimacy and of geometry inherent to the project, which he described as an infiltration of nature into a heroic gesture of a human being. Finally, he employed the example of the Eiffel tower as a structure which seemed to be completely useless work of pure beauty when constructed, but which later gained a particular utility.

Reply to Le Corbusier – Karel Teige

In his article in response to Le Corbusier’s rebuttal (which was published in the same issue of Musaion in 1931), Teige stiffened his rhetoric. He refuted the accusation of Neue Sachlichkeit and strictly criticized the Society of Nations. This time, he laid his cards directly on the table by assuming a political stance; he claimed that the Society of Nations was a reactionary institute following the interests of the powerful and pursuing strictly imperialist objectives. Projects like Mundaneum tried to clothe financial interests in a coat of metaphysics. Teige's critique therefore addressed the important question of the political responsibility of an architect: To what extent should an architect follow or contest demands of his client?

In his article, Teige stated, “Useful equals beautiful. Or more exactly, accomplished functionality is beautiful. Beauty does not exist in itself; an accomplished construction, a poem, a scientific work or other expression of vigor, is beautiful.” He criticized the bourgeois idea of Une maison – un palais and insinuated his theories of minimum dwelling. He denounced the idea of tracé régulateur because
urban life was neither symmetrical nor calculated according to a Golden Section. \textit{Tracés régulateurs}, which cannot accommodate the orientation of the sun, are mere academism of modern architecture, Teige argued. He criticized Le Corbusier for modifying the terrain in order to make his buildings perfectly symmetrical and for adding useless abutments (as with villa Besnus and villa Stein). Teige riposted that even the Eiffel Tower had a particular utility since the beginning; not only was it a meteorological and radiotelegraphic station, but it was also a gigantesque advertising of French metallurgy. To call advertising a \textit{temple} was to mistake financial concern for humanitarian service. Architecture had to consider social issues.

The timeless: nature, sun, air, simplicity

One of the main issues of this polemic is a clash between two different aesthetic conceptions. At the time of their disagreement, Le Corbusier may have been influenced by Victor Basch and by the establishment of aesthetics as an academic field that aimed to analyze absolute aesthetic values and invariants of beauty. In his \textit{In Defense of Architecture}, Le Corbusier insisted on these presumed eternal values: a cube, a circle, a \textit{tracé régulateur}. He described himself more as an artist or a poet, not far from the human geniuses whose monument was to be the Mundaneum. Le Corbusier’s aesthetic theories were concerned with invariants and eternal laws. If he defied the traditional French academy, it was not to suppress the Golden Section, but because he believed that its aesthetics had become too complicated and too distant from these invariants (i.e. neo-historical buildings were far from being simple). Le Corbusier did not want to abolish academies; he tried to rival them. He constituted \textit{l’Esprit Nouveau} as a new academy.

This position was completely opposed to Karel Teige’s stance. Teige did not believe in any eternal laws of beauty. His conception was close to Viktor Shklovsky’s idea of \textit{ostranenie} (defamiliarisation),\textsuperscript{17} demonstrating that beauty was not a quality inherent in objects but rather dependent on a spectator’s view. If Le Corbusier claimed that Roth’s wastepaper basket was hideous, Teige might have replied that even this object could be considered as beautiful if it were regarded in a certain manner. According to Teige, aesthetics \textit{a priori} did not exist; what existed was only a permanent historical evolution of aesthetic perspectives.
This idea was interconnected with the Czechoslovak intellectual life of the time, mainly with the structuralism established by the Prague’s Linguistic Circle, which included Victor Shklovsky amongst its members. In his essay *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, Jan Mukařovský, another key figure in the Circle, talked about the variability of beauty in time. Mukařovský defined the aesthetic function and stated that the “boundary lines of an aesthetic domain are very variable and they are determined by reality itself.”\(^{18}\) Although there is a relatively constant presence of the aesthetic function in our society, there are also people who consider everything to be beautiful and people who have almost no aesthetic experience; everything depends on the sensibility of the individual. For this reason, there is no clear frontier between a domain of the aesthetic and a domain of the non-aesthetic; these two zones are in a relationship of permanent fluctuation and of “dialectical antinomy.”\(^{19}\) An aesthetic object is an object with a predominating aesthetic function. But aesthetic appreciation is always volatile and dependent on the relationship between a collectivity and the world; it is never in the thing itself.

Although Teige belonged to a slightly different milieu than that of the Linguistic Circle, he became Mukařovský’s friend. While a detailed genealogy of the exchange of ideas between the Czechoslovak avant-garde and structuralism is still to be traced, it is certain that they share many connections. Early structuralism was opposed to academia and its universal aesthetic laws. In Mukařovský and Jakobson’s studies of the functions of art, aesthetic function was merely a way of seeing, which encompassed other *utilitarian* functions. While in structuralism, the form and the function were inseparably linked as two sides of the same coin, Le Corbusier leaned towards subjugating the function to the form. It may be for that reason that Teige reproached Le Corbusier for adding ornament to his architecture. Peter Zusi underscores the tension between Teige and Le Corbusier when he argues that, for Teige, “a new beauty would emerge only from a radical elimination of the independent beauty function,”\(^{20}\) whereas Le Corbusier conceived the “beauty function” as something added and thus could not avoid the pitfall or ornamentation. This discord is also the source of Teige’s condemnation of Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein. Teige criticized Le Corbusier for increasing the terrain in order to locate Villa Stein’s staircase parallel to a diagonal of a façade. According to Teige, the construction of modern temples was unjustifiable. He believed the aesthetic principles of the Golden Section were superannuated and

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that “the dictatorship of composition schemes and formalist, sculptural intentions deforms the construction.”

Beautiful – useful – poetic

Teige was convinced that every object in which form and function were in a relation of mutual balance was beautiful. If a poem was considered beautiful, it was for its coherency between the *signified* and the *signifier*. While Le Corbusier affirmed that “the function of beauty is independent on the function of utility; these are two different things,” Teige considered every perfectly functional machine as beautiful. For the latter, it was unnecessary to construct first and to add supplemental ornament later. Le Corbusier, however, accused Teige of *Sachlichkeit* and of reducing architecture to a machine. In order to evaluate this critique, it is useful to turn to Teige’s actual conception of a machine.

In his *Poetism Manifesto*, Teige declared that it “is in the interest of life, that engineers’ computations would be rational. But every computation rationalizes the irrationality only up to a certain number of decimals. The computation of every machine has its $\pi$.” Even in a perfectly rationalized construction of a house, there will always be an unconceivable zone of the irrational. The aesthetic function recalls this $\pi$ (pi) of the machine. Even so, creating deliberately irrational objects in order to aggrandize the zone of the $\pi$ would be nothing more than a mere mystification. Objects would become imperfect, not beautiful. Teige disapproved of Le Corbusier’s belief in the distinction between two phases of *construction* and of *composition*. For Teige, this was a mystification of aesthetics; as the capitalist system exploited the surplus value of a worker’s activity, Le Corbusier focused on surplus value of aesthetics.

Teige’s construction had to be rational in order to make space for the irrationality inherent in life. He proclaimed a dialectical opposition between poetism and constructivism. If constructivism was to be seen as a rational scientific practice, poetism was the joy of life, a life transmuted into poetry. Poetism was a delightful quality of life; it was an activity that happened among the walls of a building, an activity exceeding architecture. While in Le Corbusier’s considerations of ma-chinism, the rationality of architecture directed human life (i.e. his reflections on the number of working hours, hobby culture and transportation), Teige defended a clear segregation between life and archi-
He was persuaded that life was not an object. The individual did not need more than a simple *minimum dwelling* in a *koldûm*, because his or her lifestyle was not governed by private property but rather by the social relations the individual established with other inhabitants of the building.

**Art of tomorrow**

In his *Defense*, Le Corbusier accused Teige of the intention of depriving a human being of her spirituality and of reducing his or her personality to material goods. In his description of the ascension of a visitor to the top of the Mundaneum pyramid, he said: “Listen, Teige, let's talk seriously: I think this guy will be 'ready', processed; during his ascension, he will be isolated from the small concerns of his existence; he will forget to worry about his digestion or a crease of his trousers.” In this manner, Le Corbusier set beauty and spirituality in opposition to the material and corporeal aspect of life.

As they had different definitions of art, it was impossible for the two thinkers to concur. Teige criticized *l'art pour l'art*; he denounced the idea of *pure art* as a product of bourgeois society. *Pure art* was a sad liberty of an artist who limited his activity to formal play, while society subjugated all creative potential to money value. *Pure art* was pure nihilism. As a future promise, Teige sketched a free society in which all social classes would be abolished and everyone would be an artist; geniuses would not exist. Every human being could deploy freely his or her creative potential. He considered bourgeois liberty to be a pure illusion; it was an illusion that an artist could escape into an autonomous world to create freely, and were it not an illusion, the result would be that the work would have no real social impact. In reality, however, the artist created what was required by the market. *Pure art* was then nothing more than a product of capitalist society. Contrariwise, Teige proposed that the “art of tomorrow” should be useful and should not comply with the division of functions established by the market economy. Teige did not necessarily intend artists to become proletarians or proletarians to become artists; what was important was that artists engage in social issues through art and its internal development.

Teige anticipated an equitable post-revolutionary society and clearly adhered to a leftist political stance. Le Corbusier, on the contrary, lacked such political hope; his political orientation at the time of
the polemic was more ambivalent. Although he presented many technological reforms of human life, these reforms cannot be considered as overtly political. They represent rather a certain presumed expert technology of power, which has been elucidated in Mary McLeod’s article on Le Corbusier and technocracy that demonstrates the connection between the French architect and Taylorism. Le Corbusier considered architecture as an expert knowledge exempted from politics. While Teige claimed that capitalist society created pure art, Le Corbusier created pure architecture. The latter believed that only the actions of singular characters, not groups of people, could lead society towards progress. In his In Defense of Architecture, he highlighted that the Mundaneum project should glorify these human geniuses. In his vision, art was exclusive; it was not accessible to the masses, but only to the inspired.

When Le Corbusier accused Teige of Sachlichkeit, he used the word art to signify a spiritual activity as opposed to the material aspects of life. Yet, Teige wanted to suppress bourgeois art, not spirituality; he believed art and spirituality should flourish freely. Le Corbusier’s misunderstanding or misrepresentation of Teige’s philosophy transformed their entire debate into a series of false steps. Le Corbusier believed his main arguments to be contradictory to Teige (i.e. “aesthetics is a fundamental human function”), but in fact, these were also Teige’s convictions.

The relationship between politics and architecture is a key issue underlying the debate between Teige and Le Corbusier. Teige believed that architecture should clarify its ideological position and that the pretended neutrality of Le Corbusier in the Mundaneum project was only a mark of his conformism. Le Corbusier, on the contrary, considered architecture to be an apolitical and universal field. Teige stated that the Mundaneum project could not be successful if its ideological basis was unclear; it was necessary to resolve politics before architecture. Contrariwise, in Le Corbusier’s oeuvre, architecture symbolized a new form of apolitical politics. All social tensions were to be resolved by the machine age. If Le Corbusier proclaimed “architecture or revolution,” Teige’s slogan could have been revolution and architecture.
Monument or instrument?

The last significant issue of their debate was over the scale of Le Corbusier’s project. Teige claimed that “the error of Le Corbusier’s proposal is the error of monumentality.”28 Architecture should not become monument, because its goal is not to subjugate the citizen but to serve him or her. The error of the house-palace is that it makes the citizen forget her real physical and material needs in favor of the fictional ones. Monumentality, related to the Golden Section, is a prop of financial ideology promoting architecture as art.

Le Corbusier quoted a version of his famous definition of architecture in the Defense: “architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of forms brought together in light.”29 By replacing the word volume used in Towards an Architecture by form, he created an impression of denying the material aspects of architecture. If the subject of the phrase were suppressed, his definition could be applied to painting or other aesthetic form. Le Corbusier assumed the position of an artist: a sculptor or a painter for whom engineering work was a mere preliminary task. On the 4th of August 1929, Le Corbusier wrote Teige in his letter: “Do not grieve about tracés régulateurs; it is a great tool for a sculptor.”30 It is clear that Le Corbusier regarded himself as creator of monuments, palaces, and temples. Such ideas simply did not accord with Teige’s understanding of architecture as a science based on the dialectical materialism.

Teige contradicted the position of the French architect by stating that “a house can be neither museum nor exhibition gallery.”31 A temple cannot be inhabited, he argued; it only tries to subjugate human beings by hiding its power under metaphysical pretensions. “I do like neither a millionaire’s villa and its sophisticated comfort, nor capitalist cities for several millions of inhabitants. It is more about a human simplicity of a house, about an imperative of minimum comfort, because we do not live just to inhabit.”32 Teige clearly preferred modest housing that conformed to his conception of minimum dwelling (a conception refuting the CIAM’s idea of existenzminimum). Even Le Corbusier’s collective housing projects seemed to him only an expression of the will to satisfy the bourgeoisie’s desire for luxury.

Is architecture monument or instrument? Is there an ethics of monumentality? The polemic between Le Corbusier and Teige reveals two fundamental visions which differ only by a minimal distinction. On
the one hand “architecture is life,” and on the other, “life is between the walls of architecture.” A monument versus an instrument. The ideal articulation of these two poles may not have been arrived at until today. Nowadays, a certain architectural expression conforming to the market still creates an effect of monumental instrumentality (i.e. skyscrapers). For this reason, a revision of crucial architectural debates of the twenties and thirties may be very timely. While postmodern architectural production is clearly indebted to Le Corbusian ideas of the technology of power and of architecture as an apolitical expert domain, it is useful to reconsider Teige’s lesser known ideas as we redefine the relationship between architecture and ideology in the present, and as we encounter a new articulation of a monument-instrument in contemporary architectural practice.

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Endnotes

1 Karel Teige, ed., Revoluční sborník Devětsil, (Prague: Večernice, 1922).


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 152.

Ibid., 153.


Le Corbusier, “Obrana architektury,” 34.

Ibid., 42.


Ibid., 56.


Le Corbusier, “Obrana architektury,” 34.


32 Ibid.
Bibliography


Alex Dodge, “Functional Models of Self Realization (sammai-gumi) 1”, 2014
graphite and earth pigment on synthetic paper, 20 x 26 inches

Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, NY
Ash and Cinder: Photography, Film, and the Archive in Hollis Frampton’s *(nostalgia)* (1971)

by Kevin Chabot

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**Abstract:** This article examines Hollis Frampton’s 1971 avant-garde work *(nostalgia)* in terms of its representation of photography, cinema and temporality. Comprised of thirteen 100-foot 16mm rolls and running just over thirty-six minutes, Frampton’s film contains one photograph on each of the thirteen rolls which are placed on a hotplate and burnt as an off-screen voice narrates. With its unique temporal organization and deceptive use of first-person narration, *(nostalgia)* explores complex relationships between temporality, memory and subjectivity as well as their relationship to photographic and cinematic media. Drawing on the writing of Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud, and Roland Barthes, I argue that *(nostalgia)* constructs an archive of images predicated upon loss, absence and destruction. This article thus elucidates the association of photographic and cinematographic art with death and destruction, and the curious relationship photography and cinema, both ostensibly media of preservation, have with temporal progression and archival memory.

**Keywords:** Hollis Frampton; Photography; Cinema; Temporality; Archive

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On the screen appears a close-up of a black and white photograph. An off-screen voice informs us, “This is the first photograph I ever made with the direct intention of making art.” The photograph depicts a darkroom for photographic processing complete with basins, chemical products and other equipment required for developing film. As the first-person narration describes the artist’s first encounter with
photography as an artistic medium and his subsequent involvement in avant-garde visual art, smoke begins to emanate from the image. The narration continues as the photograph is engulfed in smoke and flames pierce the surface of the image. As the photograph disintegrates, the hotplate on which the photograph had been placed is revealed as the source of the fire. Melted and charred, the once revelatory photographic image is rendered an opaque black mass of ash and cinder, a product of the destructive force of time’s passage.

Such is the opening of Hollis Frampton’s (nostalgia) from 1971, the first film in the series Hapax Legomena (1971-1973). Comprised of thirteen 100-foot 16mm rolls and running just over thirty-six minutes, the film contains one photograph on each of the thirteen rolls that are similarly placed on a hotplate and burnt as an off-screen voice narrates. Significantly, as one views the film, one becomes aware that the narration and the accompanying photograph onscreen do not correspond to each other; rather, the narration describes the subsequent image in the series. In the instance of the first photograph described above, the narration is actually describing the next image, a photographic portrait of the minimalist sculptor Carl Andre holding a metronome and picture frame. As such, this first image is never directly referenced in the narration. With its unique temporal organization and deceptive use of first-person narration, (nostalgia) explores complex relationships between temporality, memory and subjectivity as well as their relationship to photographic and cinematic media. Drawing on the writing of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, I argue that (nostalgia) constructs an archive of images predicated upon loss, absence and destruction.

The making of (nostalgia) coincides with a particular historical moment in American filmmaking, and artistic practice more broadly, during the 1960s and 1970s that featured increasing experimentation with film form and style. The documentary genre, and its subgenres biography and autobiography, were no exceptions to such experimentation. Perhaps most radical in his refusal of narrative cohesion and representations of interiority was the work of Andy Warhol. In addition to the incessant repetition of celebrity faces in his screen prints, Warhol’s cinematic works deconstruct and subvert the conventional goals of portraiture, which ostensibly aim to reveal the authentic subjectivity of the sitter. The extended durations of banal activities in films such as Sleep (1963), Eat (1963) and Blow Job (1964), the eerily still
and silent cinematic portraits of hundreds of subjects in Screen Tests (1964-1966), and the celebrity portrait of Edie Sedgwick in Outer and Inner Space (1965), comprised of a double screen projection featuring Sedgwick interacting with her own mediated image, all attest to the subversive modes of representation in biographical and autobiographical film during the 1960s.

Indeed, Robert Rosenblum has asserted that Warhol’s artwork effectively revitalized the traditional genre of portraiture, writing, “If it is instantly clear that Warhol has revived the visual crackle, glitter and chic of older traditions of society portraiture, it may be less obvious that [...] he has also captured an incredible range of psychological insight among his sitters.” Conversely, Benjamin Buchloh argues that Warhol’s work stands in opposition to the aims of portraiture: “In [Warhol’s and pop artist Roy Lichtenstein’s] hands, the genre now appears not only emptied of all individuality of painterly performance but of any remnants of interiority and privacy of the self as sitter.” The controversy as to whether Warhol rejuvenated the genre of portraiture or solidified its demise thus depends upon how one interprets the degree to which the work represents the psychology, personality and interiority of the subject. This experimentation with interiority is further deployed in (nostalgia) in which language, sound, and image function to both reveal and obscure subjectivity.

In her book on the film, Rachel Moore describes (nostalgia) as a “pseudo-autobiographical” film that regularly and purposefully deceives the spectator. The most conspicuous method of deception lies in the incongruity between language and image. Accompanying the images on the screen is narration that prima facie describes the photograph that the viewer is seeing, and the first images seem to correspond to this narration; however, it is only as the film progresses and the images obviously do not match the narration, does the viewer realize he or she has been deceived. For example, the accompanying narration for the second image of Carl Andre says, “I made this photograph on March 11, 1959. The face is my own, or rather it was my own.” Unless the viewer has knowledge of what Frampton looks like, one would assume the photograph is indeed a self-portrait of the artist, rather than Andre. The next photograph in the series is Frampton’s self-portrait with the accompanying narration stating, “This photograph was made in September of 1960. The window is that of a dusty cabinetmaker’s shop, on the west side of West Broadway,
somewhere between Spring Street and West Houston.” Here is when the deception becomes clear for the first time, as the image displayed is of a lone male figure not at all reminiscent of the scene the voice-over describes. At this point, the viewer realizes that, despite the voice-over’s statements, “this photograph” is not this photograph and the viewer is required to remember the previous narration, apply it to the present photograph onscreen and listen to the new narration simultaneously.

The second deception is much less apparent and is not readily noticeable unless the viewer is familiar with the filmmakers and their visages. In a strategy that Moore describes as further distancing the autobiographical project of the film, (nostalgia) is narrated by Canadian experimental filmmaker Michael Snow rather than Frampton. The first-person pronoun I does not refer to the speaker of the narration thus violating a central tenant of the autobiographical pact. To be sure, if one listens carefully to the soundtrack, one can hear the turning of pages as the narrator recites the text, however the identity of the reader is never acknowledged. This device is used to poignant effect when Frampton’s written narration describes a photograph made in Snow’s studio. Frampton’s writing describes a disagreement about the aesthetics of the photograph, to which Frampton is now apologetic: “I regret to say that he was right. But it was too late. There was nothing to do about it. The whole business still troubles me. I wish I could apologise to him.” Of course, Frampton essentially is apologising to him as Snow reads the prepared script for the film. (nostalgia) therefore subverts central conventions of traditional autobiographical documentary in its manipulation of first-person narration and the similarly deceptive representation of archival photographs. Given such manipulation and experimentation, (nostalgia) problematizes photographic and cinematic media’s ability to construct authentic representations of subjectivity as well as subverts photographic and cinematic media’s capacity for archivization. In this way, (nostalgia) performs the ontology of the archive as described by Jacques Derrida in Archive Fever as that which simultaneously preserves and destroys.

**Derrida and Archival Violence**

Derrida explains that the etymology of “archive” stems from the Greek arkhe, which communicates both a sense of commencement and commandment. Derrida writes:
[arkhe] coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence – [the] physical, historical, or ontological principle - but also the principle according to the law, there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given – [the] nomological principle.\textsuperscript{8}

Within the Greek root arkhe, then, are the dual characteristics of temporality in the establishment of a historical starting point and the concept of authority, that is, who or what institution is tasked with officiating the constitution of an archive. Derrida further establishes this double meaning when he writes, “the meaning of ‘archive,’ its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek arkheion: initially a house, a domicile an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded.”\textsuperscript{9} ‘Archive’ is thus defined as both possessing a physical space or location as well as the notion of guardianship and the authority to oversee such a space. As such, those entrusted with presiding over an archive as well as the very act of archiving itself produce a system of law or discourse surrounding what is worthy of archiving and thus what carries historical value. It is in this sense that Derrida characterizes the act of archiving as one of violence. “[Vio-

This counter-intuitive and seemingly contradictory characteristic of the archive is best explained in relation to memory. Derrida emphasizes the distinction between anamnēsis and hypomnēma in which the former defines a strong ability to remember and the latter characterizes a weakened memory. As such, he defines the archive as hypomnesic as it involves the exteriorizing of memory into a physical and spatial location and therefore destroys our need and capacity to re-

Derrida writes:

\begin{quote}
[If there is no archive without consignation in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization,]}
\end{quote}
of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction.  

This is the key passage that will come to define what Derrida terms le mal d’archive (archive fever). To produce an archive, and exteriorize memory in the process, is to continue to reproduce a sense of loss and absence. In other words, the act of preservation simultaneously initiates the destruction of memory.

In invoking Freud’s theory of todestriebe, or death drive, Derrida situates archivization within the natural propensity and desire to return to a previous state of existence. Freud writes, "If we may accept as an observation without exception that every living being dies for internal reasons, returning to the inorganic, then we can only say that the goal of all life is death, and, looking backwards, that the nonliving existed before the living." Although Freud does not make this connection between the death drive and the archive, Derrida points out that Freud’s own metaphor of the operation of memory within the human psyche, the Mystic Writing-Pad, warrants such an association as the infinite palimpsest of this device constitutes an exteriorization of memory. In “A Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad,” Freud describes the eponymous device, called a Wunderblock in German, as a celluloid sheet laid on top of a wax cylinder upon which one writes using a stylus. Because of its layered structure, the user may remove the celluloid sheets and continue writing anew while a permanent trace of each writing remains etched in the wax cylinder beneath. As such, the Mystic Writing-Pad mirrors the operation of our memory in its capacity to register new information while a lasting trace of all previous information is stored beneath the surface. In this way, Derrida writes, “Far from the machine being a pure absence of spontaneity, its resemblance to the psychical apparatus, its existence and its necessity bear witness to the finitude of the mnemonic spontaneity which is thus supplemented. The machine — and, consequently, representation — is death and finitude within the psyche.” The compulsion to exteriorize memory thus precipitates death and destruction as mechanisms of recording and preservation destroy our capacity for anamnēsis. Therefore, this process of exteriorization constitutes a certain degree of death in our psychical operation.
Following this Derridean and Freudian analysis of destruction as the result of creation and loss as the result of preservation, Frampton’s (nostalgia) is an explicit performance of the paradox of memory, representation, and the archive. The photographs depicted in the film function as archival documents that testify to biographical instances in the life of the artist. As such, the photographs not only amount to an exteriorization of memory that Derrida and Freud describe, but Frampton further emphasizes the destructive nature of the archive by incinerating the images. The temporality of the film is crucial to understanding this point. The viewer witnesses the disintegration of the photographic image as the voice-over narration is spoken, suggesting the evanescent quality of photographic means of preservation. However, this evanescence is doubled as the image corresponds to the preceding narration; as such, the memory of the narration is always already vanishing as one’s recollection of the previous narration is supplanted by the narration currently occupying the soundtrack. The burning photograph as a visual metaphor for the evaporation of memory thus finds its corollary within the soundtrack and editing of the film as it performs the fading of memory within the viewer as one observes the film. (nostalgia) thus represents the transition from form to formlessness, legibility to illegibility and, reminiscent of Derrida and Freud, life to death.

Barthes, Temporality, Photography

The temporality of the photographic image and its relationship to cinema is also pivotal in understanding the film and, through utilizing the term ‘nostalgia’ as the title, Frampton provides us with a starting point for considering how the film represents time. The etymology of nostalgia stems from the Greek term meaning ‘the wounds of returning,’ and as Frampton elaborates, “Nostalgia is not an emotion that is entertained; it is sustained. When Ulysses comes home, nostalgia is the lumps he takes, not the tremulous pleasures he derives from being home again.” In addition to the longing one experiences for a foregone past, then, nostalgia refers to the pain associated with such longing and the realization of the impossibility of such a return. Given this connotation, the use of photographs within the film takes on added significance. The photographs function as preserved records of past experiences that resonate in the personal and professional life of Frampton, prompting the meditative narration delivered by Snow in the film. However, simultaneous with the act of recollection is the recognition of the irretrievable past and inexorable progression of lin-
ear time. This sense of melancholia associated with photographic images is shared by Roland Barthes in his foundational treatise on the photographic image, *Camera Lucida*.

Similar to the works of Derrida and Freud described above, Barthes also understands the photographic image to be haunted by the spectre of death. In the foreword to the 2010 edition of *Camera Lucida*, Geoff Dyer quotes Barthes telling an interviewer, "If photography is to be discussed on a serious level, it must be described in relation to death." Barthes continued, "It's true that a photograph is a witness, but a witness of something that is no more." Here, Barthes associates the photograph's relationship with death to the indexicality of the photographic image. Rather than a representation predicated upon resemblance, as in a painting or a sculpture, the photochemical process of photography creates a physical trace or imprint of the object being photographed, as it existed in pro-filmic space before the camera, upon the emulsion of the filmstrip. As classical film theorists such as André Bazin and Rudolph Arnheim have noted, mechanical reproduction provides access to reality in ways that other representational media cannot. As such, the taking of a photograph inscribes the filmstrip with an image of a temporal instant that survives as a representation, but can never be recovered: "What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially." It is this indexicality and existential link between the photographic representation and the historical instant that prompts Barthes to describe the photograph as a testament to existence: "In photography, I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past." This sense of the thing has been there, however, constitutes a kind of "return of the dead" for Barthes as it simultaneously signifies that the thing no longer is here. The essence of photography, then, is in the recording of an ephemeral instant that is irretrievable. This becomes most salient in Barthes' discussion of a photograph which, significantly, is the only photograph discussed at length in *Camera Lucida* that is not reproduced in its pages, the famous Winter Garden photograph of his mother.

The photograph depicts Barthes' mother at the age of five standing with her brother in a "glassed-in conservatory," or winter garden to which it was referred at the time. As Barthes' mother had passed away before he discovered the photograph, this particular im-
age resonated with him more than any other as he claimed it "achieved for me, utopically, the impossible science of the unique being." For Barthes, this discovery of the photograph that brought about a "utopian" sense of knowing the essence of his mother was accompanied by the painful awareness that this human being is no longer present. Barthes writes, "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die; I shudder [...] over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe." Barthes therefore demonstrates that photography conflates all three temporal registers of past, present and future. The photograph is a past instant that is looked at in the present and is also taken with the anticipation that it will be looked at in the future. Frampton emphasizes the multiple temporal dimensions of photography in (nostalgia) especially in its use of the cinematic medium in order to communicate duration.

As mentioned previously, one of the thirteen photographs featured in the film is a self-portrait of Frampton. In describing this self-portrait, which will be revealed as the next image in the series, the narration states, "I take some comfort in realising that my entire physical body has been replaced more than once since it made this portrait of its face. However, I understand that my central nervous system is an exception." This somewhat comical statement is reminiscent of the catastrophe Barthes identifies as inhabiting every photograph: the inevitability of age and subsequent death. Assuredly, in addition to the sense of this is no longer here, photography also signifies that we all, one day, no longer will be. This sense of loss marks the entirety of the film, not only in its representation of the destruction of the photographs, but also in the inexorable forward momentum of time. The narration is replete with references to individuals with whom Frampton no longer associates, including sculptor Carl Andre, painter Frank Stella, pop artist James Rosenquist and a myriad of neighbors and acquaintances, whom Frampton had encountered during his time as a photographer in the early 1960s. The captured photographs thus prompt the recollection of such encounters with these people and, like memory, eventually fade into oblivion. Such is the cruel temporality of the photographic image.

Significantly, I have not yet remarked upon the status of the film as a film, that is, as a series of photographic images projected at 24 frames-per-second. This adds a further temporal dimension to the
already complex representation of memory and temporality at work in \textit{(nostalgia)}. In an autobiographical sense, the film represents Frampton’s transition from photographer to avant-garde filmmaker and appropriately bridges these two professional pursuits through filming the destruction of photographic images before the cinematic camera, thus signalling the triumph of cinema over the fragility and pastness of photography. In his championing of cinema, Frampton describes an ‘infinite cinema’ that has always existed and will continue to exist. Frampton writes, “There is nothing in the structural logic of the cinema film strip that precludes sequestering any single image. A still photograph is simply an isolated frame taken out of the infinite cinema.” From the flow of time that constitutes cinematic images, the photograph is but one instant that fails to convey a sense of presence. As Barthes continually asserts throughout \textit{Camera Lucida}, it is the stillness and historicity of the photograph that produces such a sense of longing and loss.

Similarly to Barthes’ refusal to display the image of his mother in the Winter Garden photograph, despite his prolonged discussion of it, \textit{(nostalgia)} also ends with a refusal of display. The narration describes Frampton’s attempt to photograph an alleyway near his home only to have his composition obstructed by a passing vehicle. Rather than discard the image, Frampton opted to develop the photograph and in so doing discovered something standing in the street beyond the alley that, although not visible to him, was reflected in a window. The narration describes Frampton enlarging the portion of the photograph containing the image of the figure prompting Frampton to assert, “what I believe I see recorded, in that speck of film, fills me with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I think I shall never dare make another photograph again.” The narration ends with Snow, reading Frampton’s words, directly addressing the spectator: “Here it is! Look at it! Do you see what I see?” What follows the narration is not an image of the photograph that has just been described. In breaking the formal pattern of the film, the spectator has (somewhat) become accustomed to by the film’s end, the subsequent shot is simply a black screen. After being told about a figure that inspired such fear in Frampton that he now refuses to take another photograph, the viewer is left looking into the dark abyss of a blank film frame.

Hollis Frampton’s \textit{(nostalgia)} is an extraordinary example of avant-garde filmmaking that is an intricate and complex meditation on
the nature of photography, film, temporality and archivization. Within its rich tapestry of image and narration, the film demonstrates photography’s inextricable associations with loss, destruction and death, as supported by the theories of Derrida, Freud and Barthes, while graphically representing the evanescence of the image and the vanishing of memory. In addition to serving as an autobiographical account of Frampton’s early work as a photographer and his transition to filmmaking, the film challenges its viewers to rethink how we perceive both the photographic and cinematic image.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for providing helpful suggestions for improving this article.

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Endnotes


2 It is worth noting that although these Screen Tests were filmed in the typical 24 frames-per-second, they were subsequently projected at 16 frames-per-second creating a slow-motion effect.


4 Ibid.
5 Moore, 7.
6 Ibid, 18.


9 Ibid.

10 Derrida, 12.

11 Ibid, 14.

12 Ibid, original emphasis.


14 Ibid, 129-130.

15 Freud, 130-131.

16 Quoted in Derrida, 16, original emphasis.

17 Quoted in Moore, 1. Here, Frampton alludes to Homer’s Odyssey in which Ulysses (or Odysseus in the original Greek text) embarks on an epic journey back to Ithaca, his homeland.


19 Bazin states that with the invention of photography, “For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a non-living agent. For the first time, an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man.” André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in What is Cinema? Volume 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004,) 13.

20 Arnheim writes that film as an art form must move beyond its ontology as a recording medium, stating, “Art begins where mechanical reproduction leaves off, where the conditions of representation serve in some way to mold the object.” Rudolph Arnheim, “The Making of a Film,” in Film as Art, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 57.

21 Barthes, 4.

22 Barthes, 76, original emphasis.

23 Ibid, 9.

24 Ibid, 71, original emphasis.

25 Ibid, 96, original emphasis.
Bibliography


Alex Dodge, “Functional Models of Self Realization (samurai-gumi) 2”, 2014
graphite and earth pigment on synthetic paper, 20 x 26 inches

Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, NY
Sol LeWitt and Josef Albers: Parallel Squares and Kindred Concepts

by Morgan Ridler

Abstract: Sol LeWitt and Josef Albers are two artists who were each deeply involved in the exploration of the square. Albers painted many color variations in homage to this fundamental shape and LeWitt expanded the square into three dimensions, breaking down its parts and exploring its conceptual identity. Although superficially their works have many parallels, their methods and their goals were very different. In 2005, LeWitt’s Walldrawing 1176 Seven Basic Colors and All Their Combination in a Square within a Square for Josef Albers, was installed in the Josef Albers Quadrat Bottrop Museum in Germany. The drawing, completed by assistants following LeWitt’s detailed instructions and conceptual framework, resulted in a systematic recreation and simplification of the Albers’ square within a square motif and testifies to a longstanding kinship between LeWitt and Albers. But LeWitt’s complex critique of and indebtedness to Albers goes well beyond this example. Although LeWitt was never directly a student of Albers his encounters with Albers’ work and ideas in the New York galleries and through friends and colleagues during his formative years in the early 1960s, formed a foundation for LeWitt’s practice and his method of systematic investigation and conceptual rigor. This paper explores LeWitt’s debt to Albers, from his early paintings and constructions that mimic Albers’ squares but bring the optical movement into physical space and eventually leading him to his own brand of Conceptual Art.

Keywords: Sol LeWitt, Josef Albers, Conceptual Art, Homage to the Square
In the early 1960s, one American artist was described as creating “anonymous, consciously limited art...stripped of its creator and of personal touch.” This artist, according to the author, appears to avoid “superficial identification,” believing that “somebody else could create similar work.” The writer also describes the “constructional” work as “deceptively simple yet immensely sophisticated.”

Provided with these descriptions, the vocabulary used and the decade, one might assume the artist is a Minimalist. An apt association because the Minimalists were influenced by the described artist, Josef Albers, the Bauhaus master turned Black Mountain College and Yale professor and king of the square. The quotes above are excerpts from François Bucher’s 1961 book, Despite Straight Lines, which discusses Albers’ Structural Constellations series of 1953-1958 (fig. 1).

In the text, Albers himself describes the phenomenon of one Structural Constellation:

In this irrational interpenetration of 2 open cubes we notice first the heavy top and bottom edge of the front openings. They are presented by 4 lines equally long and thick, and, as parallels, equally oblique... But soon it becomes dubious whether they are parallel. It seems that they belong to a convex plane, or even to a twisted plane. Convex, because the interiors behind the openings converge. Twisted, because the axes of the interiors are bent down at right, up at left. And with this cor-
responds that we see the cubes at right from below, at left from above. But the fact remains: the 4 lines—are parallel. Albers left a lasting legacy on the art of the 1960s and 1970s but, like the optical confusion in this work, there are uncertain relationships and parallels between the work of Albers and the next generation of American artists, such as Ad Reinhardt, Barnett Newman and the younger Minimalists.

The title of the book Despite Straight Lines is a phrase that can also describe the relationship between Albers (b. 1888, d.1976) and the much younger Sol LeWitt (b.1928, d.2007). They share language like anonymous and they are both, “Deceptively simple yet immensely sophisticated.” And while these two artists make similar use of straight lines, squares and cubes, Albers and LeWitt approached their work and the role of art from immensely different historical backgrounds, artistic lineages, and with different objectives. The formal comparisons between them are tempting although perhaps misleading and when considering the relationship between these two artists many questions soon surface. How much is LeWitt’s work really indebted to Albers? What does LeWitt learn through Albers and what does he reject?

In this essay I begin to answer these questions, which have not been concretely or thoroughly addressed in any literature on LeWitt. I start by discussing some of LeWitt’s rarely discussed paintings and sculptures from his formative years and examining how he expanded beyond the influence of Albers, planting seeds for his later work. LeWitt’s synthesis of Albers can be understood in three stages: First, there is the compositional legacy of Albers to LeWitt’s early 1960s paintings and structures, second is LeWitt’s extrapolation of the visual into the conceptual when he rejects and reworks many of Albers’ formal devices and procedural methods and formulates his “conceptual” approach, and third, LeWitt returns to Albers in his Seven Basic Colors and All Their Combinations in a Square within a Square: Wall Drawing for Josef Albers (Wall Drawing 1176), (2005), a culmination of a long dialogue with the earlier artist. Although LeWitt never directly studied with Albers, the influence of the Bauhaus master was in other ways foundational. LeWitt experimented with the square as a compositional device but learned as well from Albers’ conceptual ap-
approach, the serialization and systematization that was both a model and a contrast for LeWitt’s new artistic strategy.

Despite the links between these two artists, there is no evidence that they ever met. Josef Albers was born in 1888 in Bottrop, Germany. He began classes at the Weimar Bauhaus in 1920 and became a Journeyman in 1922. He taught at the Bauhaus until its closing in 1933 before joining the faculty of Black Mountain College in North Carolina and eventually becoming the head of the design department at Yale University in 1950. In that same year, he began his most well-known series, the *Homage to the Square*, of which he made hundreds of variations of square-based works. By the mid 1950s he was exhibiting extensively in New York, executing large mural projects around the world and teaching across the country. He continued to lecture and exhibit internationally until his death in 1976 in New Haven, Connecticut.

Sol LeWitt was born in 1928 in Hartford, Connecticut and attended Syracuse University, studying fine art. After serving in the Korean War, he moved to New York and enrolled in the Cartoonist and Illustrators School, now known as the School of Visual Arts. He worked as a graphic designer and in I.M. Pei’s newly formed architectural practice from 1955-56. LeWitt quickly became bored with the tedious work of a graphic designer and began to re-explore art and the New York gallery scene as he built the foundations for his own artistic practice. With LeWitt’s growing exposure to the New York art world, it is likely that from early on he was familiar with Albers’ works and writings. By the mid-1950s, Albers was visible as a major international art figure. Albers exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York in 1955, 1958, 1961, 1963 and 1964 as well as in many exhibitions in New Haven and around the country. As noted earlier, the book *Despite Straight Lines* was published in 1961 and Albers immensely influential book *Interactions of Color* was published in 1963.

One particular exhibition LeWitt was likely familiar with was the 1958 Sidney Janis show celebrating Albers’ 70th birthday, which included the *Homage to the Square* and the *Variants* series. Most of these works are dedicated to analyzing and illustrating the interactions of color and the optical power of these relationships. In *Homages to the Square*, his most iconic works, he used a standardized composition to better focus on the color interactions. This format has been described by Albers scholar Nicholas Fox Weber as “platters to serve
color,”9 and “vehicles for the presentation of different color climates and various effects, above all for the demonstration of the way that solid colors change according to their position and surroundings.”10 In constructing these works, Albers used paint straight from tubes, recording on the back of the Masonite panel the colors, brands and layers of application. Weber describes “this meticulous listing and almost scientific method of application,” as a process that ironically facilitates the attainment of a spiritual quality.11 This spiritual quality was a result of Albers’ systematic painting structure and technique.

The 1958 exhibition prompted many reviews in the art press. Hilton Kramer in his April 1958 review of the show in *Arts Magazine* describes:

> Albers’ method is designed to remove the act of painting as far as possible from the hazards of personal touch, and thus to place its whole expressive energy—or as much as can survive the astringencies of the method—at the disposal of a pictorial conception already fully arrived at before a single application of pigment is made to the surface. The pictorial image is then ‘developed’ in the act of painting in very much the same sense that photography is developed in the darkroom: it is not so much created as re-created.12

Underlying Kramer’s description of Albers’ paintings is a comparison with the Abstract Expressionists. Albers’ paintings are in many ways antithetical to the personal and expressive actions of Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning. The pictures are restrained by the system of squares and were created with a scientific-seeming precision, with a single-minded focus on color, unlike the arena in which the Abstract Expressionists act. As Kramer describes, Albers’ paintings are all previously arranged; they just need to be executed, “re-created” from the original concept.13

In this period, during the peak of Abstract Expressionism, this type of work may have been a welcomed retreat from gestural abstraction, but “to redeem such a radical dissociation of feelings from execution would seem to call for a conceptual content so compelling as to compensate for all that has been eliminated. In Albers’ new work this conceptual content dwells exclusively on color.”14 In short, the conceptual framework of the paintings almost makes up for their impersonal and cold character. Kramer in reference to Albers, describes
the lack of personal touch similarly to the way that Bucher discusses Albers work and both are echoed in LeWitt’s later oft quoted phrase from his 1967 “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” “The idea becomes the machine that makes the art,” an issue which will be explored further below. For LeWitt, who did not identify with the Abstract Expressionists and who was searching for a different path, Albers, and these contemporary readings of Albers, provided an approach beyond personal touch and expressive gesture.

In 1960, as LeWitt became more aware of the gallery scene, he began work at the Museum of Modern Art. There he became fluent in the language of modernism and forged important relationships with contemporaries: Dan Flavin, Robert Mangold, Robert Ryman and Lucy Lippard. Perhaps his most influential friend was Eva Hesse, Albers’ student at Yale, who would become a very close friend, artistic confidant and personal link to the lessons of Albers. Also in this year LeWitt begins to make new art, first emulating Albers’ formal strategy, and quickly recognizing a conceptual strategy that fueled his later practice. It is in LeWitt’s paintings and early sculptures from 1960 to 1963, currently located in the LeWitt Collection in Chester, Connecticut, which reflect these changing factors and influences in his early career.

In *Running Man*, 1960, LeWitt paints a small, approximately 24 inches square, work consisting of three concentric squares of blue, red and black converging on the central yellow figure. This work is an early example of many works centered on the theme of running. While *Running Man* seems to mimic Albers’ formal device of squares within squares, there are a number of differences, and the parallels are not so clear. Albers’ squares are not perfectly centered, as LeWitt’s are, but are closer to the bottom of the canvas. In addition, LeWitt includes a figure, a component both antithetical to Albers’ abstraction as well as much of contemporary art. The surfaces of the paint in Albers’ *Homages* are smooth and thin, due to his diligent process. In LeWitt’s work the paint is thick with ridges, the man is almost in relief, the paint mounded and incised to create a sculptural effect. Though Albers uses colors that interact with one another, LeWitt’s squares within squares do not evoke these optical color interactions. The running figure in the painting has been linked to the influence of Eadweard Muybridge’s revolutionary photographs of motion. Therefore while it may at first
seem that Albers provides the inspiration for this early painting, there are few real similarities.

The theme of running reoccurs in 1962’s *Run II*, (fig. 2), and expands to include text, graphics and space. Four different explorations of the theme are vertically arranged with the word *run* at the top, the image of the runner underneath, with an arrow pointing to the right below that, and at the bottom a physically receding square with a square. The bottom version of this theme *run*, the square within the square, the purely abstract expression, is what will remain in later works, as LeWitt abandons the figure and brings his painting much closer to sculpture. This compositional device, a kin to Albers, is transformed into three dimensions and although one could argue that there are many other precedents for the square within square, from Malevich and Mondrian to Reinhardt, for LeWitt, Albers seems to have been a primary influence, as he described in a 1974 interview with Paul Cummings:

> Back around ’61, ’62, I did things using one figure, the running figure repeated, and then like an arrow pointing that way, and the word “run.” These things could be done on different levels. They were done as three dimensional paintings. I also was very intrigued by Albers, but the thing about Albers that I couldn’t grasp was that if he has colors that were receding, they should, I thought, physically recede; and if they advance, they should physically advance.¹⁷

Albers’ concept of the optical relationship of colors, the push and pull that the viewer perceives in the eye is the conceptual framework for an Albers square within a square. LeWitt wants to make this conceptual framework, the receding and advancing, real, moving it beyond the optical and into the physical. Albers created the concept, and LeWitt brought the idea closer to a physical reality.
While in *Run II* LeWitt explores variations on same theme, in works like *Wall Piece* (1962), as well as a number of others from that year, he moves on to explore the physical advance and recession of space. In *Wall Piece* (fig. 3) a rectangular canvas, painted a dull yellow, sits within a large white frame. In the center of the yellow rectangle a square cutout reveals a silver layer beneath, and into that surface another square cutout houses a floating projecting white square. As in a Lucio Fontana cut canvas, LeWitt broke through the picture plane, producing a sculptural painting or a painted sculpture and violating Greenberg’s mandate for pictorial flatness. Color is used to further emphasize the spatial play and the white square in the middle pushes just out beyond the colored surface. The cut-out space physically pushes deeper into the painting and the recession of spaces captures the viewer’s attention, provoking investigations of this opening, creating a work that forces the viewer to move and examine.

This work has a certain resonance with another Albers exhibition from the previous year. LeWitt, now with the advantage of being friends with Hesse, had another opportunity to see, hear and read about Albers’ work. Albers’ 1961 exhibition at Sidney Janis Gallery contained 38 paintings, 33 of which were *Homages to the Square*. Brian O’Doherty, in a review for the *New York Times*, praises the precise painting of Albers in this exhibition:

> In the most impressive room six magnificent paintings emit a golden effulgence within which squares float and hover. Constantly displaying new ambiguities, they initiate an intimate dialogue with the spectator, and lift the spirits to warm and peaceful contemplation.¹⁸

The description of floating and hovering squares that engage the spectator could describe LeWitt’s physically floating spaces and colors of the next year. LeWitt, however, does not absorb or reproduce the spiritual, heartwarming effect in *Wall Piece*. While LeWitt is still mimic-
king Albers’ squares and push-pull effect, he is deliberately leaving the emotion and richness of color behind.

In his 1962 works, LeWitt questions the boundaries between painting and sculpture, taking painting where Albers never did and expanding the conceptual conceit of Albers to the three-dimensional plane. LeWitt explains this best himself in a 1993 interview with Andrew Wilson. He was interested in:

the ideas of Joseph (sic) Albers, of colour moving back and forth...I decided that I would make colour of form recede and proceed in a three dimensional way. The idea of flatness of plane naturally evolved into three-dimensionality of form which became wall structures, at first made with colour advancing and receding and then with only black and white, and finally as freestanding pieces.\(^{19}\)

Albers’ formal structures and visual devices attracted LeWitt and he turned Albers’ optical play into something three-dimensional and physical.

Two works from 1963 display LeWitt’s further shift to three-dimensional structures and away from color towards black and white. Floor Structure takes the colored rectangles off the wall and onto the floor. A large free standing rectangular yellow wood box stands like a pillar and in the upper third of the box, a blue, square, cage-like column shape impales the yellow surface, projecting through to the other side. Square after square, repeated like a stop action photograph of a square moving through space, breaks the solidity of the yellow slab. The square within the square concept has become fully three-dimensional.

Wall Structure, 1963, (fig. 4) is at once the most Albersian and anti-Albersian of these early works, a direct reference to and a direct refusal of Albers. A black rectangle hanging on the wall provides a base for a series of white wooden squares, or open frames, with their edges painted black that project into space. The squares are turned on their points and create diamonds, or as Mondrian describes a lozenge shape. The squares sit one within another, getting progressively smaller and deeper, projecting out into the room more and more. The last central square, the smallest, juts off the wall 25 inches into the space of the viewer. The work is completely stripped of color and has made the physicality of the progression and recession of the
space three-dimensional, rather than illusionistically or optical. Albers’ flat paintings produce subjective effects of color: each viewer sees things differently, the colors look different next to each other, and they look distinctive for each person. But in this LeWitt work there is no room for such subjectivity; the structure simply exists in real space.

LeWitt discusses *Wall Structure* in his 1978 retrospective catalog as “the first serial attempt, although it was not very precise in its measurements. The projections and intervals, however, expanded and contracted in a controlled sequence.” By *Wall Structure* the physical receding and advancing that began with the Albers square within a square model has now taken an important leap into a progressive, sequential and serial exploration. While Albers used color to vary his static composition, LeWitt developed systems and intervals to create the physical depth of space. Far from blindly absorbing or reiterating Albers’ goals or methods, LeWitt was taking a few ideas, synthesizing some techniques, and developing his own artistic vocabulary out of certain Albers’ concepts.

Fig. 4. Sol LeWitt. *Wall Structure*, 1963, oil on canvas and painted wood, 62 x 62 x 25 in. (157.5 x 157.5 x 63.5 cm.) © 2014 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
At this point it is important to stress the very real and important difference between Albers and LeWitt, and between Albers and the Minimalist in terms of technique and facture. Albers’ surfaces are painted with precision, lacking any painterly impasto, but are still clearly hand painted. LeWitt’s surfaces in his early paintings like *Run* and *Running Man*, discussed above, are thick and rough. By the middle of the 1960s, in his iconic open cube structures, LeWitt’s signature surfaces become enamel and industrial, not handmade, as LeWitt was generally not interested in craft. In “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” he describes conceptual art as, “usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman.” The qualities of craftsmanship, the facture, the great effort that Albers put into his surfaces, the layers of underpainting and thinness of paint, are in many ways academic, labor intensive and based on a Bauhaus interest in the artist/craftsman with a emphasis on materials, which he learned and taught at the Bauhaus, and brought to schools like Black Mountain College. The Minimalists, by contrast, use industrial materials and procedures to create their works, having their boxes made in factories or professional workshops and not the studio, situating them apart from traditional art. The difference in craft is another instance of LeWitt contradicting Albers’ example, contrasting with what Albers represents.

For the young Minimalist generation, Albers was a major international figure and the head of one of the most powerful and elite art schools in America. He was the great academician from the École of the twentieth century, the Bauhaus, from which the new techniques of teaching and making art were first developed and then exported to the United States. Albers’ European heritage, age, easel-painting practice and focus on the ideas of beauty and spirituality in art represented exactly the paradigm Minimalism opposed. The problems of painting, and specifically “European painting,” are mentioned in Bruce Glaser’s 1964 interview with Donald Judd, Frank Stella and Dan Flavin. Stella and Judd both emphasize that European painting is relational, with compositions based on balance, while the new American art is termed non-relational, such that compositions are unimportant. When Judd is questioned by Glaser about the similar formal vocabulary of his geometric shapes to previous European movements, he responds, “I’m totally uninterested in European art and I think it’s over with.” Glaser then asks, “What about the Bauhaus?” Judd responds, “I consider the Bauhaus too long ago to think about, and I never thought about it much.”
Albers, a quintessential Bauhausler, and the younger generation, including his students, had a contentious relationship. Robert Rauschenberg, Albers’ student at Black Mountain College described him as, “a beautiful teacher and an impossible person.” Eva Hesse, a student of Albers at Yale, described him in her diary: “He is terribly limited but really maintains one point of view throughout. This is a paradoxically strong and weak attribute and shortcoming.” LeWitt, as a part of the art community in 1960s New York, would surely have understood this anti-Bauhaus and anti-Albers attitude. Nevertheless, he also must have understood the debt that these younger artists had to the forefathers of geometric abstraction. The lessons of Albers did have some resonances, even if it was not very cool to acknowledge them.

It would have been retarda-volume to appear to be following Albers’ dictums or European art in general in New York in the 1960s, and LeWitt follows suit in his late 1960s essays on conceptual art, displaying a conscious rejecting and reworking of Albers. In 1967, LeWitt published his “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” in Artforum, where he defines what he understands as conceptual art. In a very blatant rejection of Albers' pedagogical approach, LeWitt states that “conceptual art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories.” LeWitt also describes a dichotomy between conceptual and perceptual art, stating: “Art that is meant for the sensation of the eye primarily would be called perceptual rather than conceptual. This would include most optical, kinetic, light and color art.” Albers seems to fit LeWitt’s description of the “perceptual” artist, and thus he could categorize Albers as the antithesis of the conceptual artist. In addition to the perceptional elements of Albers’ practice he was likewise dedicated to his method and the process of painting. Albers worked within a system, using the same composition for many, many paintings, painstakingly noting the exact paint and color used for each work, as if creating a scientific study. As O’Doherty writes in 1961, “Within this almost Carthesian (sic) framework, Mr. Albers produces, through color, a variety of seemingly inexhaustible effects.” Albers’ working procedure creates effect after effect, color next to color. LeWitt could very well be conjuring Albers when also in “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” he wrote: “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.” The work just needs to be executed, re-created following the concept. While Albers’ art was exactly the type of
work that LeWitt differentiated from in much of his writings, the earlier
lessons of Albers, the square within square method, were not com-
pletely forgotten. Albers, with his system, his pre-designed composi-
tions and factory made colors, should perhaps be re-designated as a
proto-conceptual artist.

LeWitt’s work seems to parallel the way Kramer describes Al-
bers’ working process. The system, the seriality and the discipline of
Albers is his legacy, although not perhaps his own goal. The common
link between Albers and LeWitt is the idea of working on one idea,
over and over until it has been exhausted. O’Doherty describes Albers
as “an exact poet who measures and surveys with almost obsessional
precisions, but who finally presents one with an immeasurable experi-
ence.”30 LeWitt also develops a way to work in which thinking and
planning are the most important aspect of the artwork. This effect can
be seen in many of his serial projects, like Serial Project #1 (ABCD),
1966 and the Incomplete Open Cube, 1974, which take an idea like a
cube within a cube and all the variations of an incomplete open cube
and extrapolate all possibilities within that concept. Rosalind Krauss
sees the madness and obsession of such a project:
The babble of a LeWitt serial expansion has nothing of
the economy of the mathematician’s language. It has
the loquaciousness of the speech of children or of the
very old, in that it refuses to summarize, to use the sin-
gle example that would imply the whole, is like those
feverish accounts of events composed of a string of
almost identical details, connected by “and”.31
In this respect, both Albers and LeWitt created obsessional work. Al-
ers’ strict formulas are all about procedure, but O’Doherty explains,
“He is full of paradoxes, and the more discipline he submits to, the
freer his invention seems to be.”32 Both artists submitted themselves
to a discipline of rules and plans, of concepts and systems, but the
results were unforeseen and intriguing.

Though LeWitt and Albers each worked within similar systems,
they did not have the same goals in mind. LeWitt declares in “Para-
graphs on Conceptual Art” that this conceptual art “is intuitive, it is in-
volved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless.”33 As
LeWitt clarifies his position, he is not a scientist and there is no reason
or purpose behind the art, aside from art itself. Whereas Albers pre-
sented a rationalization of color theory and lessons for his students,
LeWitt, as Krauss describes, is creating a parody of rationality, using the rational but taking it to an extreme. A LeWitt project takes the kind of directions Albers may have given to his students to logical but absurd ends. In LeWitt’s own words, “Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.” He celebrates the irrational, which “lead[s] to new experiences,” and argues that “irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.” LeWitt is not interested in formalism or exploring the optical effects of colors; he is interested in formula and progression. Art historian Jeffrey Saletnik has argued that Albers instilled in his students, particularly Hesse, LeWitt’s friend, an approach to materials and a process of experimentation. Hesse’s experimentations with latex were an extension of Albers’ in-class exercises of uncovering the qualities and potentials of the materials to an exhaustive length. While LeWitt did not learn directly from Albers and certainly did not have interest in materials or craft, he did however absorb this fixation, the exhaustion of an idea and Albers’ process of working by using conceptual and serial strategies.

As should be now apparent, this relationship between LeWitt and Albers is a troubled parallelism, with many contradictions. LeWitt was not lured by the nearly scientific study of color, the search for beauty or drive to instruct students. In fact, he quickly eliminated color and painting altogether, but he takes the simple geometric idea of a floating square and pushes it beyond painting into structures. Albers’ rigorous geometry and systematic investigations provided LeWitt with a conceptual paradigm and gave him a fundamental lesson in formal questions, as well as an idea to outgrow and reject. In many interviews, LeWitt acknowledged Albers as a source of inspiration. His most clear demonstration of the lingering effect of Albers and perhaps part of a reevaluation of his own earlier career was confirmed near the end of his life in 2005 at the Josef Albers Museum.

On July 29, 2005 the LeWitt wall drawing *Seven Basic Colors In a Square Within a Square: Wall Drawing for Josef Albers (Wall Drawing 1176)* was unveiled at the Josef Albers Museum in Quadrat Bottrop, Germany (fig. 5). The work is in many ways typical for a LeWitt wall drawing. It was executed by a team following a systematic set of directions. It uses a palette of seven colors, the three primary colors and the three secondary colors with the addition of gray. These colors had been present in LeWitt’s wall drawings since the 1980s.
and, as the title suggests, represent basic colors, expanding the Mondrian primaries to include the secondary colors. The formal composition of the work is in the familiar guise of the square within the square, the Albers compositional device. LeWitt modified the basic composition, using two squares, a large outer square, 96 inches on each side, and the inner square exactly half the outer square’s dimensions, making a more mathematical version of Albers’ grid.  

LeWitt’s organization of the color combinations makes Albers’ subjective, quasi-scientific system of color relations more objective by systematically combining and eliminating color. LeWitt takes the combination of different primary colors to logical and irrational conclusions. In the beginning of the sequence the color red is used for the large outer square. Inside each large red square is a secondary square, with one of the remaining six colors. After this first red series is exhausted, yellow becomes the large outer square and the remaining five colors, excluding red, are used in the middle. This reduction continues until the squares wrap around the walls of the gallery and into the inner gallery space. The last square, the twenty first in the sequence, is purple with a gray center.

Heinz Liesbrock, the organizer of the exhibition, reported that when LeWitt was approached about the possibility of working with the Albers museum and creating a work that “reflects his own engage-
ment with the work of his older colleague, he responded spontaneously in the affirmative.” According to Liesbrock, LeWitt then discussed his own work in the 1960s and some of the aspects of his work dealing with color and movement in space, “which the study of the paintings of Josef Albers had made him aware of, stressing at the same time that Albers’ heritage continues to this day to have an effect on his work.” LeWitt, after solidifying his own legacy and within two years of his death, was finally able to comment on and support his connection with Albers.

This contemporary work demonstrates LeWitt’s reflection on his own development and interest in a previous generation of Modernists. This can be said of many American artists in the late Modernist 1960s and 1970s, who although often deny the important presence of the older artists like Albers, Picasso, or Kandinsky, were still working within a legacy of European modernism. The 2005 wall painting repeats Albers’ most famous compositional motif and the one that LeWitt had himself emulated. LeWitt takes the composition and Albers’ idea to combine different colors in order to illustrate optical effects, but instead of recreating the subtle, subjective and transcendental qualities of an Albers, he imitates the precision. One could imagine this museum filled with Albers’ style of squares within squares but instead LeWitt creates an affectionate parody of the Bauhaus Master. LeWitt reveals the true legacy of Albers in this work, the power of the idea as a driving force of art.

This wall painting acts as a bookend, a final testament to the significant role Albers played in LeWitt’s career. Certainly LeWitt developed his own singular works, forging new ground in Minimalism and Conceptual art, but by considering some of his early works and the early themes we can better appreciate how LeWitt arrived at his later grids, cubes, and wall drawings. LeWitt’s formal adoption of the square within a square and the physical recession of space was only a superficial adaptation of Albers. Albers’ exactness and obsession of his method, the standardization and serialization, can be identified throughout LeWitt’s oeuvre, from the conceptual completeness of the *Incomplete Open Cube* series to LeWitt’s own homage to Albers in 2005. By understanding how LeWitt mimicked, absorbed and then rejected much of what Albers represented and emblematized illustrates the complex relationships of the artists of LeWitt’s generation in dealing with their predecessors.
Rejection of parental guidance is a normal part of the matura-
tion process. It is now time to look back and not only see the rebellion 
but also the continuities. The important legacy, the real parallel be-
tween Albers and LeWitt is in the serial and conceptual model that Al-
bbers inspired, and although there are deep and serious differences 
between the two artists, they shared the square.

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Bauhaus Wall-Painting Workshop: Mural Painting to Wallpapering, Art 
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tecture at the Bauhaus, from 1919-1933. She earned an M.Phil. in Art 
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Endnotes

1 François Bucher, *Josef Albers: Despite Straight Lines; an Analysis of 
His Graphic Constructions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 
1961), 75-76.
2 Bucher, 17.
3 Bucher, 78.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
LeWitt’s early career has been discussed in: Sol LeWitt, Alicia Legg, Lucy R. Lippard, Bernice Rose, and Robert Rosenblum. *Sol LeWitt*. New York: MoMA, 1978; Sol LeWitt, and Gary Garrels. *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective*. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2000; Sol LeWitt, and Josef Albers. *Sol LeWitt Wall Drawing 1176: Seven Basic Colors and All their Combinations in a Square within a Square: for Josef Albers*. Düsseldorf: Richter, 2006. The 1978 MoMA exhibition catalog includes illustrations of early painting and structures, reproduced in black and white, like LeWitt’s more well-known works, though many in fact are multicolored. The 2000 exhibition and catalog, organized by the San Francisco Museum of Art, offered a more comprehensive evaluation of LeWitt’s early career. Building on these two texts, the most important resource for defining the relationship of LeWitt with Albers is the 2005 catalog for LeWitt’s wall drawing from the same year at the Josef Albers Museum in Bottrop, Germany. In sum, while the extant literature provides the foundation for an exploration of this topic, it does not dissect and analyze the important early works at length in order to get to the root of the association between the two artists.


Oral History Interview with Sol LeWitt, 1974 July 15, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. He began exploring the New York gallery scene with Tony Candido, an architect in Pei’s office.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.


21 LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art."


23 "Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Frank Stella New Nihilism or New Art? Interview with Bruce Glaser (1964)."

24 Ibid.


27 LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art."

28 Ibid.

29 LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art."

30 O'Doherty.


32 O'Doherty.

33 LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art."


35 LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art."

36 Saletnik.

37 For example 1974 interview quoted above as well as in interviews in the 1990s and in connection with his large retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2000.

39 Liesbrock, 41.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.
Bibliography


Oral History Interview with Sol LeWitt, 1974 July 15, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.


Alex Dodge, “Functional Models of Self Realization (samurai-gumi) 3”, 2014
graphite and earth pigment on synthetic paper, 20 x 26 inches

Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, NY
Seeing the Sentiment: Eighteenth-Century Theatrical Portraiture and Garrick’s Adaptation of Romeo and Juliet

by Emily Leach!

Abstract: Not only did the theatrical portraiture of the eighteenth century contribute to the creation of celebrity by depicting the most prominent actors and actresses of the day in the roles for which they were most famous, but it also preserved some of the period’s most iconic dramatic scenes. One such example is Benjamin Wilson’s popular 1753 print of David Garrick and George Anne Bellamy in Romeo and Juliet, which sold very well, and in fact can be purchased on t-shirts and coffee mugs to this day. In this print, Garrick and Bellamy are acting the famous tomb scene, one of Garrick’s own additions to Shakespeare’s original script. Through a study of Wilson’s famous print, along with the print, published by W. Herbert in 1753, of Henry Woodward as Mercutio reciting the “Queen Mab” speech, and William Elliot’s 1759 print of Spranger Barry and Maria Isabella Nossiter acting the famous balcony scene, my paper considers Garrick’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s famous tragedy and its relationship to the theatrical portraiture that came out of it, in order to ask how the portraits speak to the text and the performances which they were intended to represent. Through a close reading of these three theatrical portraits alongside two earlier works, Charles Le Brun’s A Method to Design the Passions (1734) and John Weaver’s descriptions of theatrical gestures in The Loves of Mars and Venus (1717), my paper argues that the portraits affirm the desired increase in sentimentality that Garrick tried to effect within Romeo and Juliet through his adaptation.

Keywords: Romeo and Juliet; theatrical portraiture; William Shakespeare; David Garrick
David Garrick is often credited with reviving public interest in the works of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, in large part by staging and adapting many of his plays as manager of the Drury Lane theatre. In fact, Garrick’s 1748 adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* was the definitive version of the play performed on stage for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In what became known as the “battle of the Romeos” in 1750, Garrick’s particular adaptation of the play was performed a staggering twenty-five times, with the Covent Garden theatre staging the play twelve times, with Spranger Barry and Maria Isabella Nossiter playing the lead roles, and the Drury Lane theatre thirteen times, with Garrick himself playing the role of Romeo alongside George Anne Bellamy as Juliet. Both theatres’ companies strove to attract audiences away from the opposing theatre and towards their own productions.1 Aside from the obvious draw of the competition between the two theatres, what was it that made Garrick’s adaptation so successful that Francis Gentleman said “no play ever received greater advantage from alteration than this tragedy”?2 The *Theatrical Review* of 1772 hints at one possible explanation when the author states that, in setting out to write his adaptation of Shakespeare’s famous tragedy, Garrick “found... that Shakespeare had neglected to heighten the catastrophe to so great a degree of distress, as it was capable of being carried.”3 In other words, one of the elements of Garrick’s revision of *Romeo and Juliet* that made it so successful in drawing in the eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century crowds was the way in which it maximized the narrative’s emotional impact by increasing the play’s sentimental attributes.

One strong piece of evidence for this explanation can be found in the theatrical portraiture of Garrick’s time. While eighteenth-century theatrical portraiture no doubt “fostered the ‘celebrification’ of actors,” as Aparna Gollapudi suggests, by inextricably linking them to specific, definitive roles and attempting to recreate “the onstage impact of the player’s celebrated genius,”4 the portraiture also serves a secondary function. In depicting the actors in their most iconic roles, the artists behind eighteenth-century theatrical portraiture also had to situate their portraits within the most recognizable moments from the play in which those roles originated, posing the actors as though they were in the midst of performing that significant scene. The scenes in which the actors were represented were presumably chosen because they represent some of the most stirring bits of performance on the part of the actor in question, and they determined for the artist the facial expres-
sion and posture in which the actor ought to be depicted. As a result, the necessity of selecting a specific moment from the performance in which to set the portrait meant that not only the actors, but also those moments themselves were preserved and promoted. As such, eighteenth-century theatrical portraiture reveal a great deal about how certain characters and scenes would have appeared in performance, as well as which moments from the plays would have been the most familiar amongst theatre-goers. Therefore, the theatrical portraiture coming out of Garrick’s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* grants insight into the changes, both textual and performative, that Garrick made to the play. Through a study of three famous theatrical portraits—Benjamin Wilson’s 1753 print of David Garrick and George Anne Bellamy acting the famous tomb scene, W. Herbert’s 1753 print of Henry Woodward as Mercutio reciting the “Queen Mab” speech, and William Elliot’s 1759 print of Spranger Barry and Maria Isabella Nossiter acting the famous balcony scene—this essay considers the place of sentimentality in David Garrick’s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* and suggests that the portraiture coming out of this revision of Shakespeare’s famous tragedy represents an affirmation of the sentimental mode within the play.

The sentimental mode, popularized by such authors as Samuel Richardson in his novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, becomes understood in the eighteenth century as “both public and private,” in the sense that, while it is produced by an inward attention, sentimentality represents “a concern with feeling as articulated by the body—by its postures and gestures, its involuntary palpitations and collapses.”

The first half of the eighteenth century saw a move towards elevating the theatrical institution and making the theatre-going experience more respectable. Garrick, as lead actor and manager of the Drury Lane theatre, played an important role in contributing to this shift. One of the ways in which Garrick and other members of the theatrical community worked to change the attitude towards the theatre was by drawing on the sentimental mode through the use of the spectacle of bodies on stage. As Paul Goring notes, “[bodies on stage] performing according to innovative notions of theatrical expression became...a means of emblematising polite society and of showcasing modes of noble self-representation.” In other words, the polite body image of the mid-eighteenth century theatre helped to promote a perception of the theatre as “a polite, moral institution.” Similarly, in his discussion of sentimental art, Andrew S. Winston notes that, in many eighteenth-
and nineteenth-century paintings, not only softened facial features but also gestures such as “the averted gaze, tilted head, and partially turned body... all contribute to sentimentality by suggesting purity, innocence, and vulnerability.” Winston notes that the category of sentimental art does not become clearly defined until the nineteenth century. However, eighteenth-century theatrical portraiture, which this essay will address, does indeed function to produce in the viewer “idealized thoughts about the goodness and purity of the subject matter,” as Winston suggests that sentimental art should. In the case of theatrical portraiture inspired by Garrick’s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, this means emphasizing the youth and innocence of the two protagonists and the purity of their forbidden love.

As such a physically expressive mode, eighteenth-century sentimentality lends itself very well to performance, and Shakespeare’s work was no exception, as the mid-eighteenth century saw a move towards “domesticating and sentimentalising Shakespeare.” In the case of Garrick’s adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, this meant a shift from “the pathetic to the tender female and the emotive rather than heroic hero,” as well as an attempt to turn the narrative of the star-crossed lovers inward, “away from the wider social and political world, to concentrate on characters’ feelings and interactions at the personal and family level.” This turn is evident in Garrick’s alteration of *Romeo and Juliet* with an elongated tomb scene, in which Romeo and Juliet are given additional time alone on stage together before their deaths. This extra moment directs the tragedy of the play back toward the young couple’s purity and sincerity of love and away from the effects of their actions upon the larger community of Verona. While these changes to Shakespeare’s text were significant, it is also important to note the changes to the way in which the play is acted. Cunningham observes that, in order to produce the increased sentimentality for which Garrick’s adaptation strives, “the facial expressions, gestures and movements of the actors were equally as important as the words they uttered.” Similarly, Janet Todd notes that this move towards sentimentality in *Romeo and Juliet* is also reflected on the stage beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century, particularly in the change in the style of acting promoted by popular performers such as Garrick himself, who is praised for his method which “stressed the feeling performance and the expression of attitude in all parts of the body.” It is into this performative element of Garrick’s adaptation that the related theatrical portraiture grants insight.
One of the major changes Garrick makes to Shakespeare’s famous tragedy is the removal of the plot point of Romeo’s initial love for Rosaline, as it was deemed “a blemish in his character.” In Shakespeare’s original version of the play, Romeo is in love with Rosaline before he easily abandons her to pursue Juliet, implying that he is fickle, that he moves his attention from woman to woman without a thought and that therefore, he would likely have done the same to Juliet. In contrast, Garrick’s version of Romeo and Juliet opens with Romeo already deeply in love with Juliet. This change in Romeo’s character is reflected in William Elliot’s 1759 print of Spranger Barry and Maria Isabella Nossiter acting Romeo and Juliet’s famous balcony scene (fig. 1).

An examination of Barry’s posture and expression in this print reveals them to be a perfect model of the physical display of pure love, as described by Charles Le Brun in A Method to Learn to Design the Passions, as opposed to the lustful character Shakespeare may have originally intended. As Romeo, Barry’s forehead is smooth, his brow raised, and his head “turn’d softly towards the beloved object.” His cheeks are colored slightly, as Le Brun suggests true love presents with “a blooming blush to the cheeks” and his mouth is “somewhat opened, and the corners a little turn’d up,” just as Le Brun says they ought to be, as Romeo glances upward at his beloved Juliet. Furthermore, his arms are spread open, and his torso is turned towards the audience, so that his body is completely open and exposed, the implication being that Romeo is completely sincere in his declarations of love to Juliet, and is hiding nothing. The presentation of true love is contrasted with that of desire, the signs of which include “the eyebrows being close-pressed and advancing over the eyes,” “the pupil situated in the middle of the eye and full of fire,” “the mouth also more open than in the preceding action, and the corners drawn back,” and finally Le Brun notes that “the tongue may appear just upon the

Fig. 1. William Elliot. Mr. Barry and Miss Nossiter in the characters of Romeo and Juliet, act 2d, scene 2d. 1759. Graphic. Folger Shakespeare Library.
Elliot’s portrait shows no evidence in the image of Barry’s Romeo of anything that might be read as desire, suggesting that the portrait, and by extension the production upon which the portrait is based, is deeply concerned with ensuring that the audience perceived Romeo’s pursuit of Juliet as motivated not by physical desire, but rather by a pure and innocent love.

The depiction of Maria Isabella Nossiter’s Juliet in Elliot’s portrait also reflects the desired shift in Juliet’s character towards a more sentimental figure, as mentioned above, from “the pathetic to the tender female.” This portrait reveals an instance in which it is not a textual change but a performative change that grants the scene its increased senti mentality. Although Garrick leaves the exchange between Romeo and Juliet in this scene mostly without alteration from Shakespeare’s text, the portrait reveals a possible change in the way Nossiter portrayed Juliet in this scene. In the text, Juliet is concerned through much of the scene with the danger that Romeo might get caught, warning him that her garden is “death, considering who thou art, / If any of my kinsman find thee here,” or that she is being too forward and revealing too much of her feeling towards Romeo, as she states that “I should have been more strange, I must confess, / But that thou over-heard’st, ere I was ware, / My true love’s passion.”

However, the Juliet represented in Elliot’s portrait of Nossiter is serene, her forehead smooth, not creased with worry or anxiety, and a faint smile plays upon her lips as she glances down at her beloved Romeo, her arms stretched out to him, open and inviting. Such a depiction of Nossiter’s Juliet suggests a change in the way in which the character of Juliet would have been acted in this scene, with the focus being less upon Juliet’s uncertainty and anxiety with respect to the potential danger of the situation, and more upon her tender affection for her new lover Romeo.

The character of Mercutio is also transformed in Garrick’s adaptation. Francis Gentleman praises Henry Woodward for his performance in the role of Mercutio, stating that Woodward’s “grimace and attitude, which so often diminish that gentleman’s merit in other characters, are here of singular advantage, and the peculiarity of stile is admirably set forth by his peculiarity of expression, especially in the capital speech relative to Queen Mab.” Woodward’s larger-than-life attitude and expression in performance is so well-suited to the role of Mercutio because he is a character of boldness and excess. Mercu-
tio, in a sense, represents the type of hero from which the sentimental is trying to move away: the charismatic man of wit who laughs in the face of danger. However, Garrick turns Mercutio’s narrative into a didactic one, just as he does with the “Queen Mab” speech, as I suggest below. Although much of Mercutio’s bawdy humor is redacted, such as his references to Juliet as a “popp’rin pear” or the fruit of a medlar tree, both of which are puns of the sex organs or sexual intercourse, what Garrick’s version does preserve is Mercutio’s flippant treatment of love—more specifically, of Romeo’s love for Juliet. While the audience of Shakespeare’s original play is tempted to agree with Mercutio’s mockery when he likens Romeo to a sort of Petrarchan lover who speaks in rhymes, makes appeals to Venus, and appears “in the likeness of a sigh,” Garrick’s revision of Romeo’s character into a more sincere, less fickle lover turns these words back around on Mercutio, making his words seem not witty and perceptive, but rather expressive of Mercutio’s inability to grasp the true nature of Romeo’s love for Juliet.22 Similarly, Mercutio’s promise to Romeo that, if he attends Capulet’s feast, Mercutio will find him a new love to help him overcome his current feelings, and in which he begs Romeo to “compare her [Juliet’s] face with some that I shall show, / And I will make thee think thy swan a raven,” takes on new meaning in Garrick’s adaptation.23 While in Shakespeare’s unaltered version of the play Mercutio’s words do, in fact, prove true, as Romeo casts off his love for Rosalind in place of his new love for Juliet, in Garrick’s adaptation, Romeo’s attendance at Capulet’s feast only affirms his pre-existing love for Juliet, cementing the audience’s view of Romeo as a loyal lover, and making Mercutio’s advice seem nothing but ironic and perhaps even foolish.

While Garrick’s revised Romeo and Juliet changes Mercutio’s attitude toward Romeo, it preserves his bravado. The adaptation maintains Mercutio’s taunt to Tybalt to “make it a word and a blow” in the scene in which he duels Tybalt to his death, and it retains his cries of “a plague o’ both your houses!” before his own death, in which he rages at both the Capulets and the Montagues for making him a victim of their long-standing feud.24 By preserving Mercutio’s cynicism and grandiosity, and placing them against the adaptation’s redeemed Romeo, Garrick’s revision of Romeo and Juliet uses Mercutio’s fate to show the inferiority of the model of heroism Mercutio represents and to promote a new model of heroism: the emotive Romeo. This
new perspective on Mercutio’s character in Garrick’s adaptation, and on his famous speech as well, is reflected in W. Herbert’s portrait of Woodward as Mercutio (fig. 2). In the portrait, Mercutio is placed in the forest, but unlike in Wilson’s painting of Garrick’s added tomb scene, which will be discussed later in this paper, there is nothing separating Mercutio from the disorder of the forest. In fact, Mercutio appears to mirror nature through his unkempt clothing: his vest is untucked, his jacket undone, and the buttons on his vest seem about to burst. Mercutio’s expression is the very definition of bravado. The one hand placed upon his belly hints at laughter and mirth, which are qualities with which we can certainly associate Mercutio, and a knowing smile plays at his lips, but his mouth remains tightly closed, as though he must contain any strong emotion he should happen to feel. Furthermore, to problematize his proud, mirthful appearance, Mercutio’s sword hangs conspicuously below his waist, a reminder of his impending tragic fate. By presenting Mercutio in this way, Herbert’s portrait ties his qualities of bravado and wit to the disorder and chaos of the forest, reminding his audience of the dangerous nature of the kind of heroism Mercutio represents in Garrick’s adaptation of the play, and of the superiority of the emotive hero, as represented by Romeo.

Another noteworthy change Garrick makes to Shakespeare’s tragedy is the removal of the last several lines of Mercutio’s famous “Queen Mab” speech, ending it with the image of the soldier who dreams of being in battle, then awakes and, frightened, prays before going back to sleep. In doing so, Garrick removes all mention of Queen Mab’s mischievous activities that go beyond inspiring sleepers with dreams, taking out Mercutio’s statement that Queen Mab “bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,” or that she comes to sleeping maids “pressing them and learns them first to bear.” Not only does
this alteration limit Queen Mab’s influence solely to the realm of dreams, denying her any agency in the physical world, it also removes the suggestion that maids might be less than virtuous. Garrick’s adaptation of the “Queen Mab” speech also moves the emphasis away from Queen Mab’s actions and towards the sleepers’ reactions to their dream experiences. By ending the speech with the image of the praying soldier, the alteration emphasizes the emotional effects of dreams and, in this case, the sleeper’s virtuous response of prayer. In John Mullan’s text, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, he argues that the play has the potential to be morally instructive by staging “exquisite scenes of feeling and distress,” representing the experience of extreme emotions in which the audience can share and from which the audience can learn.  

By removing the final few lines from the “Queen Mab” monologue, Garrick transforms it into the perfect model of a morally instructive speech.

Perhaps the most significant change Garrick makes to *Romeo and Juliet* is the addition of the tomb scene, in which Juliet wakes up shortly after Romeo drinks the poison, and the two lovers have one final encounter before the poison takes effect and Romeo dies. In his work *The Dramatic Censor, or Critical Companion*, Francis Gentleman praises this addition, stating that, “bringing Juliet to life before Romeo dies is undoubtedly a change of infinite merit.” The *Theatrical Review* of 1772 similarly praises the added scene, stating that the effect upon Romeo of Juliet’s waking up from seeming death—that he is so elated to find her alive that he forgets that he has just consumed a poison that will soon end his own life—sets the scene for an electric transformation of the characters’ emotions, “from rapture to despair,” and in doing so, makes the moment in which Romeo remembers what he has done “infinitely more affecting, and the distress of Juliet, as well as his own, much deeper than it stands in the Original Play.”

Indeed, in the short scene, the characters do undergo a startling transformation of emotions, from Romeo’s astonishment and relief when he sees Juliet awake, to Juliet’s fear that Romeo, whom she does not recognize, has come to make her marry Paris and forsake her true husband, to the recognition and joy that she has been reunited with her beloved Romeo at last, and finally the lovers’ lament at Romeo’s remembrance that he has taken poison and will not survive for much longer.
It is noteworthy, then, that Benjamin Wilson’s 1753 print of David Garrick and George Anne Bellamy acting Garrick’s famous added scene (fig. 3) shows Garrick’s Romeo and Bellamy’s Juliet not in the throes of either rapture or despair, as the *Theatrical Review* suggests, but rather in postures of astonishment wherein, as John Weaver describes the gesture in *The Loves of Mars and Venus* (1717), “both hands are thrown up toward the skies; the eyes also lifted up, and the body cast backwards.”31 Wilson’s decision to cap-

![Fig. 3. Benjamin Wilson. David Garrick as Romeo, George Anne Bellamy as Juliet and Charles Blakes as Tybalt in Romeo and Juliet adapted by David Garrick from William Shakespeare. 1753. Graphic. Victoria and Albert Museum.](image)

ture the initial moment of shock upon Juliet’s awakening, rather than the complex mixture of emotions which follows it, suggests a desire on the artist’s part to preserve not the transformation of emotions which both characters undergo in the exchange that follows, but the exact moment in which, as Francis Gentleman states, “nature is brought to her most critical feelings” within the *audience*, who would have anticipated Romeo’s terrible moment of realization from the second Juliet awoke.32 As Janet Todd suggests in *Sensibility*, the main emphasis within a sentimental narrative “is not on the subtleties of a particular
emotional state but on the communication of common feeling from sufferer or watcher to reader or audience,” and Wilson’s decision to recreate the audience’s moment of horror and realization rather than Romeo’s own reflects this emphasis.\textsuperscript{33}

In keeping with the importance of inspiring a particular emotion within an audience, Gentleman’s review of Barry and Garrick’s performances as Romeo also reflects this preoccupation with the audience’s emotional response. He writes of the two actors in their respective turns as Romeo:

I perceived that Mr. Garrick commanded most applause—Mr. Barry most tears: desirous of tracing this difference to its source, I found that as dry sorrow drinks our blood, so astonishment checks our tears, that by a kind of electrical merit Mr. Garrick struck all hearts with a degree of inexpressible feeling, and bore conception so far beyond her usual sphere, that softer sensations lay hid in wonder.\textsuperscript{34}

In other words, the success of Barry and Garrick’s performances is being judged not on any sort of technical skill, such as how true they are to their character, or how well they deliver their lines, but instead it is being judged by the strength of the emotions they inspire within their audience, reflecting the sentimental narrative’s concern with the communication of common feeling between the characters onstage and the members of the audience.

In Sentiment and Sociability, John Mullan states that the instrument of sentimentality in the eighteenth century was “a massively sensitized, feminine body,” and that feminine virtue was one of the sentimental mode’s primary concerns. It is noteworthy that Garrick’s added scene in the tomb also allows for a further emphasis of Juliet’s virtue, specifically her fidelity to Romeo, as her first act upon waking in the tomb is to vociferously protest that she will never marry Paris: “Why do you force me so—I’ll never consent/ My strength may fail me, but my will’s unmoved—I’ll not wed Paris,—Romeo is my husband.”\textsuperscript{35}

Wilson’s portrait also emphasizes Juliet’s virtue in this scene in a number of other ways. First, by choosing not to depict the corpses of Tybalt and Paris, which exist in the tomb along with Romeo and Juliet in both Garrick’s revised script and in Shakespeare’s own text, Wilson’s portrait eliminates the suggestion of any other male influence in Juliet’s life, implying that she is loyal and obedient only to Romeo.
Also, by including within the painting the darkness and the threatening woods through which Romeo has just travelled to reach Juliet’s tomb, and in placing the dense, dark woods outside in direct contrast with the warm light and the clean, open space inside the tomb, Wilson’s painting implies a connection between the order and light within the tomb and Juliet herself as a source of that order and light. This is a significant choice on Wilson’s part, as the script calls for the tomb itself to be rather dark and dismal, with Juliet describing the vault as a place “to whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,” as she anticipates waking up in the vault to find herself surrounded by “the bones of all my buried ancestors” and seeing “where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth, / Lies festering in his shroud.” The fact that Wilson does not incorporate this description into his portrait suggests that Wilson’s painting is more concerned with accurately conveying Juliet’s pure and virtuous character than the setting in which Juliet finds herself in this particular scene, which is once again reflective of the sentimental concern with an outward expression of the characters’ inner emotional lives, over and above maintaining a coherent narrative.

Wilson’s portrait of the tomb scene also highlights another important feature of sentimentality: the exploration of the limits of language to fully capture moments of great emotion. As Mullan writes, in reference to the sentimental, “the special powers of feeling, the exceptional reaches of sympathy, are set against a world of twisted or broken communication.” This desire to convey unspeakable emotions in performance, and to inspire those emotions within the audience, is reflected in Garrick’s alteration of the language of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which he claims to have removed the “jingle and quibble” of Shakespeare’s original play in an effort to make the language appear more natural and spontaneous. One particular instance of this can be found in Act 3, Scene 4, in which Juliet waits impatiently for Romeo to come to her, presumably so that they can consummate their marriage. In Shakespeare’s version, Juliet laments: “O, I have bought the mansion of a love / But not possessed it, and though I am sold, / Not yet enjoyed”. However, in Garrick’s adapted version, the last half of Juliet’s lament is removed. While it is likely that Garrick simply wanted to eliminate the mixed metaphor, in which Juliet is both the purchaser and the object of purchase, the result of the removal of this particular part of Juliet’s speech is, once again, that Juliet appears more virtu-
ous. While “the mansion of a love” can refer metaphorically to Romeo and Juliet’s marriage and love for one another, it is difficult to read Juliet’s claim, “I am sold,” as well as the idea that she might be “enjoyed” by Romeo, as referring to anything other than her own physical being. Garrick’s removal of these lines draws attention away from Juliet’s physical nature and physical desires, placing the emphasis instead upon Juliet’s virtue as she waits eagerly for her new husband, and on the purity of Romeo and Juliet’s love for one another. This attempt to minimize any reference within the play to Juliet as a sexual being is further evident as Garrick removes Juliet’s mention of the “amorous rites” of lovers, or the reference to Juliet’s “unmanned blood, bating in [her] cheeks” as she waits for Romeo. Finally, an earlier alteration, in Act 1, Scene 3, sees Capulet asking Paris to “let two more summers wither in their pride, / Ere we may think [Juliet] ripe to be a wife,” disrupting the rhyme from Shakespeare’s version in which Juliet will be thought ripe to be a bride, not a wife. This adjustment serves another purpose aside from disrupting the rhyme scheme, which is to once again emphasize Juliet’s virtue and her potential to be a dutiful wife, while distancing her from the physical spectacle that the bride often becomes, as the object of the wedding guests’ gaze, as well as from the bride’s responsibility of consummation of the marriage on her wedding night.

As one of the most celebrated actors of his time, Garrick often used his celebrity to shape the tastes of the theatre-going public of London through the productions he staged at the theatre at Drury Lane. He did this not only by reviving the works of Shakespeare, but also by taking plays, which had been successful in the past and subtly (or sometimes not so subtly) altering and shaping them to reflect what he believed theatre ought to be. One example of this is Garrick’s The Country Girl, which he adapted from William Wycherley’s 1675 play The Country Wife in order to “clear one of our most celebrated Comedies from Immorality and Obscenity,” to reflect his beliefs that comedies ought to be “innocent without being insipid” and that, when it comes to writing for the theatre, “no kind of Wit ought to be received as an Excuse for Immorality.” As this essay has shown, Garrick enforced similar theatrical and moral values upon Romeo and Juliet through his adaptation of Shakespeare’s famous tragedy, and this change carried over into the way in which the actors performed their characters onstage, the way in which the characters were perceived.
by the audience, and finally, the way in which these performances were preserved in the theatrical portraiture coming out of Garrick’s long-running adaptation.

Both through the use of language, by altering Shakespeare’s text, and through the use of gesture, by changing the way in which the play was performed, as evidenced by the theatrical portraiture available from Garrick’s time, Garrick translated Shakespeare’s story of the star-crossed lovers into the language of eighteenth-century sentimentality. In doing so, not only does Garrick’s adaptation make Juliet become less pathetic and more tender, chaste and virtuous, and Romeo become a more sincere, steadfast lover, but Mercutio too is transformed, from a witty and astute critic of the folly and fickleness of young love to a foil for Romeo’s sentimental hero of feeling; Mercutio becomes an embodiment of the heroic wit and bravado which the sentimental, emotive hero looks to replace. Perhaps even more significantly, by emphasizing the sincerity, purity and depth of the star-crossed lovers before they meet their untimely ends, Garrick’s sentimental adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* achieves exactly what Garrick set out to achieve: to enhance the emotional impact for his audience and to “heighten the catastrophe to so great a degree of distress, as it was capable of being carried.”

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**Endnotes**


7 Ibid., 116.

8 Ibid.


10 Ibid., 121


12 Ibid., 75.

13 Ibid., 34.


16 Shakespeare, 34.

17 Ibid., 35.

18 William Hogarth’s series “A Rake’s Progress,” specifically the third painting of the rake at Rose Tavern, is an example of an eighteenth-century work that conforms to Le Brun’s idea of how to represent desire in art, as the rake in the foreground is depicted with flared nostrils, wide eyes, and his torso is angled toward the woman sitting next to him, the object of his desire.

19 Cunningham, 75.

20 Shakespeare, 23.
21 Gentleman, 190-191.
22 Shakespeare, 20.
23 Ibid., 13.
24 Ibid., 34-35.
25 Ibid., 14.
26 (1.4.92-93)
27 Mullan, 58.
28 Gentleman, 187.
29 Theatrical Review, 62-63.
30 Shakespeare, 65-66.
31 John Weaver, The Loves of Mars and Venus; a Dramatick Entertain-ntment of Dancing, Attempted in Imitation of the Pantomimes of the Ancient Greeks and Romans; as Perform'd at the Theatre in Drury-Lane (London: W. Mears, 1717), 21.
32 Gentleman, 187.
33 Todd, 4.
34 Gentleman, 190.
35 Mullan, 61; Shakespeare, 65.
36 Ibid., 54.
37 Mullan, 61.
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40 Ibid., 3.2.8 and 3.2.14.
41 Ibid., 1.2.11.
44 Theatrical Review, 62.
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Alex Dodge, “Functional Models of Self Realization (samurai-gumi) 4”, 2014
graphite and earth pigment on synthetic paper, 20 x 26 inches

Courtesy the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, NY

Review by Rachel Corbman

In May 2014, as part of her second stint as a scholar in residence at the New School, the legendary black feminist critic bell hooks sat down with a hand-selected cohort of young black female cultural workers for a public dialogue before a hearty crowd in the university’s auditorium as well as a virtual audience tuned in via live stream. This dialogue with bell hooks—who writes her name in lowercase to emphasize the importance of her ideas over her identity—covered an expansive range of topics. Yet one dangling clause in this two-hour program caused the most buzz and unrest. The subsequent reaction centered on hooks’s searing criticism of the superstar Beyoncé, whose celebrity is already the locus of considerable conversation around race, gender, sexuality, and feminism in popular culture. “I see a part of Beyoncé that is in fact anti-feminist,” said hooks, “that is a terrorist especially in terms of her impact on young girls.”

This purposeful overstatement—we all know Beyoncé is not a terrorist—rehearses an argument quite familiar by now to hooks’s dutiful readers, which was most forcefully articulated by hooks twenty years ago in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992). Famously, *Black Looks* argues that images produced within the mass media maintain the white supremacist patriarchy’s “oppression, exploitation, and overall domination” of all black people and all women, and especially black women.¹ For hooks, the ways in which Beyoncé’s body is represented—emblazoned on the recent cover of *Time Magazine*’s “100 Most Influential” issue and elsewhere—is not just problematic but also complicit in the anti-black racism and sexism of the culture at large. “[Beyoncé] is colluding in the construction of herself as a slave,” hooks concluded.
The outpouring of responses to hooks’s provocative comments ranged from wholesale rejections, to dismissals tempered with respect for the writer, to statements of support. However, according to the public intellectual and writer Rev. Osagyefo Sekou, this coverage strongly trended toward negative responses that deemed hooks and her patented critique of the representation of black women outdated. “What is at stake in the younger generation’s critique is not simply a question of age,” Sekou writes, “but rather is fundamentally a question of ideology.” Sekou stages this intergenerational clash as a battle that pits a generation of unruly upstarts, who lack a sufficient critique of neoliberal capitalism, against their older and wiser elders. In “On bell, Beyoncé, and Bullshit,” Brittney Cooper’s brilliant and nuanced commentary of the fallout following hooks’s comments, the writer takes Sekou to task—yet ultimately concludes that her generation “could benefit from a more radical edge to our critique.”

While Cooper’s blogged article is well worth reading, her argument is largely outside the purview of my review of Jennifer C. Nash’s important new contribution to black feminist thought. Rather, what I want to emphasize here before turning my attention to The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography (2014) is that hooks’s assault on Beyoncé was lodged in the context of a panel that was already intentionally framed as a dialogue between hooks and a younger generation of thinkers—specifically the author Marci Blackman, the filmmaker Shola Lynch, and the memoirist and activist Janet Mock. Mounted as more of an opportunity for mutual appreciation than as a sparring match, the conversation in fact took a surprise turn with Mock’s (and later Lynch’s) disagreements with hooks. However, if a critical mass has followed Mock’s lead in taking to the internet to question hooks’s once tried-and-true analysis, how can we move beyond this critique to a new mode of black feminist analysis?

A few weeks after I fumed silently in my seat at the New School, I had the opportunity to read Jennifer Nash’s The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography, which was published a couple of months earlier, in March 2014. Partially through this confluence of events, a book has never instantly struck me as so timely and necessary. The Black Body in Ecstasy is a “loving critique” of the established canon of black feminist thought, including bell hooks’s oeuvre, that both “parts company with many of the questions
that have driven black feminist scholarship on representation ... [and] hopes to bring renewed theoretical energies to these debates.”

Nash takes two routes to this destination. First, in the opening chapter of *The Black Body in Ecstasy*, Nash charts a critical genealogy of contemporary black feminist thought. Specifically, the writer convincingly argues that it was Patricia Hill Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, which was published two years before *Black Looks* in 1990, that moved representation from the periphery to the center of black feminism. While attention to the representation of black women has become so pervasive that it is rarely remarked upon, this focus actually marks a distinct rupture in the field. Earlier work, Nash argues, had “relatively little interest in representation,” instead emphasizing a myriad of causes of black women’s marginalization—including “capitalism (Frances Beale), sexual violence (Darlene Hine Clark), sexual hierarchy (Audre Lorde), simultaneous oppressions (Combahee River Collective), and the law’s inattention to black women’s experiences of discrimination (Kimberlé Crenshaw).”

Nash’s black feminist genealogy has a similar guiding impulse to the genealogy in Clare Hemmings’s *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, which was published in 2011 as part of the series Next Wave: New Directions in Women’s Studies, the same Duke series of which Nash’s contribution is also a part. In both monographs, the writers question and creatively reconfigure commonly narrativized truths about feminism—in the end opening up a space where we can begin to think differently about feminism. “I hope to create analytic breathing room for scholarship,” Nash writes. “My profound faith in the promise and possibility of black feminist theory leads me to advocate not an abandonment if it, but instead a concerted effort to craft an alternative black feminist theoretical archive.”

To do so, the ensuing chapters of *The Black Body in Ecstasy* offer close readings of four hardcore pornographic films from the 1970s and 1980s that feature black women. Nash’s decision to hone in on racialized pornography is crucial. “Pornography has implicitly come to structure black feminism’s conception of representation,” she argues. “Indeed, black feminism has often read visual culture’s treatment of black women even in non-pornographic texts as a kind of pornography; pornography has become both a
The Black Body in Ecstasy intervenes within black feminism by challenging the critical “preoccupation with the injuries that racial pornography engenders” by instead reading for what the writer characterizes as ecstasy, “possibilities for female pleasure within a phallic economy and possibilities of female pleasure within a white-dominated representational economy.” This is a strategically selective reading practice or what queer theorist Judith Butler has termed an “aggressive counter-reading.” And although I am in complete sympathy with both this hermeneutic and its deployment in The Black Body in Ecstasy, this leads me to my primary critique of Nash’s book. At times, the precision of her close readings and the seductiveness of her larger argument have the potential to jump step disruptive cleavages in her readings of films.

A good example is found in her extended analysis of the film Black Taboo (1984) that constitutes the third chapter of the book, “Laughing Matters: Race-Humor on the Pornographic Screen.” Black Taboo depicts a family’s excitement at the return of their son, Sonny Boy, after a decade of service in the military. In hopes of helping the melancholic and withdrawn Sonny Boy acclimate back to civilian life, his sister Verdana, his sister Theodora, and his mother Valdesta each in turn have sex with him. The film, then, concludes with a punch line that ostensibly undoes the film’s promise of breaking the incest taboo. Valdesta discovers that Sonny Boy is missing a birthmark and is, therefore, not actually her son. But “you know what they say: We all look alike,” she laughs.

Nash argues that Valdesta’s joke not only deflates the taboo promised by the title of the film but also the “racial mythology that lent the film its erotic charge” in the first place. This joke, then, effectively releases the protagonists of the film from “being the subjects of ethnographic race-humor and instead [turns] an uncomfortable comic gaze on the spectator.” Nash makes a quite compelling case here. And in the context of her powerful argument, it is easy to miss the writer’s mere parenthetical mention of incestuous lesbian sex between the sisters, Valdesta and Theodora, as well as Nash’s avoidance of this scene vis-à-vis the chapter’s larger thesis. However, if we take lesbian sex seriously as sex, her argument loses some of its traction,
as we would certainly have to see the sisters’ sexual encounter as an example of incest that is not negated by the narrative. Complicating an argument, however, does not have to weaken it. Significantly, *Black Taboo* (unlike the writer or reader) does not require a negation of incestuous sex acts between sisters because lesbian sex is imagined as something that can be sexy but is less than sex in a phallic economy. This is missing from Nash’s argument. But it is worthy of our attention, precisely because it creates an opportunity to consider the intersection of heterosexism and male dominance that both renders lesbianism largely invisible and conversely pornographic lesbian sex highly visible.

Clearly, the representation of lesbianism is more central to my intellectual agenda than it is to Nash’s project. Yet my desire for her to engage this question comes from my respect for her work and its many successes rather than a place of dismissal. Indeed, I think *The Black Body in Ecstasy* is the most significant black feminist text in recent memory. It is as rigorous as it is creative; and, in the tradition of thinkers like hooks, it is elegantly written and thoroughly readable. Most importantly, it charts an inspired critical path that sees pleasure as a site of possibility or, invoking the late queer theorist Jose Muñoz, “an invitation, a call, to the then-and-there, a not-yet-here... a collective potentiality.” This fashions a clearing that is serviceable both inside and outside of black feminism, particularly in the broader bodies of feminist and queer thought that Nash engages throughout *The Black Body in Ecstasy*.

In closing, I would like to return now to a second moment in the “Are You Still a Slave?” dialogue. For me, this moment remains far more troubling than the question of whether Beyoncé is or is not a terrorist. “I used to believe,” bell hooks noted, “that by the time I reached the age of forty, fifty that there would be so many people, young black females and males, who would have surpassed bell hooks.” Shifting seamlessly from the first to third person, she continued: “‘Wow, you know, bell used to be useful but we’ve got so much more visionary theory’— and yet that hasn’t happened.” Or has it? It would be depressing to think black feminism stalled after bell hooks. Equally depressing is the thought that newer visionary theory must inevitably supplant older visionary theory with time. Thankfully, though, I do not subscribe to either of bell hooks’s presuppositions. And after reading *The Black Body in Ecstasy*, I count Jennifer Nash as
one of the young visionary theorists whose work, like the work of proceeding generations, continues to engage, excite, and inspire me.

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Endnotes


11 Ibid.

