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The figure : David Park and the postwar taboo

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THE FIGURE: DAVID PARK AND THE
POSTWAR TABOO

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of the History of Art
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Elizabeth Towers-Ciriello

May 1996

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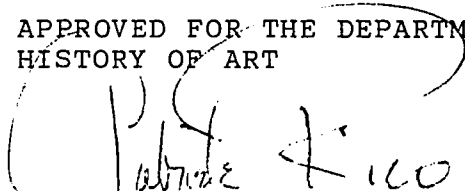
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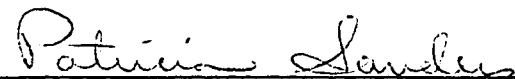
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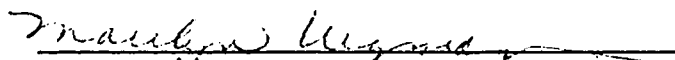
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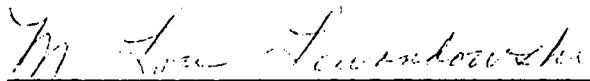


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ABSTRACT

THE FIGURE: DAVID PARK AND THE
POSTWAR TABOO

by Elizabeth Towers-Ciriello

This thesis is a parallel examination of David Park's figurative work of the 1950s and the taboo of the figure in painting in postwar America. David Park's "return to the figure" coincides with the dominance of Abstract Expressionism which, in theory, rejected recognizable imagery and held a specific disdain for the figure.

In order to demonstrate that a taboo existed, an historical and political analysis of the hegemony of Abstract Expressionism is given full attention as well as the theoretical, critical, and commercial aspects of the movement. A reconsideration of Park's art, ideology and career is interwoven with the above discussion, advancing the notion that the figure, as a powerful vehicle of human expression, posed a threat to the reigning abstract mode and the ideals of postwar America.

DEDICATION

For my parents
to whom I am greatly indebted

Heart-felt gratitude to my patient family,
David, Darin and Natalie
and loving husband, Dario

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Chapter 1. THE TABOO	1
Chapter 2. ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT	6
Chapter 3. CRITICISM AND THE ART MARKET	22
Chapter 4. HISTORICAL PROFILE OF THE CHOSEN ONES	47
Chapter 5. THE BROKEN SILENCE	67
Chapter 6. CONCLUSION	90
Notes	93
Illustrations	119
Bibliography	131

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. David Park, Standing Couple, 1958. Oil on canvas, 75 x 57 inches. Krannert Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.
2. Hans Hofmann, Sparks, 1957. Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Theodore N. Law, Houston, Texas.
3. David Parks, Non-Objective, 1949. Oil on canvas, 34 x 25 inches. Art Department, The Oakland Museum.
4. David Park, Kids on Bikes, 1950. Oil on canvas, 48 x 42 inches. The Regis Collection, Minneapolis.
5. David Park, Nude - Green, 1957. Oil on canvas, 68 x 56 3/8 inches. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Julian Eisenstein, Washington, D.C.
6. David Park, Daphne, 1959. Oil on canvas, 75 x 57 inches. Collection Mr. and Mrs. James R. Patton, Jr.
7. David Park, Head, 1959. Oil on canvas, 19 x 16 inches. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy J. Younger.
8. Mark Rothko, Four Darks in Red, 1958. Oil on canvas, 102 x 116 1/4 inches. Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
9. David Park, Four Men, 1958. Oil on canvas, 57 x 92 inches. Collection Whitney Museum of American Art.
10. Photograph of David Park by Imogen Cunningham.
11. David Park, Standing Male Nude in The Shower, 1957. Oil on canvas, 70 1/4 x 37 3/4 inches. Private collection, Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York.
12. Albrecht Dürer, Naked Self-Portrait, c. 1503. Schlossmuseum, Weimar.

Chapter 1. THE TABOO

David Park's reputation as a significant American painter has not been fully accorded in the histories written since his death in 1960. In a retrospective of his work in 1985, Henry Geldzahler writes that "David Park has been best known as a painter whose achievement and reputation have been under-valued."¹ This thesis explores the justice of this claim by taking a comprehensive examination of the period 1950 - 1960, when Park committed to painting the figure in the context of the dominant postwar movement: Abstract Expressionism. It is my intention to define the postwar taboo of the figure and propose that it was an adverse factor, just as the regionalist bias was, in the career of David Park. In so demonstrating, Park's art will be reconsidered on the merits of its humanist value.

From the historical perspective granted to scholars of the 1980s we find the emergence of the term "taboo" attached to figuration during the postwar period. In the exhibition catalogue, The Figurative Fifties: New York Figurative Expressionism (1988), the author states that artists were "breaking an implicit taboo" when they used "recognizable images" in their work, but this statement is too inclusive.² This thesis suggests that a specific controversy centered around the figure and it was this

"human image" which was most forbidden. This taboo of the figure in painting was both explicit, in the theories of Abstract Expressionism and the critical writings of Clement Greenberg, and implicit, in the commercial art world, politics, and, in a less frequently discussed way, as an undercurrent in the sociology and psychology of man in the 1950s. This latter aspect--the "disappearance of man" in painting during this period--became an issue pressing enough at the end of the fifties to spawn several exhibitions in New York based on the figure, from "New Images of Man" in 1959 to "Recent Painting USA: The Figure" in 1962.³

After a period of painting in the "non-objective" mode in the late 1940s, Park made a complete and unparalleled change.⁴ His dissatisfaction with abstraction led him back to a favorite subject, the figure, in the early days of 1950. His breach with the avant-garde mode of painting is implied in the epithet, "return to the figure" which, although in the historical sense is true, dismissed figuration as reactionary at the very least. In Chapter 2, we look closely at the authority of Abstract Expressionism: the theories and critics that supplied justification for the supersession of abstraction over representation, New York above the Bay Area.

The critical rejection of representation translated into commercial success for Abstract Expressionism which, in turn, generated more and more writing about the movement, gathering such momentum in the new "consumer" art market that abstraction came to symbolize free enterprise and social status. Hence, commodity value plays a role in the taboo. Its subsequent effect upon the market, for representational works of art in general and more specifically the new figurative work by Park, is discussed in Chapter 3.

The increasing popularization of Abstract Expressionism was taken by the United States Government as a cue to endorse this new modernist movement through its international programs, especially the Venice Biennales organized by the Museum of Modern Art during the fifties. The notions of artistic and intellectual freedom, together with the apolitical attitude of the Abstract Expressionists, were used for propagandistic purposes--as American ideals--in the Cold War. Figurative painting, whether or not engaged in a political agenda, became associated with communism or isolationism; therefore, in Chapter 4 we add to the definition of the taboo, the figure as communicator of controversial ideas and the subject of censorship.

David Park's individualistic nature and his need to paint

with enough "absorption" so as to allow the human content to guide the formal aspects of the painting, rather than the reverse, set him upon a ten year path of exploring the human form. Park's work previous to the abstract expressionist phase also centered around the figure in his experimentation in the thirties with the styles of Picasso, Leger, and eventually Rivera. Richard Armstrong chronicles Park's early career (1930-1945) with sensitivity to his incessant search for a personal approach to painting.⁵ Throughout Park's life and art, he was "consciously developing, always trying to say it better on canvas" as his daughter, Natalie Schutz recalls in an interview. In Park's mind, he was "just getting it in the later years." ⁶

Park's later figurative work is the reward of his enduring belief in the human form as a vehicle for those values he referred to as his "gods." The figure fulfilled Park's intention to make art an "extension of human life."⁷ In Chapter 5 we re-examine Park's work on the basis of his intentions measured against his execution of those ideas, and his intuitive understanding of the figure's potential to "approximate [his] aims." By surveying the figure's role in art historically, one begins to see that Park's humanism and preference for the human image can be traced to the Greek belief in the "wholeness" of man. Park gave over to his audience an art that was above all accessible

in an era when the "esoteric and difficult" reigned in modern art.

In the concluding words of The Figurative Fifties, Judith Stein comments that, while critics sought to categorize and rank the tendencies towards abstraction or representation, the artists themselves did not consider these modes to be exclusive of one another. Stein calls out to historians to "revise our comprehension of the period by looking more closely at what the artists themselves said and did."⁸ The taboo of the figure was part of the fifties' conformity which pervaded all walks of life from politics to the artworld. The figure possessed the potential to remind man of his humanity, to challenge and confront the social and political ills of postwar America. Park's figurative art of this period evokes a dialogue that embraces more than simply the political side of man; he "stripped the figure" of the divisions haunting man, which were fictitious in his mind, in order to expose the human qualities that he so cherished.⁹

Chapter 2. ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the decade of the 1950s the art world witnessed David Park's last period of work referred to as "a return to the figure" and the domination of Abstract Expressionism. The dichotomous nature of these styles, figurative as in Standing Couple, 1958 (Fig.1) by Park and abstract, exemplified in Sparks, 1957 (Fig.2) by Hans Hofmann, seems less so today. In fact, Park himself stated "The line between non-objective painting and figurative painting is no different than the line between still life and portrait painting."¹ Though de Kooning shared Park's nondiscriminatory view, on the whole the debate between the abstract-ionists and realists was polarized in the postwar period.² The victory of abstraction has been credited to "a dominance of critical enthusiasm and the art market."³ These two forces, to be discussed in the following chapter, sustained the supremacy of Abstract Expressionism during the 1950s and both directly and indirectly limited the exposure of realist works, such as those painted by David Park. In this chapter, I will define the art historical context in which David Park committed to painting the figure.

The Objectives of Abstract Expressionism

The mode in which the Abstract Expressionists came to work

was illuminated by Harold Rosenberg in his famous article of 1952, "The American Action Painters." As was consistent with the artists' intentions, Rosenberg defined the action painters or "Abstract-Expressionists" as individuals with common ideas that manifest in divergent ways, not as a group identified with a School.⁴ What they did share David and Cecile Shapiro highlight as:

The need to explore the subconscious; the value of the exploitation of chance; the capacity of paint to serve as a vehicle for emotional expression; the certainty that the times mandated an entirely new way of painting employing an individually developed style in a vehemently personal art divorced from, and irreconcilable with, the past.⁵

While the first two aspects mentioned are derivative of Surrealism in its embrace of the psychoanalytical method of automatism, the latter are particular to Abstract Expressionism. The "New American Painters" placed process above product, abstraction above representation, as Rosenberg so aptly states

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act--rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event."⁶

While the methods of the Abstract Expressionists differed according to their individual preference for more or less visible gesture--the trace of the event--and their personal definition of subject matter, collectively their

work remained difficult and esoteric.⁷

The aforementioned characteristics of this new approach to painting--dependence on the medium and independence from history--are at the center of the categorical position espoused by the critic Clement Greenberg. As early as 1939, in "Avant Garde and Kitsch" followed by "Towards a Newer Laocoon" in 1940, Greenberg insisted on the supremacy of abstract art.⁸ Within these articles and other writings of Greenberg, Rosenberg, Hess, and the artists themselves, we find the judgements against figurative art validating the experiments of the Abstract Expressionists. The extent of the critics' role in making or breaking careers of artists depending on their avant-garde status is covered in Chapter 3; presently it is paramount that we understand the formalist notions, defined in a few key references, that preclude any reference to the human figure.

The avant-garde artist, in this case synonymous with the Abstract Expressionist, "sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute."⁹ In this process, as Greenberg states, value is revealed in "'abstract' or 'nonobjective' art." "Subject matter or content becomes something to avoid like the plague."¹⁰ Clearly within these brief passages we can see the bias of Greenberg's argument. Setting

aside for the moment the controversy that surrounded content, what was the basis of his formalist theories?

Greenberg's ideas concerning the abstract are, in part, a mingling of Kantian "self-criticism" applied to the arts and the theories of Hans Hofmann.¹¹ In "Modernist Painting", Greenberg acknowledges his reliance on the logic of Kant:

I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant. ...The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline itself--not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.¹²

The marriage of these influences with Greenberg's theories bore the notion of a purity in art that is achieved through a sort of distillation, resulting in an economic but potent version of itself. The "narrowing" path is the self-critical means to this "pure" standard of quality.¹³ In painting the elimination of references to or properties of other artforms, plastic or literary, reduces it to those properties unique to painting in which "flatness" heads the list.

Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.¹⁴

Hence, for the avant-garde painter, the purging of all illusory references contained a promise of purity. What this meant to a painter, who embraced these objectives, was

a new value system allowing for the exploitation of his materials but one which suppressed the use of recognizable imagery.

Greenberg's brand of formalism coincides with Hofmann's ideas in that the chief inspiration for the artist emanates from the medium itself.¹⁵ Hofmann uses the term "expression-medium" and defines this as "the material means by which ideas and emotions are given visible form." This hybrid term is not to be confused with "artistic expression" which he refers to as a "product of a conscious feeling for reality."¹⁶ According to Hofmann, and therefore Greenberg, the artistic expression was transmuted in a "creative interpretation" of the expression-medium. The paint itself--the saturation level, its viscosity and texture--was the means of expression, the painter's language. The artist fluent in the "expression-medium" was able to translate his experiences gathered from the three-dimensional world into a "creation" that affirms the flatness of the two-dimensional picture plane.¹⁷ Here, Greenberg's notion of the sanctity of the picture plane is clearly identifiable.

Yet for Hofmann, an artist and teacher, the emphasis on the picture plane followed his understanding of "pictorial laws" which lend themselves to broader interpretation than the ideas of Greenberg. These laws were governed by the following fundamental perceptions:

...the essence of the picture is the picture plane. The essence of the picture plane is its two-dimensionality. The first law is then derived: the picture plane must be preserved in its two-dimensionality throughout the whole process of creation until it reaches its final transformation in the completed picture. And this leads to the second law: the picture must achieve a three-dimensional effect, distinct from illusion, by means of the creative process.¹⁸

It seems that for Hofmann, the creative process was foremost; the principle of flatness played a key role in the artist's work but was only one factor among many. Creation, as defined by Hofmann, involved the interpretation of the visual experience (nature) through the expression-medium, (plastically) enlivened by the artist's capacity for emotion, reducing and simplifying into the two-dimensional work.¹⁹ Whereas Hofmann reveres the process of creation over the product, the two-dimensional object, Greenberg seems to reverse the priority, placing "flatness" above all and the means--abstraction--falls neatly in line as the obedient servant.

The discussion of the absolutes: the picture plane and non-objectivity was fed by Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko's publication of their "aesthetic beliefs" in the New York Times, June 1943.²⁰ The last two points, No.4 and No.5, contain support for the theoretical climate of the period giving birth to Abstract Expressionism, and are noteworthy as a gauge of the temperament of the artists, themselves.

4. We favor the simple expression of the complex thought. We are for the large shape because it has the impact of the unequivocal. We wish to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth.
5. It is a widely accepted notion among painters that it does not matter what one paints as long as it is well painted. This is the essence of academism. There is no such thing as a good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is crucial and only that subject-matter is valid which is tragic and timeless. That is why we profess spiritual kinship with primitive and archaic art.²¹

The first passage is yet another version of the Greenberg/Hofmann ideology, but the latter addresses the issue of subject matter which became the crux of the movement and the point of contention for David Park.

The New York Scene

The practitioners of Abstract Expressionism were gathered in the centers of New York and San Francisco; the stronger contingency based in the East. According to Joan Bossart, "the struggle to maintain its [New York's] position of power and dominance" simultaneously forged the identity of New York as torchbearer of modernist American art whose light periodically shown upon the Bay Area.²² In part, this division of artistic activity accounts for the partisanship of art criticism against figuration, since modernism became synonymous with abstraction.

The movement itself was not monolithic by any means. To categorize the tendencies of the Abstract Expressionists is to normalize the differences in their work and veer dangerously towards a loss of individualism--the antithesis of their vanguard position. With caution I proceed with the two broadly definable categories of gesture painters and "one-idea" painters.²³ The latter group of artists, referred to by Sandler as the "myth makers" included Baziotes, Newman, Still, Stamos, Rothko and Gottlieb among others. As Sandler's designation implies these artists were interested in universal themes, from primitive or archaic cultures (except Newman), and the pure idea. Newman carried the notion of the pure idea furthest.

The basis of the aesthetic act is the pure idea... that makes contact with mystery--of life, of men, of nature, of the hard, black chaos that is death, or the grayer softer chaos that is tragedy. For it is the only pure ideas that has meaning.²⁴

From the Northwest Coast culture of the Kwakiutl Indians came his inspiration and his thesis on the "ideograph", the visible form of the "abstract thought-complex" expressed in the abstract shape.²⁵ The myth makers' fascination with non-Western cultures was impelled by the desire to rid themselves of the burden of European history, to transcend the particulars of time and place that for these artists was present in recognizable imagery.

While the "one-idea" painters emphasized the "abstract" in

Abstract Expressionism, artists that worked in the more gestural mode favored the "expression" of the artist regarding it as the personal mark. Motherwell, Pollock, de Kooning, and Hofmann, to name a few, were interested in the processes of painting, in the willed action or decision-making of the artist. Here the Rosenbergian notion of the painting as an event is important to reiterate for it further explains the finished work (often with an unfinished look) as a record of the artist's experiences.²⁶ Meyer Schapiro clarifies the nature of the gesture as "signs of the artist's active presence" and in that brushstroke or drip is conveyed the emotions of the artist.²⁷ Motherwell, whose intellectual proclivity towards art led him to write extensively on the subject, explains his personal reasons for the abstract idiom.

Its feeling content happens to be just how I feel to myself...expressed as directly and cleanly and relevantly as I can communicate the concrete felt pattern of my senses. How I feel is not how I look; naturally then I have not represented my visage. This is justification for the non-representational means employed in this work. Non-representation for its own sake is no more, though no less interesting than representation for itself. There simply happens to be certain problems of expression which representational means cannot solve.²⁸

The "need for felt experience" in modern men, in Motherwell's words, beckons the Abstract.²⁹ This exclusive position was neither held by Pollock nor by de Kooning, both of whom went in and out of the abstract vein and by the 1950s

reintroduced recognizable imagery into their work. The impetus for this change in de Kooning's work in the Women series (1950-53) was the desire to "get hold of " the image, the woman.³⁰ Subject and expression merge into a form/gesture that, in this phase of de Kooning's work, results in representation. The struggle is more dramatically felt when the object/subject of the struggle is recognizable. For Park, too, the communication of "felt experience" was more successfully achieved through representational imagery. With the census taken, the majority of these artists worked within the limitations of abstraction for reasons already given and numerous others that will unfold. Abstract Expressionism exhibited a bias towards what Park referred to as "big abstract ideals", from the universality of the "one-idea" painters to the venerability of the artist's gesture.³¹ It is curious to note, that while the movement strongly opposed conformity and the designation of a style, the parameters were firmly in place when the issue of representation was raised.

The Bay Area Developments and David Park

The New York artists had come into these theoretical and aesthetic programs through direct contact with the European masters of Modernism, among which Hans Hofmann's influence

can not be underestimated, but synthesizing and personalizing these ideas into the "New American Painting." On the other hand, San Francisco was the recipient of the movement already in place, which Albright describes as "an explosion" caused by the messianic Clyfford Still. It was 1946 and the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) with its newly appointed director, Douglas MacAgy, was ripe for an infusion of modernist ideas. The fact that Abstract Expressionism was an "imported" movement may have been a factor in its short tenure but, as this thesis suggests, the taboo on representational imagery--especially the figure--could not sustain itself for long.³²

The Bay Area had not been completely isolated from the works of the New York avant-garde. In 1945 and 1946, the works of Pollock and Rothko, respectively, were exhibited in San Francisco. But the mythic tales that surround the apotheosis of Clyfford Still lend credence to Albright's statement:

Still has frequently been credited with single-handedly introducing Abstract Expressionism to the Bay Area when he taught at the California School of Fine Arts between 1946 and 1950...³³

Still's presence at the School was considered, in general, one of seriousness and intentionality as expressed in his thoughts on the work of the artist:

Therefore, let no man under-value the implications of this work or its power for life; --or for death, if it is misused.³⁴

His reputed conviction was that Western values of art must be subverted by the artist "walking straight and alone" through a mythic encounter with his imagination, resulting in "the Act, intrinsic and absolute [abstract]."35 The "Act" of Clyfford Still was not unlike the "actions" of the New York avant-garde with whom he retained a connection during his years at CSFA. Still's work engendered a sense of awe from admirers fed by the sheer scale of his work and the ambiguity of its abstract nature, which paralleled the effect of his personality.

The degree to which Still influenced the dramatic change in Park's work in 1949 remains in question.³⁶ Mills explores the reasons for the Park's radical change from the non-objective mode we see in Non-Objective, 1949.(Fig.3) Mills prefaces this discussion with the differences in personality and ideology that existed in Still and Park. In the case of Still, the way in which these two aspects combined, the term "'cult' figure" is legitimately assigned.³⁷ It was Park's abhorrence of pretension, which he found personified in Still and present in his own work, that compelled him to change directions. A friend and colleague, Richard Diebenkorn, observed the sense of dissatisfaction Park felt with abstract expressionism.

[It was].. kind of forced...he was involved with shape but I never felt there was a terribly important space to his non-objective work... There would be shapes without a good reason. there would be shapes that were representational ...they were awkward and got in the way...The abstract expressionist period was the ...weakest period of all his work.³⁸

Park's personal statements regarding his reasons for the move away from abstraction, which in Park's mind were the only ones of value, indicate the failings of Abstract Expressionism that in time would be shared by others.³⁹ Park's initiative is notable because his individual rejection of lofty idealism and reintroduction of figurative work, that rekindled a humanist dialogue with the viewer, illuminates the voids (discussed in Chapter 5) created by Abstract Expressionism. In Park's words:

During that time I was concerned with big abstract ideals like vitality, energy, profundity, warmth. They became my gods. They still are. I discipline myself rigidly to work in ways I hoped might symbolize those ideals. I still hold those ideals today, but I realize that those paintings practically never, even vaguely, approximated any achievement of my aims. Quite the opposite. What the paintings told me was that I was a hard-working guy who was trying to be important.

In telling this I am purposely stressing my own reactions to my own paintings... To me it was clear that when I aimed to fulfill the grand ideals all that the painting did was record the vulgar gesture of a finger pointing. Was it possible that they did not want to be pointed at or were the ideals putting me inextricably in my own way?⁴⁰

"Ideals" are referred to time and time again in these two passages. For Park, the Greenbergian mission to "raise it [painting] to the expression of an absolute" took him further away from the ideals he struggled to express. While an artist such as Rothko resolved to paint the simple expression in the Abstract; there Park found no sense of communication. For the "one-idea" painters, art was a means to "make the spectator see the world our way--not his way."⁴¹ Park's disillusionment seems to hover around this solipsistic aspect of Abstract Expressionism, confirmed by the reference to "the vulgar gesture of a finger pointing." For Park the self-referential, monological expression was not satisfying, in fact, he added that he "felt like a critic ... not a painter" during his non-objective period.⁴²

The painter in David Park retained some of the traits of the abstract expressionist period, the most notable his "terribly excessive" use of paint.⁴³ Diebenkorn, a draftsman at heart and prone to economy in his use of paint, remarks on Park's ability to infuse paint with feeling.

He was 'in love' with oil paint and its potential to become 'merde' which he manipulated with frank relish, creating from it his powerful and loving statements affirming the possibilities of a densely loaded and vigorously articulated canvas plus humanity as he perceived it.⁴⁴

His passion for paint is reminiscent of the feeling-laden medium described by Hofmann. Park's approach to the canvas

in the new figurative mode was the same as it had been in the non-objective period; he cultivated the image through his keen sense of memory, observation, and the delicate balance of self-will and the medium's potential. In these ways Park had fully come to know the means to creating a "modernist" painting but it was the human figure that "invite[d] him to paint with total absorption" and, for which he was dismissed as a reactionary.⁴⁵

Considering this aspect alone--Park's preference for the human form and its communicative powers--we begin to see that Park had touched upon a taboo. Figuration carried with it a host of controversy in the 1950s, such as its anti-modernist aesthetic (partial discussed), political and ideological associations, to be covered subsequently, and the least discussed area--the sociological side of the subject. Park's abandonment of abstraction in 1950 with the new figurative work, Kids on Bikes (Fig.4) sent a shock through the artworld.⁴⁶ The nature of the subject matter, its lighter, less serious, everyday images in contrast to the somber, intellectual or spiritual content of an Abstract Expressionists' work, seems to be a factor in criticism of Park's work during this early phase.⁴⁷ Yet when the tone in his work changed dramatically to a sense of timelessness evoked by Nude - Green, 1957 (Fig.5),

which in feeling quality comes closer to that of an Abstract Expressionist's painting, the subject matter--the figure--was still considered "retardataire."

Just as Greenberg and company were establishing the first truly American Modern art, David Park was not the only one that had grown tired of it. Critic Thomas Hess noted in the Summer of 1956, in his review of new works by New York artists at the Stable Gallery, the trend toward figuration.

Perhaps the moment of inspired collective activity that such an exhibition marks has passed...Because many of the missing artists work in styles independent from the abstract ones which, quite rightly, dominate the exhibition, one gets the impression that certain esthetic standards were brought to bear by the jury.⁴⁸

There is a reticence, here, to acknowledge that abstraction may no longer have been on top or the choice expression of the "missing artists." In fact, despite the work of David Park and the Bay Area figurative painters, de Kooning and Pollock, the tide remained high during the 1950s for Abstraction. What was the nature of this consensus on the taboo of the figure?

Chapter 3. CRITICISM and the ART MARKET

The eclipse of the figure and the rise of Abstract Expressionism to prominence had much to do with the "dominance of critical enthusiasm" for the movement, in conjunction with the art market of the 1950s.¹ The more comprehensive explanation of the "exile" of the figure involves the role of politics in the promotion of Abstract Expressionism which is given full attention in Chapter 4.² Here, it is my intention to uncover the critical and market forces working against representational imagery and how this opposition related to Park's career. As we shall see, the rising success of Abstract Expressionism was directly tied to its commodity value in the 1950s.³ This is not to say that the exposure given to the Abstract Expressionists by the United States Government in its international programs did not affect the market but that another system--capitalism--took hold of American art as never before.⁴

Market Trends

The art market of the 1950s experienced "a boom in art sales unparalleled in living memory" according to A. Deirdre Robson in her study Prestige, Profit, and Pleasure (1995) where she cites that the annual auction gross rose from \$4.24 million in 1954 to \$7.2 million in the 1957-58 season. In the com-

mercial gallery arena, this positive trend is confirmed by the 500% increase in the number of pictures sold from 1947 to 1957.⁵ Robson's discussion of the "boom" provides us with a host of economic factors (e.g., postwar federal and corporate investments) which describes an overall prosperity during the 1950s. Specifically relevant to the art market was the rise in the population among the upper and upper-middle classes.⁶ Hence, more disposable income and more people to dispose of it. What more could the "tastemakers" of art--museums, galleries and dealers--wish for? Well, perhaps a strong sales pitch?

With the increase in demand for art and the most attractive investment, the 19th century European masters, in short supply, the market seized the opportunity to initially promote the early 20th century French artists (e.g., Matisse, Bonnard, Rouault) and later with vigor, the work of the "modern masters"--the Cubists. The art-historical status--the contribution the artist made to the "canon of modernism so powerfully promulgated by MoMA"--became an indicator in the value attached to a work.⁷ As Robson states:

Apart from the "modern masters", the artists whose market standing improved most in the 1950s were those whose work was perceived as having some relevance to contemporary art.⁸

Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art for nearly four decades until 1967, made it known what was considered historically significant through the collecting

practices and exhibitions of the museum. The "Cubism and Abstract Art" exhibition (1936) for which Barr wrote the catalogue, replete with a "genealogy of modern art styles", typifies the intentions of MoMA to feature abstract art in its concept of modern art history. In the business of gathering investors, Barr instructed his staff to stress the financial wisdom of buying modern art which had already proved to be a lucrative investment.⁹ Ten years previously in "Harper's Bazaar" the works of modernists Mondrian and Léger were used as "backdrops" for the Spring "haute couture," but in effect their work was used to sell an image of status. Guilbaut refers to this advertising collusion as follows:

The art of the avant-garde, modern art-- represented by Mondrian and Léger but in other issues by Picasso, Matta, and Pollock--became a shibboleth of class differentiation, a minimal but nonetheless essential sign of distinction... At a time when the middle class was striving to incorporate into its own vocabulary the type of painting formerly appropriated by the wealthy, the wealthy were beginning to distinguish themselves by buying abstract expressionist art, hesitantly at first (1943-45) but later with ever increasing confidence (after 1946).¹⁰

By the early fifties the art of the Abstract Expressionists symbolized the cultural and economic elite, and the art of contemporary realists was reduced to lower class status.

The case of Jackson Pollock is prototypical of the way in which an artist's work became a guarantor of social status. Pollock was thrust into that market considered historically

significant in the late forties. Between the years 1952 and 1955 his work was shown in a total of five group exhibitions, three in New York and two in Europe, each presenting Pollock as the heir of Kandinsky's modernism. This exposure shot his work into the realm of prices usually reserved for paintings by the older generation of abstract artists in the mid-fifties. But the real turning point in the market was the death of Pollock and the change in his status from living to nonliving, with a corresponding sharp rise in price for his work. Before Pollock's death (1956) the price of Autumn Rhythm was \$8,000 but in 1957 MoMA acquired it for \$30,000, thus setting a record for the highest price paid for any work by a modern American painter. The precedent set by Pollock's career stimulated the market for works by other Abstract Expressionists, due to the "greater critical and commercial coverage situating them within the developments of twentieth-century modernism."¹¹

Vanguardism

Part of the appeal of the Abstract Expressionists' work was, as Guilbaut and many other scholars have noted, its avant-garde nature. Whether an artist favored expression over abstraction or vice versa, the product must be the trademark of his individual freedom, "inseparable from the biography of the artist" according to Rosenberg, and it must be NEW.

The avant-garde, whose place had always been on the fringes of society, challenging established norms, was the natural breeding ground of the new.¹² Both Rosenberg and Greenberg discuss the "Value of the New" in modernism but from different perspectives; the former critic elaborates on the multivalence of novelty, e.g., the liberated artist in a new relationship with his work, the new function of art as a commodity, whereas in Greenberg's view, the value resides in the quest for newness.¹³

Newness in art was a modernist theme; it rejected the past and all its manifestations, from traditional methods of painting to the narrative quality in representational subject matter. It was Greenberg's article "Avant-garde and Kitsch"(1939) which validated the presence of the avant-garde as saviors of culture. (We will later see the relevance of this notion in the political arena.) Leaving aside Greenberg's political agenda, his definition of the art created by the avant-garde, and that which he calls kitsch--a product of the "rear-guard"--is vital to the hieratic poise of the "new" in the arts.¹⁴

Hence it developed that the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to "experiment," but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture "moving" in the midst of ideological confusion and violence.....

"Art for art's sake" and "pure poetry" appear, and subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like a plague. It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at "abstract" or "nonobjective" art-- and poetry, too. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape--not its picture--is aesthetically valid; something "given", increate, independent of meaning, similars or originals.

Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.¹⁵

In other words, avant-garde art could not be imitative; imagery that re-presented or alluded to forms or figures in nature, opined Greenberg, was the product of the masses who were "more or less indifferent to culture." Kitsch assumed many false faces, from "academicized simulacra of genuine culture" to the official art of totalitarian regimes, all of which were practiced by those who were incapable of discerning a "high order of artistic creation".¹⁶ The avant-garde artist lent his critical eye to society as a counterpoise to the masses, blind to the necessity of progress in culture.¹⁷

While this theoretical position was rarely wholly espoused by the avant-garde community, the "ideal" was very much present in and achieved the status of a canon in art criticism.¹⁸ Following this premise that most critics indicated a regard for, even if they did not follow,

Greenberg's identification of Abstract Expressionism with vanguardism, let us examine the critical writings on Park's paintings and the bias in favor of Abstract Expressionism.

Criticism

In preface to the discussion of the reviews of Park's figurative work and other painters within the same genre, I must recall the issue of "New York mindedness"--the prejudice in the worlds of journalism and criticism that New York was the only valid area of art activity--that pervaded the reviews of the Bay Area artists.¹⁹ Joan Bossart provides scholarly insight into this bias, which at the time was part and parcel with New York's vying for the title of culture capital.²⁰ And yet, while this observation seems fact now, Shapiro and others cite another measure in the inequity of critical acclaim for Abstract Expressionism. According to research by David and Cecile Shapiro for Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, less than ten percent of the material written on the subject questioned the movement.²¹ "The dearth of well-written published material critical of or hostile to Abstract Expressionism" resulted in a sort of critical consensus by default in the 1950s.²² In 1959 this phenomenon was described by John Canaday in The New York Times, no less:

Abstract Expressionism was at the zenith of its popularity, to such an extent that an unknown artist trying to exhibit in New York couldn't find a gallery unless he was painting in a mode derived from one or another member of the New York school...

...a critic not entrenched in the New York scene could find himself in a painful situation when he suggested that Abstract Expressionism was abusing its own success and that the monopolistic orgy had gone on long enough....But in 1959, for a critic to question the validity of Abstract Expressionism as the ultimate art form was to inspire obscene mail, threatening phone calls, and outraged letters to the editor signed by eminent artists, curators, collectors, and critics demanding his discharge as a Neanderthal throw-back.²³

These words were not only justified but tell of the way in which journalism had been seized for a time by a lack of critical thought.²⁴ What about those artists whose work did not fall into the category of the New American Painting? Shapiro suggests that without recognition (gallery and critical support) these artists had to face the choice of relying on others or another source for income--as did Park during the "Lydia Fellowship" and university years of the 1950s--or of changing their style.²⁵

The nature of critical enthusiasm for Abstract Expressionism has been aptly described in Realism and Realities: The Other Side of American Painting, 1940-1960 (1981) as "a missionary spirit that infused critics who saw a desperate need to rid America of its philistinism" and in so doing Abstract

Expressionism became "like a swollen river; flooding, wasting away, and destroying."²⁶ In New York, as well as the Bay Area, figurative artists suffered these "floodwaters." The solo publication of Reality, A Journal of Artists' Opinions (Winter, 1953) was an attempt by the New York artists to voice that "art cannot become the property of an esoteric cult."²⁷ While the promotion of Abstract Expressionism involved a wasting, through lack of or negative criticism, of figuration as a valid, contemporary mode of expression, in the Bay Area this wasting was further augmented by New York bias.²⁸

The postwar period seemed to demand of those artists working in realism a strong statement to counteract the theories of the Abstract Expressionists and the critical recognition given to them. Many of the beliefs contained in Reality reverberate to issues of a like concern in David Park's published statements. Among the Bay Area figurative group-- whose anti-theoretical position was typical--Park was the most articulate about his ideas on art.²⁹ An approach which juxtaposes Park's personal statements with a selection of critical reviews of his figurative work might reveal a new dimension of the elitist position held by Abstract Expressionism: the critical disdain for recognizable imagery and the gulf between the language of Park and that of the New York avant-garde.

The most dramatic example of these ideological differences lies in Park's rejection of the value of the NEW. He was in constant struggle with "the personal" in his art but abhorred vanguard obsession with novelty. Park reflects in 1954 on passing through his phase of abstract expressionism and its effects:

I think that I, three years ago, was too much concerned with the direction that art would or might take, too much with my thoughts on the future of painting and not enough on the present. I believe that we are living at a time that over-emphasizes the need of newness, of furthering concepts. Sure I hate the lethargy of Mr. Average Public, but I also shudder at remembering that quite often students of mine have asked me with real bewilderment, "What is there new that I can do?"³¹

Park found the historical consciousness of the avant-garde and its bedfellow, style, to be the demons of his age.³¹

Park's first post-abstraction work to be widely recognized--Kids on Bikes, 1950 (Fig.4)--was considered reactionary by his colleagues. The responses to Kids on Bikes were on the whole dismissive and derogatory. Diebenkorn felt it contained "some of the worst stylizations David could use" and Bischoff expressed a prevalent opinion on the subject of Park's new figurative work when he stated:

The heat that had been gotten up about abstract expressionism made it inevitable that anyone who switched was regarded as a traitor--a heretic. There was more of a feeling that he had "chickened out" than anything else. ³²

While the work was reproduced in Art Digest, no mention was given about this "realistic" work among commentary on other prize winners.³³ First of all, the lack of recognition is typical of the art world's bias but it also raises the question of the disparity between the critic's view and that of the more popular view demonstrated by the recognition awarded Park by the San Francisco Art Association.³⁴ Was it the representational subject matter itself, or the trivial nature of the content--the mundane play activity of young boys--that stymied the critic? Both the illusionistic, even exaggerated, nature of the images and their light-hearted associations were clearly not avant-garde material. Richard Armstrong comments on this very point in his 1988 analysis of Kids on Bikes as "a sharp reaction against the increasingly theoretical, even simplistically metaphysical dialogue that thrived in Abstract Expressionist circles."³⁵

The critics of the 1950s had difficulty writing about figuration because the language of Greenbergian modernism was inadequate for the task of discussing the "realist" expression. This aspect becomes apparent when one compares the nature of criticism in the fifties with more recent analyses that have had the benefit of historical perspective.³⁶ In the postwar rhetoric of art criticism, the discussion of abstraction versus realism was clad in quasi-military terminology--it was an ideological "battlefield." Assuming

such a position, as did David Park in his rejection of the tenets of Abstract Expressionism and natural disdain of manifestos, left him "on the firing line," as Herschel Chipp alluded.³⁷ Again, let us consider the comments regarding Park's work and his own statements, this time from the group show of 1957 when we find the first measurable critical response to figuration.³⁸

In Hilton Kramer's review of the "Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Exhibition"(1957) we can see how the cold war language supports the established "camps" and accuses figurative artists of cowardice.³⁹

...as the Mill's catalog implicitly claims, it represents a new pictorial strength or, as its adversaries have argued, it is merely a new failure of nerve in the face of the challenge which the so-called "heroic" period of American abstract painting laid before a younger generation. (Emphasis added.)⁴⁰

To set the record straight Park was not of the "younger generation"; his contemporaries were Pollock and de Kooning.⁴¹ We know from Park's colleagues and friends that he was anything but afraid of challenge and in fact, chose representation over abstraction because for him

...even the very fine non-objective canvases seem [to me] to be so visually beautiful that I find them insufficiently troublesome, not personal enough.(1952)⁴²

De Kooning expressed related thoughts on this subject in "What Abstract Art Means to Me."(1951)

Art never seems to make me peaceful or pure. I always seem to be wrapped in the melodrama of vulgarity. I do not think of inside or outside--or of art in general--as a situation of comfort....Some painters, including myself, do not care what chair they are sitting on. It does not even have to be a comfortable one....They do not want to "sit in style."⁴³

In an interview with David Sylvester, de Kooning acknowledged that he had been criticized by "certain artists and critics" for his figurative approach in the Women series; consequently did this mode of expression put him "out on a bit of a limb?"⁴⁴ De Kooning's reply to these criticisms is worth reproducing here for its assertion of the artist's position, which was close in feeling to Park's, and the tension between their ideas and the vindictive atmosphere of the art world.

Yes, they attacked me for that, certain artists and critics, but I felt this was their problem, not mine. I don't really feel like a non-objective painter at all. Some painters feel they have to go back to the figure, and that word "figure," that becomes such a ridiculous omen. In a way if you pick up some paint with your brush and make somebody's nose with it, this is rather ridiculous, when you think of it, theoretically or philosophically. It is really absurd to make an image, like a human image, with paint, today, since we have this problem of doing it or not doing it. But then all of a sudden it becomes even more absurd not to do it. So I fear that I'll have to follow my desires.⁴⁵

And so, the problematic nature of figuration was addressed as such by the critic and more often than not "realism" was scrutinized on abstract territory. Bossart had noticed

the same when she commented that Kramer tried to keep Park, Bishoff and Diebenkorn "in the mainstream of abstract painting" in the following review.⁴⁶

Diebenkorn has the keenest pictorial intelligence. Park is rather more tentative and uncertain in his pictorial intentions...I find [his] figures completely devoid of pictorial expression. At best they resemble a kind of high-level, "quality" illustration, at worst mere lumps of paint. Expressively, Park's paintings are still abstract and rather inferiorly so.⁴⁷

Kramer can only focus upon the formalist issues of the picture plane and therefore defines "expression" with the limited vocabulary of an advocate of abstraction, unable to discuss the content/meaning of Park's work.

An uncovering of the role of language in the "problem of figuration" would come a decade after the "Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Exhibition," as the art world would experience more artists creating works of a representational nature. After the Bay Area group show (1957) the Museum of Modern Art organized their own show of figurative artists known as the "New Images of Man"(1959). Although there was a slant of existentialism in the selection of works for the exhibition, keeping the artists in a current ideological, New York discussion, the fact remains that the "picture plane" had been broken and the art world had begun to recognize it. Anita Feldman, in "The Figurative, the Literary, and the Literal" in 1968, credits language or

in her words, the "rhetoric of figuration," with creating meaning independent of the artist's intentions or distorting the meaning or the value of the artworks.⁴⁸ This avenue of discussion, to be explored in Chapter 5, is a bit premature here, but let this acknowledgement of the disparity of intention and interpretation that shone in the sixties be a reminder of its continual presence in the preceding decade.

David Park's career unfortunately ends with the dawn of this new decade. Just as Park had gained national and international exposure--with the exhibition, "Pacific Coast Art:United States Representation at the III Biennial of Sao Paulo"(1956), which toured Cincinnati, Colorado Springs, San Francisco and Minneapolis--and had his work represented by the Staempfli Gallery, New York in 1959, he would be diagnosed with spinal cancer. In 1957, when Paul Mills interviewed Park, he stated:

As you grow older, it dawns on you that you are yourself--that your job is not to force yourself into a style, but to do what you want. I saw that if I would accept subjects, I could paint with more absorption, with a certain enthusiasm for the subject which would allow some of the esthetic qualities such as color and composition to evolve more naturally. With subjects, the difference is that I feel a natural development of the painting rather than a formal, self-conscious one.⁴⁹

Park's work of the later period, the University years 1955-60, has been referred to as his finest effort in the

challenge of painting the figure when it was so controversial to do so. Daphne, 1959 (Fig.6) and Head, 1959 (Fig.7) exemplify that incessant individualism which drove Park away from "style" and for which he finally received a positive review by "M.S" of Arts, 1960.

[Park] stands out as the strongest and most mature, in that his works are fully realized; though he was unknown in the East until last year, his reputation will now surely soar.⁵⁰

The Measure of Success

The inquiry into the "success" of Park's work is inevitably caught up in the market trends of the fifties. Thus far this area of discussion focused on the changing nature of art sales during this period and the rise in value of the Abstract Expressionists' work. Among the American artists within the realist/expressionist genre, sales improved but were "losing ground critically to more abstract approaches."⁵¹ The case of Byron Browne is exemplary of the rejection by galleries of alternative modes of expression in favor of the abstract and the NEW. Samuel Kootz, prominent gallery owner and promoter of contemporary art, "rediscovered" Browne's art in 1943 which, in Kootz's mind at the time, symbolized the international power of America. But after the war, the tables turned for Browne. According to Guilbaut, the need to differentiate American art from

French themes in the postwar era, together with the authority of Greenberg and Kootz's stance on the "bankruptcy" of the subject, compelled Kootz to drop Browne as well as Carl Holty and Romare Bearden from his sponsorship in 1949.⁵² Hence, it becomes easier to understand the following statistics that in 1954, out of eighty-one galleries in New York that represented contemporary artists, only seven exhibited paintings that might be considered realist.⁵³

Within the market for figurative art described above, the prices for Park's work seem fitting. From his first and last one-man show at the Staempfli while he was still alive, the records indicate Park sold 14 canvases in the range of \$500 to \$2000 in 1959.⁵⁴ One can hardly compare these prices with Pollock's record high of \$8000 for Autumn Rhythm because Pollock's status was preened by the "tastemakers" and his level of exposure was on the opposite end of the scale.⁵⁵ But even when one compares Park's career to de Kooning's, which followed a similar path in its rise from virtually "nonexistent" sales in the early fifties to international exposure by 1959, we see that de Kooning was able to price Merritt Parkway (an abstract expressionist work) at \$14,000--a meteoric increase far eclipsing the value of Park's work.⁵⁶

The "going price" for contemporary American art during the

latter half of the fifties was not only subject to the living or non-living status of the artist, the critical attention paid to the artist, often but not always a factor of gallery exposure, but also, as mentioned earlier, the historical significance of the work. The critical reception of Park's work undeniably worked against his work being considered progressive, modern or significant in the developments of twentieth-century American art. And in those standards by which Park's work was measured and priced, there lies a judgement made and upheld against figurative painting. By whose hand was realism declared démodé?

The Museum of Modern Art

This final section addresses this question by turning to the most influential promoter of Abstract Expressionism: the Museum of Modern Art, which exercised its powers through national and international exhibitions, collecting practices, lending and purchasing programs, publishing and the "Round Table" discussions on modern art, covered by Life magazine.⁵⁷ The nature of MoMA's hand was ubiquitous, involving herself in culture building, politics, education and the art market. The first two areas will be covered in the section on the American image in Chapter 4 which will provide the reader with a fuller picture of the eminence of MoMA in the 1950s, while we now take a look at the museum's

influence through some of the education and exhibition programs. Returning for a moment to Robson's sociological profile of the art audience in the 1950s, we find a burgeoning upper and upper-middle class sector with probably little or no knowledge of modern art, European or American. If investing in art was a tradition in the family, then the buyer would most likely purchase 19th century European art. In most cases a history of owning art was nonexistent among the newly rich.⁵⁸ Americans needed to be educated to the value of art, the idea of purchasing art and what art was worth buying--the role of the Museum of Modern Art.

In the early 1940s there a was surge of campaigns to boost the art market, one of which was "Buy American Art Week" and the broadcast which accompanied the panel discussion titled: "Art and Our Warring World." The objective of educating the masses to American art reads as a success story in the statistics for "Buy American Art Week," November 25-December 1, 1940: 32,000 artists exhibited their works in an impressive 1,600 exhibitions nationwide.⁵⁹ The broadcast involves subtler analysis, as provided by Guilbaut in his statement:

The transcripts of the exchanges between [panel members] Clifton Fadiman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Louis Wirth, and Archibald MacLeish is crucial for understanding the goals the American Government, which hoped to use art and culture generally as a unifying and pacific influence.⁶⁰

Art that insured "psychological unity" was perceived as a vital part of national defense in these early days.⁶¹

A similar credo inspired the exhibition practices of the Museum of Modern Art in the 1950s which we will consider further; in the realm of "education," MoMA used one of the most effective means to reach the masses--Life--with probably the largest circulation of any popular magazine at the time.⁶³ The article appeared in October of 1948 as "A Life Round Table on Modern Art: Fifteen Distinguished Critics and Connoisseurs Undertake to Clarify the Strange Art of Today" and covered over twenty pages of the issue. This article could stand alone as an affidavit of MoMA's bias and propagandistic practices.

The list of panelists includes James Johnson Sweeney (director of many of MoMA's exhibitions), Alfred Frankfurter (editor and publisher of Art News), Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg, all of whom had reputations as proponents of modernism.⁶³ The article presented a combination of the Round Table discussion on questions pertaining to modern art in general, commentary on a modern work of art, e.g., Miro's Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird, and a section devoted to guiding the "ordinary layman" in the viewing of modern art. This latter section reads like a set of instructions on how to re-program oneself in order to participate

in the "esthetic experience."⁶⁴ Greenberg was called upon to define the nature of the experience, whereupon he answered that it "differs radically from the experiences of ordinary life." A new approach to viewing art is thus required; cease "looking for ideas" and "seek an experience."⁶⁵

The panel did come to some conclusions on the debate over representational versus nonrepresentational art, whether the abstract or symbolic expression was the only one of contemporary value. A resolution was proffered by professor and art historian, H.W. Janson:

Every valid work of art represents the response of the artist to his total experience as a living man. The cubist Picasso draws to the same extent on outside associations as the Rouault. It just happens to be a rather different kind of reality.⁶⁶

Janson presents this alternate criterion for assessing the value of a work but one which requires more of the "ordinary layman" than his viewing experience. There seemed to be no discussion surrounding the contradiction between Janson and Greenberg's critiquing methods, but as one will notice in the following group statement, Greenberg's voice dominates.

This four point plan was devised to "educate" the viewer to value the art of the avant-garde. Note in the first point how the suggestion disregards the personal or subjective privilege of the viewer and with more acridity in point 3 the affirmation that the work of art remains

an absolute truth and the viewer himself is flawed in his interpretation.

1. The layman should guard against his own natural inclination to condemn a picture just because he is unable to identify its subject matter in his ordinary experience.
2. He should, however, be equally on guard against the assumption that a painting that is recognizable in ordinary experience is no good. He should not fall a victim to the kind a academicism that insists upon obscurity for its own sake.
3. He should look devotedly at the picture, rather than at himself or at any aspect of his environment. The picture must speak. If it conveys nothing to him, then he should remember that the fault may be in him, not in the artist.
4. Even though he does not in general like nonrepresentational painting, the open-minded attitude will very much increase the layman's enjoyment of artistic works, ancient or modern. (Emphasis added.)⁶⁷

Within the panel's discussion of the "difficulty of modern art," specifically its unintelligibility, Dr. Greene defended the right of the avant-garde artist "to express life accurately as he sees it from a highly individualistic point of view."⁶⁸ Accordingly, modern art's incomprehensibility results from the lack of a "community" which understands the new language of modern art.⁶⁹ Life magazine seemed enthusiastic about this thesis for it not only opened its pages to the promotion of avant-garde art on this occasion but also played host on numerous others.⁷⁰

During the cold war period, the consistency of the record of modern works selected indicates that MoMA's exhibition

practices were overtly abstractionist.⁷¹ This can be demonstrated by the early support of Jackson Pollock, through the purchase of She-Wolf in 1944, only one year after his first solo show at the Art of this Century. In the same year, his work was included in the circulating MoMA exhibit "Twelve Contemporary American Painters" and by 1948, Pollock, along with Gorky, Stamos, Rothko and Tobey were represented at the Venice Biennale.⁷² This level of exposure to a movement barely out of genesis was unprecedented in American art, in part due to the urgency of the demand, politically and culturally, for a uniquely American art.⁷³

The Venice Biennale of 1950 was the most conspicuous display to date of the Abstract Expressionists in their role as heirs in the history of modern art.⁷⁴ Just as the complexion of the art market had changed to include the work of these living or recently deceased modern artists alongside senior masters, so too had the structure of the Venice Biennale. Lawrence Alloway comments that this change in purpose and the increasing show of contemporary artists blurred the division of past and present, thus granting art historical significance to works less than two years old, such as the new drip paintings of Pollock, or the black-and-white paintings by de Kooning.⁷⁵ The curator of the

modern works for the American section was none other than the director of MoMA, Alfred Barr. His decision to exhibit fifty-five works by John Marin, considered to be one of the forefathers of Abstract Expressionism, adds to Shapiro's claim that the selection was not only unrepresentative of the cross-section of the American art scene, but that it was also biased towards abstraction.⁷⁶

At the close of the decade of the fifties we see the continuation of MoMA's support for Abstract Expressionism. The exhibition "New American Painting"(1958-59) was devoted specifically to a comprehensive show of the Abstract Expressionists and prepared for a tour of eight European cities.⁷⁷ The publicity generated by this tour cannot be underestimated, for each host institution made available a catalogue produced in their native language, not to mention the journalists' contribution.⁷⁸ As Porter McCray states in the catalogue,

whether enthusiastically, hesitantly, in the form of back-handed compliments, or of real hostility, it was acknowledged that in America a totally 'new'--a unique and indigenous--kind of painting has appeared, one whose influence can be clearly seen in works of artists in Europe as well as in many other parts of the world.⁷⁹

And indeed, acknowledgement was exactly what the Abstract Expressionists received throughout the cold war era. The taste-makers--the critics, galleries, and museums--shared

the lust of the art market to promote an American art that could compete on the European market and stand confident as a cultural icon. The Museum of Modern Art cooperated with the United States government in their duty to disperse American culture abroad, sometimes in an open partnership but in others, such as during the heightened hysteria of the McCarthy era, they operated covertly through the CIA and by other indirect means. What were the historical and political circumstances that motivated these institutions to promote Abstract Expressionism?

Chapter 4. HISTORICAL PROFILE of the CHOSEN ONES

If it is generally agreed that art is one of the aspects of human activity that gives point and value to life, then visual art is the focus of values in visual form.¹

- David Shapiro
Social Realism: Art as a Weapon

If this notion provides some insight into the 1930s, its benefit will be even greater in the examination of the art of the post-World War II period. The socio-political values that gave rise to the art of Social Realism were only a generation past and, in fact, appertain to the highly charged political climate of the McCarthy era.² After World War II the United States found itself in a position of superiority, militarily and economically, among the nations of the world as never before, with a third ingredient, that of cultural ascendancy, quickly in the making. But before the seat of Western civilization (held hostage in Nazi-occupied Paris) could be transferred to New York, a definition of "American" needed to be arrived at along with an "image" of America. The arts were to play a significant role in the creation of the visage of America as "an open and free society" where artistic freedom functioned as a symbol of the benefits of life under American democracy.³

In the thirties, the decade that Social Realism thrived, "the choice to be a Communist was ... easy and rational"

according to Daniel Aaron, author of Writers on the Left.⁴ Artists and intellectuals found their place initially within the Popular front, the First American Artists' Congress (1936), and the American Artists' Congress (1937), all with varying degrees of allegiance to the Communist Party.⁵ It was a time when radical ideas on social reform walked arm in arm with the establishment; in other words this was the only period in all the world's history when you could be at one and the same time an 'ardent revolutionary' and an 'arch-conservative' backed by the governments of the United States 'and' the Soviet Union.⁶ Therefore, given the political marriage of the thirties when "communism claimed to be '20th century Americanism' and figurative painting was the vehicle of expression, it was imperative in the 1940s and 50s that the new image be vehemently opposed to all things considered communistic.⁷

The political and cultural objectives of postwar America were intentionally, if somewhat ironically, conjoined with the art of the Abstract Expressionists.⁸ In every respect, they became the "chosen ones." The theoretical and economic dynamics involved in creating this American art have been explored and now it is important to examine how this image served the United States as "a weapon of the Cold War."⁹ David and Cecile Shapiro, in the comprehensively written

article "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," attribute

the lever that lifted Abstract Expressionism to the peak it achieved as the quasi-official art of the decade, suppressing other kinds of painting to a degree not heretofore conceivable in our society, was the arm of the United States Government. (Emphasis added.)¹⁰

Orchestrated by Cold War politics, this program featured the avant-garde art of the Abstract Expressionists that claimed to be free "from Value--political, aesthetic, moral."¹¹ Yet as scholars have concluded, the anti-thesis occurred when the apolitical art became "art-as-propaganda."¹² What better way to gain prominence among the intellectual community revered by the ugliest of realities--repression under Stalinist communism--than to encourage and promote an art that decrees freedom of expression?¹³ The fact that Abstract Expressionism rejected recognizable imagery, especially the political figurative art of Social Realism, was in accordance with the official policies of the U.S. government to quiet internal dissent, as well as to promote American modernism abroad.¹⁴

Before moving further into the discussion of the ways in which Abstract Expressionism came to be synonymous with Americanism in the postwar period, an explanation of which American ideals were promoted is vital. Two major concerns

facing the United States in the early years of the war, nationalism and internationalism, gave birth to the political values of a nation yearning for an identity. Leadership was the only option that would ensure the survival of America as a democratic society and a global model for the fight against totalitarian regimes or, as Dorothy Thompson wrote in the New York Times in 1941 to Americanize enough of the world so that we shall have a climate and environment favorable to our growth is indeed a call to destiny.¹⁵

One of the most influential voices that would echo this call was the publisher of Time, Life and Fortune, Henry Luce.¹⁶ In a full five-page article in Life, he addressed the American people in a fireside chat manner on the values of living in a free and democratic society. The title of the article, "The American Century" adroitly captures the image which he and, after reading his persuasive writing, the American public were convinced was manifest destiny.

Americanism and "The American Century"

The year was 1941, less than ten months before the Attack on Pearl Harbor in December of that same year, when the most widely read popular magazine--Life--served the cause of rallying the American public to meet the challenges of defending democracy. Luce understood well the division of public opinion on the issue of nationalism, which meant

isolationism, and the more progressive position, internationalism. Of course the attack on Pearl Harbor would level any thoughts of isolationism, but at the time of the publication of "The American Century", Luce attended to those sentiments while presenting a forceful case for Internationalism with America as leader; it was the nation's duty to rise up against the "virus of isolationist sterility." Heretofore, the failure of the nation had been its lack of acceptance "spiritually and practically" of its responsibility to the world that comes with being "the most powerful and vital nation."¹⁷

The "vision" for America, proposed in the concluding section of Luce's article, essentially specifies which ideals were to describe the Americanism of the forties and fifties. He asks the American public to

Consider four areas of life and thought in which we may seek to realize such a vision:

First, the economic...We know perfectly well that there is not the slightest chance of anything faintly resembling a free economic system prevailing in this country if it prevails nowhere else....The vision of America as the principal guarantor of the freedom of the seas, the vision of America as the dynamic leader of world trade, has within it the possibilities of such enormous human progress as to stagger the imagination.

Closely akin to the purely economic area...there is the picture of America which will send out through the world its technical and artistic skills...these skills, this training, this leadership is needed and will be eagerly welcomed, if we have the imagination to see it and the sincerity and good will to create the world of the 20th century.

But now there is a third thing which our vision must immediately be concerned with. We must undertake now to be the Good Samaritan of the entire world. It is the manifest duty of this country to undertake to feed all the people of the world who as a result of this worldwide collapse of civilization are hungry and destitute--all of them, that is, whom we can from time to time reach consistently with a very tough attitude toward all hostile governments. (Emphasis added.)

This section of Luce's proposal was edited in order that the quintessential thrust, which is clearly and fervently capitalist, imperialist, and Christian, be felt.¹⁸ Notice the reiteration of the notions of freedom, leadership, and manifest destiny that have a kinship with the theories of the avant-garde.¹⁹ The fourth and final point is akin to chauvinism in its appeals to "the spiritual" side of the American people; therefore the following is quoted in its entirety.

But all this is not enough. All this will fail and none of it will happen unless our vision of America as a world power includes a passionate devotion to great American ideals. We have some things in this country which are infinitely precious and especially American--a love of freedom, a feeling for the equality of opportunity, a tradition of self-reliance and independence and also of co-operation. In addition to ideals and notions which are especially American, we are the inheritors of all the great principles of Western civilization--above all Justice, the love of Truth and the ideal of Charity. The other day Herbert Hoover said that America was fast becoming the sanctuary of the ideals of civilization. For the moment it may be enough to be the sanctuary of these ideals. But not for long. It now becomes our time to be the powerhouse from which the ideals spread throughout the world and do their mysterious work of lifting the life of mankind from the level of the beasts to what the Psalmist called a little lower than the angels.²⁰

Luce's vision for America was considered important at the time by the public, the media, and even Vice-President Henry Wallace, who proposed in "The Century of the Common Man," 1942, (modeled upon "The American Century") a less aggressive, yet nonetheless imperialist, role for America in the democratization of the world.²¹ The "great American ideals" of the prewar nation matured in the policies of the United States government throughout the war and on into the Cold War.²²

A Modernist Art Fit the Bill

In the art world, the political debate of the Nationalists versus Internationalists was restaged in the controversy of the traditional and modernist positions over which tendency would best represent American ideals.²³ The traditional view was more problematic because of its ties with isolationism, exemplified by the Regionalists, and Communism, identified with the art of Social Realism; both styles relied on representational imagery, especially the figure, to conjure associations of an utopian or revolutionary America. The communicative powers inherent in representational art, in fact, were appropriated by Stalin and Hitler to serve their agendas while Modernist abstraction was considered "degenerate" in Nazi Germany and "decadent" in Communist Soviet Union.²⁴ The alignment of Abstract

Expressionism with Americanism involved the persuasion of the conservative opinion--whose opposition to subversive political commentary attacked all "isms" regardless of style--by the liberal view that embraced the "apolitical" art of the avant-garde.²⁵

During the fifties, according to Jane de Hart Mathews, "politics not only became esthetics but esthetics became politics."²⁶ Most of the Abstract Expressionists had been politically engaged before the onset of World War II; soon after, their ties with the Left were severed and their art disassociated from a conscious political agenda.²⁷ The entire sphere of "realism" seemed so highly suspect and, to borrow a notion from Linda Nochlin, "criminal," that to divest art of all recognizable subject matter seemed to be the only way out of the "esthetic-political continuum."²⁸

Guilbaut maintains that due to the intense political climate of the early fifties, the Abstract Expressionists were incapable of holding on to their apolitical position. And in fact,

their work, their disengagement, were all reworked, re-ideologized into the service of a cause not always in accord with their aspirations. On the other hand, those painters who wanted to continue, despite all pressures against it, an engaged painting, a realist work (like Ben Shahn or Phillip Evergood), were forced through subtle pressures to drop their political stance of opposition in order to fit into a more central and less belligerent position.²⁹

Effectively, the art of the Abstract Expressionism served up the up the right mix of vanguardism, ambiguity (discussed in chapters 3 and 5, respectively) and the most proselytized of values--freedom. The value of freedom, both ideologically and economically, bound together the establishment and the intelligentsia and became the keystone to the international relationship shared by America and the Abstract Expressionists.³⁰

The United Front

While it is difficult to extract and discuss single factors in the phenomenon I refer to as "the chosen ones" without creating a skewed critique of the Abstract Expressionists, it may confirm how well matched their artistic program was with the political aspirations of the United States government. Serge Guilbaut refers to the years 1948-50, the onset of the Cold War, as the pivotal period when a "united front" became a vital issue to the United States government.³¹ Not only had Abstract Expressionism been elevated to a prominent position on the domestic scene, it had also assumed a "symbolic role in international cultural politics."³² It was the ideological position of the avant-garde, its depoliticized nature coddled in abstraction, which attracted the United States government in its cultural imperialism. The leadership role which America was intent on playing in

"postwar painting games" is best examined through the efforts of the CIA, and of special interest is its affiliation with MoMA in promoting American culture abroad.³³

In "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," Eva Cockcroft recounts the numerous instances of the promulgation of Abstract Expressionism by the United States government. The role of MoMA during and after World War II as "a weapon for national defense" was obvious as early as 1941. In a statement by John Hay Whitney, Chairman of MoMA's Board of Trustees, a program had been defined: "educate, inspire, and strengthen the hearts and wills of free men in defense of their own freedom."³⁴ The biases, and one could say tendency toward censorship, of MoMA in her exhibition programs and the Venice Biennale Expositions (which have been discussed in Chapter 3) can now be fully understood in light of the institution's mission. The extent of MoMA's power during the 1940s and 1950s becomes apparent when one considers the key players, for instance Nelson Rockefeller, son of the founder of the museum Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Cockcroft summarizes Nelson Rockefeller's various prominent roles during this period.

In 1939, Nelson Rockefeller became president of MoMA. Although Nelson vacated the MoMA presidency in 1940 to become President Roosevelt's coordinator of the Office of Inter-American Affairs and later assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs, he dominated the museum throughout the 1940s and 1950s, returning to MoMA's presidency in 1946.³⁵

The crossing over of persons from political office to places of power within the MoMA seemed frequent during this period of intense culture building.³⁶ This bilateral force which promoted Abstract Expressionism is regarded as a major contributor in its hegemony.

The case of Thomas W. Braden is indicative of the politics behind the appropriation of Abstract Expressionism. Braden was the executive secretary of MoMA in the late forties before joining the CIA in 1950, after which he supervised the agency's cultural activities from 1951-1954. In a 1967 article entitled "I'm Glad the CIA is 'Immoral'" he acknowledged that "dissenting opinions" or, in other words, revolutionary rhetoric made harmless, were considered effective propaganda abroad.³⁷ The ahistorical, anti-traditional, irresponsible avant-garde art of Abstract Expressionism, thus fulfilled the objectives of MoMA's international programs during the cold war "to let it be known especially in Europe that America was not the cultural backwater that the Russians,...were trying to demonstrate that it was."³⁸ This need to be "culturally up-to-date" was yet another value, like individuality and freedom, that easily transferred from artistic discourse into the politics of image building.³⁹ The cult of vanguardism nurtured the drive for "newness" in the arts, but it was the politics of "artistic free enterprise" led by Alfred Barr which

inscribed "New" aside "American" for global export. This merger of a modern style with Americanism was the focus of much critical attention, as we have seen, but in its political role, "modern" or "new" symbolized "the role that history had bestowed upon the United States."⁴⁰

In the discussion thus far we have taken a look at mid-twentieth-century America, in the process of defining its role as a world leader and building an image of itself beholden to the ideals of "The American Century." Integral to the nation's strength and credibility as a cultural leader, the United States government promoted "freedom of artistic expression" and, for reasons already given, chose Abstract Expressionism as a symbol of this democratic value.

The United States government was even more concerned with its identity and with maintaining a "united front" during the decade following World War II.⁴¹ William Hauptman states in the article "The Suppression of Art in the McCarthy Decade" that

an almost pathological fear of communist infiltration...resulted in one of this country's most shameful endeavors to deny artists their basic freedom of expression.⁴²

Anti-communist sentiments were not confined to the "McCarthy" period, which got its name from Senator Joe McCarthy early in the year 1950.⁴³ The communist element had been visible and even a viable threat during

the 1930s, but with the onset of the Cold war and fueled by the Korean war the threat became a paranoia.

The arts in general were scrutinized and held in suspicion, which again attests to the more-or-less "official" role played by Abstract Expressionism. The work of the realists, and even some abstractionists were targets; modern art was criticized for its un-American roots in European surrealism while realist art was denounced for its Communist leanings. The fear that was directed towards the arts was part of the wave of xenophobia that threw America into a state of conformity.⁴⁴ The repercussions on the artist, in essence his freedom of thought, were felt in both camps but more so by the artist whose work contained recognizable imagery. The fact that realism attracted the most scrutiny begs the question: in what ways did figurative art pose a threat, perceived or real, to the values of America? Let us investigate McCarthyism and its effect on the artistic climate of the 1950s.

Anti-communism and McCarthyism

The historical period which coincides with McCarthyism began in 1950, but as previously indicated, the attitudes that came to be known as McCarthyist were present during the decade of the 1940s. Richard M. Fried, author of

Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective (1990), provides us with a definition of the period; one that reveals its character in its pervasiveness in society as a whole.

McCarthyism was a political phenomenon that extended well beyond the antics of Senator McCarthy--indeed, well beyond the boundaries of conventional politics. What gave the "ism" its bite was the political dynamic that obtained at mid-century, accentuated by the anxieties germinated by the Cold War.⁴⁵

The many explanations given for this "phenomenon" converge in the opinion that there was a "cultural aversion to communism" which, in effect, sanctioned in principle the political measures taken during the Cold War.⁴⁶ According to Shapiro, the hysteria resulting from the communist threat produces another monster--conformity--which, in the realm of the arts, translated to censorship.⁴⁷ The 1940s campaign to define an American set of cultural and political values was now focused on purging all walks of life and art of un-American activities.

In order to understand the artistic climate of the 1950s in which figurative painting was considered a political act, one must take a look at events that took place before McCarthyism came into its fullest form. "Advancing American Art" (1946), the State Department's exhibition of contemporary American paintings scheduled to tour Latin America and Europe, was the first major target of

censorship in the arts.⁴⁸ The show was halted even before it left the states due to accusations that it "featured the work of left-wing painters who are members of Red fascist organizations" and ensuing protests, in particular the denouncements issued by one politician: George Dondero, Republican representative from Michigan.⁴⁹ This exhibition and criticism thereof is perplexing; cited by De Hart Mathews as an example of the anti-modernist program to rid the arts of communist infiltration, it has also been used by Guilbaut as evidence of the increasing vulnerability of the arts in general to government intervention.⁵⁰ Dondero's attacks, while ostensibly directed at modern art, are the product of his anti-radical views shared by other politicians at the time.

Modern Art is Communistic because it is distorted and ugly, because it does not glorify our beautiful country, our cheerful and smiling people, our material progress. Art which does not glorify our beautiful country in plain, simple terms that everyone can understand breeds dissatisfaction. It is therefore opposed to our government, and those who create and promote it our enemies.⁵¹

In fact, the selection of 79 works representing 45 contemporary American artists was not biased towards abstraction, as one might deduce from Dondero's comments; however, the commentary which accompanied the works did emphasize the modernist and formalist aspects of even the most realistic works, e.g., Portrait of an Old Woman by Franklin C. Watkins,

perhaps in order to avoid the politics embroiled in content.⁵² The fact that the government was compelled to cancel the exhibition points to the strength of the anti-communist sentiment and the subjugation of the arts to politics before McCarthy.

Another case of censorship in the late forties--this time realism was the victim of government suspicion. In 1941 the federal government commissioned Anton Refregier to paint a mural depicting the history of California in the Rincon Annex Post Office (San Francisco).⁵³ Throughout the duration of the project there were a total of 91 conferences and official visits by inspectors of the Public Building Administration. Yet upon completion in 1949, the work was criticized by Hubert B. Scudder, Republican representative from California, members of San Francisco's Young Democrats, and others on numerous counts of slanderous and subversive content.⁵⁴ The content was typically social realist, from the waterfront strike of 1934 to the Torchlight Parade depicting the celebration of the 8-hour workday, in fulfillment of the contract to "relate to people in contemporary idiom."⁵⁵ The various attacks on content seem to consistently rebuke the appearance or portrayal of the figures in the works: "Making monks 'cadavaerous' or 'potbellied' was anticlerical; 'elongated angular figures' were 'Frankenstein monsters.'⁵⁶ Refregier was forced

to repaint portions of the mural to appease the American Legion, the Sailor's Union, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The murals caused such a controversy that in 1953, the Chairman of the House Committee on Public Works, George Dondero, called for a subcommittee to investigate the murals and consider them for removal on the grounds that they were "an insult to every loyal American."⁵⁷ Hubert Scudder agreed with Dondero and proposed the removal of the Rincon Murals because they contained Communist propaganda. An unprecedented response to save the murals came from the three major museums of the San Francisco Bay Area, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the American Federation of the Arts, the Artist's Equity, together with an impressive list of citizens and professionals in the areas of art and historical preservation.⁵⁸ Even abroad, the Rincon Murals saga drew attention; a German art journal reacted thus: "In a country which on paper--has the best constitution in the world, today it is becoming difficult to live, to think, and to act according to that constitution."⁵⁹ In the end the murals were not destroyed, but the ability to exercise artistic freedom had been, in a very public demonstration of the will of the United States to censor "controversial" positions.

Anti-communism grew rabid with Senator McCarthy's political agenda established in the early months of 1950 and the

onset of the Korean War (June 25, 1950) which in turn "drastically narrowed the nation's limited tolerance of political dissent."⁶⁰ Fried answers the question "How deeply did anti-communism gouge the social and political terrain of the 1950s" with the substantiated conclusion that the rise in incidences of repressed thought caused a pressure to conform.⁶¹ A salient example of the success of McCarthyites to rein in "free expression" in the visual arts is the exhibition "Sport in Art" (1956). The American Federation of Art organized the show for Sports Illustrated and scheduled it to tour the United States before its debut at the Olympics in Australia. Two months before the show arrived in Dallas, the Dallas County Patriotic Council demanded the removal of four paintings that were considered products of Communist sympathizers before it would be allowed to open. All of the works were of a figurative nature: National Pastime (a drawing of a baseball game) by Ben Shahn; two depictions of ice skaters by Yasuo Kuniyoshi and Leon Kroll; and a painting of a fisherman by William Zorach.⁶² In De Hart Mathews' discussion of this case, she makes a comment that concurs with my thesis that figurative art of the period was suspect no matter what the content of the work may be.

Although Shahn's work, like that of other Social Realists, often served as a means of communicating the artist's political and social values, these particular paintings bore no "message." But however innocuous the work themselves, all four artists had been linked to "front" organizations in the thirties.⁶³

The Dallas Museum denied that there was sufficient evidence to exclude the artists from the show and opened as scheduled. Fearing another fate like that of "Advancing American Art," the USIA canceled the remainder of the tour on the sole grounds of the unconfirmed accusations by the local anti-communists.⁶⁴ A similar controversy arose shortly thereafter with the exhibition "100 American Artists of the Twentieth Century"(1956), also scheduled for an international tour. Again the USIA succumbed to anti-communist pressure and canceled the exhibition.

These examples of compromised artistic expression and censorship are a part of the real consequences of heightened anxieties surrounding the communist threat in the United States during the forties and the fifties. Recalling Guilbaut's comments, the realist artist was coerced by the times to reconsider his political views and, ultimately, the content of his work.⁶⁵ This was the political milieu in which David Park and other figurative artists worked, not only against the backdrop of censorship but also against market forces caught up in the enthusiasm for Abstract Expressionism

The taboo attached to the representation of the human figure takes the name of political controversy in art of a socially conscious nature, and it assumes many anti-modernist guises in theories that granted historical significance to abstraction.

With the various analyses that reveal the nature of the hegemony of Abstract Expressionism completed, my attention will turn to that which was left out of the picture, the human figure.

Chapter 5. THE BROKEN SILENCE

Time and time again in the postwar era, man's humanity was called into question.¹ Dwight MacDonalD's analysis correlates the "inhuman" with the immeasurable atrocities of the Hiroshima explosion,

Again, the effort to "humanize" the Bomb by showing how it fits into our normal, everyday life also cuts the other way: it reveals how inhuman our normal life has become.²

The attempt by President Truman and the media to rationalize the absurd, silence the despair, left artists and intellectuals with a sense of rupture. The bifurcation of form and content in the visual arts as well as the taboo of the figure is symptomatic of this widening distance between man and the world, and of man's fascination with his "animality." Erwin Panofsky defines these two aspects of humanity (humanitas) as the relationship of man to that which is greater than himself--from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment this meant exclusively the divine--and that which is less, the barbarian. The Renaissance synthesis of these tensions--the former signifying human limitations and the latter, human values--gave rise to "humanism" as a concept or attitude that emphasizes the "dignity" of man.³ Humanism, in this sense, seemed to vanish with the bomb, so too, the most powerful reminder of man's humanity--the figure. Throughout the discussion, aspects of David Park's humanist

sentiments have been touched upon and in this chapter, with an expanded analysis of these, I suggest that the significance of Park's work is his commitment to the presence of the "human" in painting. Other artists of the period who fall into this category, such as Leonard Baskin and Ben Shahn, contribute their writings to my discussion of this void of Abstract Expressionism. Ann Gibson's arduous search for intention in the work of the Abstract Expressionists led her to a most provocative approach: to "involve the imaginative reconstruction of the choices not made; that is, the concepts forgone, emotions unexpressed, and the issues untreated."⁴ A greater understanding of the associations and properties of figuration circuitously emerges through the exposure of these aspects of Abstract Expressionism as intentional, as willful rejection of the human form. Let us also examine the ways in which the figure has historically served the artist's intentions, all the while maintaining certain intrinsic meanings. David Park's revival of the figure in painting was far more than an artist's predilection for the plastic human form; the figure, as embodiment of Park's humanism, evokes a human dialogue with the viewer, for a time silenced by the dominance of the abstract mode.

Choices Not Made

According to Gibson, the determination by the Abstract Expressionists to reject recognizable imagery was matched by the "opacity [of the works] to existing methods of interpretation."⁵ This decision to create art of an ambiguous and "incommunicable" nature simultaneously reflects a will to not communicate. The Abstract Expressionists' "evasion of language," placing their work beyond interpretation and refusing to explain it, follows the avant-garde position of "anti-intentionalism."⁶ Yet the fact remains that an act of creation involves intention; in the words of Leonard Baskin, "an act of creating is an act of commitment, a gesture that blazons forth an attitude, a position, a stand."⁷ According to E.D.Hirsch, Jr. "intention" is a private wish to do something or communicate meaning as distinguishable from "meaning" which is the "concrete accomplishment of that intention" and, therefore, given over to the public domain. Hirsch reminds us that the artist's "desire to communicate a particular meaning is not necessarily the same as his success in doing so."⁸ Whether an artist intends to communicate or, as in the case of many of the Abstract Expressionists, to not communicate, success resides in the proximity of intention to meaning.

David Park realized this inability of the abstract method of painting to fulfill his intentions, recalling his words:

"those [abstract] paintings practically never, even vaguely approximated any achievement of my aims."⁹ The figure became the form that best suited Park's intentions. Form and content, which had been separated under modernism, were reunited in a dynamic equilibrium that Park felt was lacking in his non-objective paintings.

Content or subject matter was one of the "concepts forgone" by Abstract Expressionism. The first of two related points to be discussed is the fallacy that content does not exist in abstract painting and the second surrounds the issue of interpretation. In Greenbergian terms, subject matter held too much potential--the potential for misuse by propagandists, for interpretation, for distraction from the purity of the picture plane. Content, inseparable as it is from painting and despite the nonexistence of recognizable imagery, remained but attached itself to other aspects of painting. For many of the Abstract Expressionists, content merged with medium, for others it clung to style.¹⁰ In Ben Shahn's brilliant work, The Shape of Content (1957), he reveals his experience as an artist with intimate knowledge of the creative process.

Form is formulation--the turning of content into a material entity, rendering a content accessible to others, giving it to the race.
... Form is the very shape of content.¹¹

Shahn continues with comments that border on the disparaging

on the contemporary divorce of form from content. Critics avoid mentioning content and those that feel the need for content where it is inaccessible, "create a content by describing the work in terms of some content-reference."¹² Here, Shahn touches upon the role of language in divining meaning in the work of the Abstract Expressionists, which in Gibson's opinion filled the "vacuum"--the no content.¹³

A comparison of the "content" of an Abstract Expressionist work, such as Four Darks in Red, 1958 (Fig.8) by Mark Rothko, with that of David Park's Four Men (Fig.9) from the same year will provide us with a visual basis for the discussion of interpretation. Recalling the previous discussion on the dominance of formalist criticism in the arts during the post-period, figurative works such as Four Men were either not written about or discussed almost exclusively in terms of process and formal components; hence, the following criticism of Four Men comes from a later date. In the fifties if intention had been tossed to the wind, the validity of interpretation (of which content participates) was launched into orbit. Both indicators of meaning--the artist's wish to communicate and the critic's "best" reading of the work--were no longer valued.¹⁴ The significance of this turning away from an accessible meaning and its relevance to the question of humanism in the arts will be addressed after our consideration of the paintings by Park and Rothko.

Typical of Park's later figurative works, Four Men is a rendering of figures evoking a psychological distance from one another, participating more in their painted "idyllic" environment than any narrative. Park's objectives in this period of his work include the need for "anonymity" and a love of "urgency" he found in primitive art.¹⁵ It seems that the critic Henry Geldzahler perceived these intentions with the statement, "in all of Park's pictures there is an immediacy and a familiarity that is quite disturbing." (1985)¹⁶ "A figure by Park makes a commanding impression not unreminiscent of that most ideal of all young men, the Greek 'kouros'," comments Eleanor C. Munro in an exceptional article, "Figures to the Fore"(1960).¹⁷ Bill Berkson wrote of Park's figures, "They're preoccupied looks, signaling an innate seriousness, feel tentative, as if they've been caught in a dispute between deliquescence and solidity, between encroaching nature and their own hapless guarded forms."(1987)¹⁸ These examples are but a sampling of this type of interpretation of Four Men (and others of Park's done in a similar manner) which reveals that Park's forms often projected his intentions.

Though Rothko shared Park's hesitancy to compose words to explain one's art, he was defiant about his right to conceal intention. In 1954 Rothko he stated that "paralysis of the mind and imagination" sets in when written material

accompanies art. Rothko, unlike Park, severely curtailed his commentary as death approached.¹⁹ Consequently, the following excerpts from his writings precede Four Darks in Red by a decade yet reveal much about his intentions regardless.

The picture must be for him [the artist], as for anyone experiencing it later, a revelation, an unexpected and unprecedented resolution of an eternally familiar need.²⁰

In reference to what "need" that might be, Rothko cited that the best art of the past came close to expressing it in the form of a "single human figure."

But the solitary figure could not raise its limbs in a single gesture that might indicate its concern with the fact of mortality and an insatiable appetite for ubiquitous experience in the face of this fact. Nor could the solitude be overcome.²¹

Four Darks in Red is one of the most exemplar of paintings to apply Maurice Denis's phrase: "It is well to remember that a picture--before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote--is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."²² Rectangular bands of monochromatic variations stress the horizontal dimension of the canvas. According to Irving Sandler, Rothko's subject in this painting is the "holistic" composition of colors, which seems to be the most accessible content.²³ In a 1958 publication of Arts and Architecture, Dore Ashton issued a profuse amount of rhetoric on "the subject" which

she quite blatantly admits cannot be "name[d]"; nonetheless, she superimposes one of Shakespeare's sonnets upon Rothko's "zones of ambiguity" as an attempt to concretize meaning.²⁴ In the same breath as Ashton acknowledges the "not readily catalogue[d]" or obtuse aspect of Rothko's subjects, she disaffirms the value of accessible content by stating that the works are valid irrespective of their incommunicability.

Was not the "resolution of an eternally familiar need" one of Rothko's intentions? If Rothko wished to communicate a feeling of resolve and familiarity (content that lends itself well to recognizable forms), perhaps the abstract mode of painting was incongruous with his intention.

Leonard Baskin adds to this that a successful Abstract Expressionist work "can, in a very general way, express sadness or joy... Nuances of emotional meaning are outside their ken."²⁵ If in the process of abstraction (which is to extract or filter out the "irrelevancies") so much was removed, namely any hint of the subject, the "feeling" intention seems destined to hover like light without a surface to illuminate. Rothko's intention may not have been best served by the purely abstract mode; he said himself that the best example of the feeling of solitude had been presented in the context of the human form.

The profit from the above comparison is not that Park's intentions may have been more successfully revealed in his

art given historical perspective than is the case with Rothko's, but that the search for comprehensible meaning is a human necessity. In the figurative work by Park, the intended meaning was realized through the human form, whereas in the abstract work by Rothko, the artist's intention was fused with the medium, a less "tangible" form, and one that required the adjunct of criticism to decipher plausible meanings or run the risk of remaining incomprehensible. In Meaning in the Visual Arts, Panofsky tackles this issue with confidence when he states,

One thing is certain: the more the proportion of emphasis on "idea" and "form" approaches a state of equilibrium, the more eloquently will the work reveal what is call "content."... A spinning machine is perhaps the most impressive manifestation of a functional idea, and an "abstract" painting is perhaps the most expressive manifestation of pure form, but both have a minimum of content.²⁶

Park's manipulation of the relationship of form to content in Four Men seems to fall within that range of "equilibrium" to which meaning is bound and from which comes "nourishment," to borrow Susan Sontag's metaphor, for the human need of intelligibility.²⁷

Before moving forward into the discussion of the figure's role in providing a context for the communication of the artist's intentions, a brief reminder of the historical significance of Park's "return to the figure" is essential. The "coup" of Abstract Expressionism, as we have seen with

the theoretical, critical, "tastemaker" and government support, was so ubiquitous that the human form had in a sense "disappeared completely," in the words of Paul Tillich.²⁸ In the preface of the catalogue for "New Images of Man"(1959), Tillich poses this question: "What has happened to man?" and then counters with the mirroring probe, "Instead we should ask ourselves, what has become of us?" His following comments bring the historical situation closer to us.

Humanity is not something man simply has. He must fight for it anew in every generation, and he may lose his fight. There have been few periods in history in which a catastrophic defeat was more threatening than in ours. One need only to look at the dehumanizing structure of the totalitarian system in one half of the world, and the dehumanizing consequences of technical mass civilization in the other half. In addition, the conflict between them may lead to the annihilation of humanity. (Emphasis added.)²⁹

And in the face of such a fate, some artists were drawn to the figure as was Park. The "new image" of postwar man as presented in the exhibition was not wholly consumed by tragedy, as some scholars have argued.³⁰ The desire on the part of the artist to communicate through the depiction of the figure was, in itself, a refreshing change and, indeed, a plea for human dignity.

Humanism and the Figure

The notion of humanism carries with it the definitive

qualities of responsibility and tolerance, according to Panofsky, if man is to be dignified by his human values (rather than his "animality") and his human limitations (rather than his pretensions to be divine). Humanism advocates an individualism that both "rejects authority" and "respects tradition" which cradles the history of human endeavors, a welcomed source of learning.³¹

How does the representation of the human figure relate to these qualities? What constitutes Geldzahler's reference to Park's humanism in the following statement?

He remade the human presence for his generation, a generation that was full of despair at man's inhumanity, and full of hope that man's noblest values would prevail.³²

The answer to these questions is manifold. The fact that Park rejected the avant-garde taboo on the figure and chose to paint the human form with such exclusivity should not be underestimated as a statement of his intuitive understanding of the figure as a powerful means of communication. Park's earlier figurative work is evidence of his respect and fascination for the portrayals of the human figure in the works of Picasso, Matisse, Degas, and Piero della Francesca, whose "sense of distance, a kind of reverential detachment" Park's figures have inherited.³³ The history of art is rich in representation of the human form and a brief detour through some theories of response to the

figure will demonstrate that potentiality which has been understood by artists of the past, discarded by the Abstract Expressionists and reformulated by David Park.

For my purposes, whether Park's figures are rendered completely nude or nearly nude, there exists a "nakedness" or exposure of a quintessential expression or personality in his figures. (Park's preference for the nude will be examined further on.) We turn to the "inventors" of the nude in art--the artists of fifth-century Greece--for clues to the compelling nature of the figure. In the seminal work, The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form (1956), Kenneth Clark suggests some eminent reasons for one's response to viewing the nude which transgresses time. The following quote is lengthy due to its import; Clark states that

Although the human body is no more than the point of departure for a work of art, it is a pretext of great importance. In the history of art, the subjects that men have chosen as nuclei, so to say, of the sense of order have often been in themselves unimportant.....But the human body, as a nucleus is rich in associations, and when it is turned into art these associations are not entirely lost...It is ourselves and arouses memories of all the things we wish to do with ourselves; and first of all we wish to perpetuate ourselves.....Apart from biological needs, there are other branches of human experience of which the naked body provides a vivid reminder--harmony, energy, humility, pathos; and when we see the beautiful results of such embodiments, it must seem as if the nude as a means of expression is of universal and eternal value. (Emphasis added.)³⁴

Nakedness was a statement for the Greeks of their philosophy of human wholeness. The body (form) literally embodied the spirit (content) and it was only the nude, stripped of the human tendency to fracture or conceal aspects of his being, that could sufficiently represent this wholeness. The Greek practice of giving the gods a tangible, familiar image--human or half-human--in tandem with their belief in the manifestation of the spiritual in the nude, exemplifies an ancient solution to the problem of accessibility in art.

John Berger discusses the process of cognition in viewing art to which Clark intimates in the above quotation. In Ways of Seeing, Berger presents us with the group portraits, The Regents of the Old Men's Alms House and The Regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House, by Frans Hals and excerpts from an authoritative work on the painter by Seymour Slive in which he comments that "the penetrating characterizations almost seduce us into believing that we know the personality traits and even the habits of the men and women portrayed."³⁵ Berger capitalizes on Slive's reference to Hals's genius for "seducing" and argues the contrary; it is not that Hals's brushstrokes work their magic on the viewer, but that the viewer "accepts" the image before him because he "accepts" Hals's observations as similar to his own.³⁶ Berger's notion of acceptance is not unlike Clark's theory--"it is

ourselves"--in that both concede that empathy lies at the heart of the connection between the image and the viewer. But what Berger seems to overlook, although his discussion focuses on figurative works, is that his theory applies equally well to the viewing of inanimate representation, consequently dismissing the possibility of the reciprocity that distinguishes Clark's ideas.

So, in summary, upon viewing the figure we may become the portrayed through the process of empathy or, as Roland Barthes prefers to describe it, "the voice of the singularity (to replenish such banality with all the élan of an emotion which belongs only to myself.)"³⁷ Or, we may assume the perspective of the artist, that which Berger's thesis proposes. Both of these two operative modes can and often do function conjunctively upon a work of art depending on the "eye"--the physical scanning of the work and its pre-existing "need and prejudice."³⁸ How well-comprehended, pleasing or moving the work of art may be depends on the artist's relative success in making the work of art accessible. Within the range of representation, the human form--especially depicted in a state of nakedness--provides the most familiar information to the viewer: "reading of [the body]...is by virtually automatic habit...how easily it issues," in the words of Nelson Goodman.³⁹

Whether the naked figure evokes our pride, as in the Greek sculpture, Bearded God (Zeus or Poseidon); our pathos in the painted panel, The Crucifixion by Grunewald; or our sensuality in the Nude Study, a photograph by Watson, the image "arouses" that dialogue between self and observed world, reflecting upon those qualities of humanity expressed and/or implied. Adrian Stokes lends his authority in Reflections on the Nude (1967) to this discussion.⁴⁰ He adduces that from infancy, in which the world is apprehended as "part-objects" (not separate), humans tend to treat "whole objects" (self-sufficient persons or institutions) as "part-objects"; "It involves a degree of merging with, or being enveloped by, the object." Through the dialectical process, which Stokes refers to as the "projective and introjective," we gain some measure of comprehension of ourselves and the world as composed of "self-contained, whole-objects." Moreover, the nude (in art) provides the "imaginative translation of that [whole-object] prototype" as a necessary supplement to the contemplation of one's own body viewed solely as a "part-object." Thus, the nude is "a promise of sanity"--similar to the Greek concept of nudity as "wholeness"--and, in this sense, possesses tremendous power.⁴¹

David Park's working methods and paintings of the 1950s exhibit this "projective and introjective" process, and in fact, this quality of his work became the theme for the

exhibition, "David Park: Fixed Subjects" (1994).⁴² The title came from the following statement made by Park in 1952,

I believe the best painting America has produced is in the current non-objective direction. However, I often miss the sting I believe a more descriptive reference to some fixed subject can make. Quite often, even the very fine non-objective canvases seem to me to be so visually beautiful that I find them insufficiently troublesome, not personal enough.⁴³

If one hopes to clarify Park's reference to "some fixed subject," another statement from the same time helps to build upon his intentions.

I saw that if I could accept subjects, I could paint with more absorption, with a certain enthusiasm for the subject which would allow some of the esthetic qualities such as color and composition to evolve more naturally.⁴⁴

It seems that Park's subjects, while "fixed" in the sense that they are recognizable (compared to abstract subjects), are not stable, as frequently interpreted; rather they are "about fixing." Once Park would "accept" a subject, a dialectical process, similar to the one described by Stokes, nurtured the creation of the image from Park's memory.

A quote from the brochure of "Fixed Subjects" advances the parallel that I am proposing in this manner,

In contrast [to the work of de Kooning], Park's work is genuinely humanistic, far more lyrical, harmonious, integrated, and pensive. In scale and mood Park's work suggests an intimate memory, fixing an acute observation of reality.⁴⁵

The author not only refers to Park's work as humanistic, placing this qualifier first on the list, but also describes his work as "integrated and pensive." Park's uncanny sense of observation and memory has been cited by Berkson as the key to these qualities, together with his "having kept his mind wholly occupied with the image at hand."⁴⁶ One need only to look at the photograph by Imogen Cunningham of the artist (Fig.10) to acknowledge the force of concentration at work.

The above commentary accords with the methods by which Park arrived at his subjects, conceptually and formally, as well as the self-critical observations of his work. Out of his struggle with Abstract Expressionism, Park retained, along with his extravagant use of paint, some of the psycho-analytical measures he had used to critique his own work. In regard to the experiences during the non-objective period, he states that

In fact I had taught myself to use the painting as a means of looking at and trying to appreciate the man that did it. This was contrary to another strongly felt ideal which said that the man's work should be quite independent of him and possibly very much more wonderful.⁴⁷

This paradox of perspective, which frustrated Park during these years, seemed to work in his favor upon his return to the figure. The latter reference to the "strongly felt

ideal" stems from his study of and enthusiasm for the ideas of C.G. Jung, set forth in Modern Man in Search of a Soul.⁴⁸

In Jung's words,

The secret of artistic creation and of the effectiveness of art is to be found in a return to the state of participation mystique--to that level of experience at which it is man who lives, and not the individual, and at which the weal or woe of the single human being does not count but only human existence. This is why every great work of art is objective and impersonal, but none the less profoundly moves us each and all.⁴⁹

But Jung also states that in the "psychological" or humanly intelligible work of art, the creative material must come "from the vast realm of conscious human experience--from the vivid foreground of life."⁵⁰ Jung advances this notion of the artist drawing from his individual experiences in the chapter, "The Modern Spiritual Problem," where he states that in order to be truly modern, a man must be "fully conscious of the present."⁵¹ Modern man is solitary, and so hyperconscious of the present that he finds himself disconnected from the past. Here lies the paradox: for the closer the modern artist approaches this state of present-day consciousness and solitude, the less his individuality measures against his work to which he is "subordinate." The artist "has done the best that in him lies in giving it form, and he must leave the interpretation to others and to the future."⁵² From Park's intense absorption in his

subjects drawn from within his personal experiences, to his break with the current abstract mode of expression (which Park called "pretentious" and Jung labeled "pseudo-modern"), one could say Park's ideology shared a great deal with Jungian theory.

The juncture of Jungian theory and Park's work that further elucidates Park's humanism is this issue of the artist's source of inspiration--himself and his experiences--and his intention--communicability. As noted by Gibson, the Abstract Expressionists had drawn upon Jung's theories for just the opposite--anti-intentionalism--which Jung alludes to in his definition of the "visionary" artist whose work "does not explain itself and it is never unequivocal."⁵³ While the "visionary" notions suited the Abstract Expressionists, the methodology of the "psychological" artist seem to resonate with the direction of Park's work. Park's affinity for life, especially his life and those in his close circle of friends and family, which naturally manifested itself in his "love of bodies," was the "matiere" of his art. The figure is to Park's intentions as it was to the Greeks, a reminder of humanity. Park stated as much in 1959:

I think of painting--in fact all the arts-- as a sort of extension of human life. The very same things that we value most, the ideals of humanity, are the properties of the arts. The words that come to mind are many--energy, wisdom, courage, delight, humor, sympathy, gentleness, honesty, peace, freedom--I believe most artists are goaded by a vision of making their work vivid and alive with such qualities. I believe this is the undercurrent of the artist's energy.⁵⁴

But just as Park was inspired by the ideals of man, so too was he by his limitations. Munro notes that psychoanalysis opened up this avenue for Park; "It has helped establish a feeling that your faults have color, have value; so instead of working for perfection, you can work towards being yourself."⁵⁵

The Nude and Park

The most striking of Park's nudes, described by Berkson as "immediate and unnerving," is Standing Male Nude in the Shower, 1955 (Fig 11). This painting is likely a self-portrait to which Park's wife, Lydia, commented one evening "What's the matter, David, can't you sleep?"⁵⁶ The life-size male figure "ambushes us with his enigmatic stare and frank frontal pose," in the words of Jones, but it is the content, perhaps the figure's "lack of purpose" or isolation from any probable narrative, that issues in the psychological power of this work.⁵⁷

Park's interest in the nude, although partially due to his resumed teaching of drawing at the University of California, Berkeley, is a natural consequence of his attitude towards clothes as a symbol of the superficial self and the years of commitment to the humanist concerns in his work.⁵⁸

Beyond any of his other nude paintings, in Standing Male Nude the tension of the "projective and introjective" modes of apprehending the human form is most apparent. As self-portrait, the image is both the visual embodiment of the artist's perspective and subject of our empathy, triggered, if not entrapped, by the "omnipotent" eyes of the figure.⁵⁹

The nude for Park carries with it little eroticism, as noted by Mills and others.⁶⁰ This temperance of the sexual element has been often misconstrued as refusal of "the frank acceptance of the flesh," quoted by Berkson who places Park in the "peculiar American tradition of awkwardly depicting (or, more commonly, avoiding depicting) the unclothed human body."⁶¹ I would argue that Park's refusal is not of the "flesh" but of that which has been historically associated with voyeuristic versions of the nude. By meditating on himself as subject, which is quite literally revealed in Standing Nude Male, he "accepts" the physicality of being human but not to the exclusion of his intention to offer the viewer a dialogue--one that is not limited to the contemplation of one's own sexuality. By comparison, in the

self-portrait by Albrecht Dürer (which bears an almost eerie resemblance to Park's) "the genitals are drawn with painstaking accuracy" and, according to Margaret Walters, reveals the artist's frustrations with his sexuality and aging.(Fig.12)⁶² Yet in Park's self-portrait, according to Jones and Armstrong, the image encompasses the prosaic nature of existence and "figurative symbols that can allude to universal human conditions."⁶³ In Standing Nude Male, Park's dialogue with himself, with the Jungian conundrum-- that art must come from personal experience while simultaneously transcending the artist's reference and extend meaning to all men--is that which makes his work a humanist achievement.

To return to the original question of humanism in Park's work, we see that his intent to communicate human values through the painting of the human figure was an act of "responsibility," and that his unidealized manner of depicting the human form was an act of "tolerance." The figure satisfied several of Park's intuitive needs: to bring into his art that which was most familiar to him and accessible to his audience, to accept subjects that would competently express human values, and hold all of these aspects in a "troublesome" balance so as to insure the impact of his work. The issue at hand is the choice made by Park to paint in a "democratic" mode, as opposed to the

elitist manner of the Abstract Expressionists. As Ortega y Gasset in The Dehumanization of Art points out, "the characteristic feature of the new art [abstract] is, in my judgement, that it divides the public into the two classes of those who understand it and those who do not... The new art obviously addresses itself not to everybody, as did Romanticism, but to a specially gifted minority."⁶⁴ The intention of Abstract Expressionism to remain aloof, inaccessible, and indignant to interpretation by its practitioners could be taken as an anti-humanist stance. Park's break with the avant-garde, indeed, was in reaction to the incomprehensible, deadening silence of that approach to painting. In rebuffing the taboo on the figure, Park revived the dialogue between the artist and the world in a deeply human way. As Thomas Albright puts it, "Park's audacious 'failures' are more interesting than so many ambitious 'successes.'"⁶⁵

Chapter 6. CONCLUSION

In the 1950s the figure became a taboo image in American art. The work of David Park fell victim to this proscription, which this thesis has proposed resulted from a complexity of forces of greater scope than previously presented. By the 1970s, politics emerged as a factor in the hegemony of Abstract Expressionism; research into the postwar period during the 1980s and 1990s has revealed other motivations, e.g., autonomy (Gibson, Lyotard), cultural superiority (Guilbaut), profit (Robson). Within these decades, with the benefit of pluralism in the arts, Park's work was reconsidered, culminating in a retrospective at the Whitney and Oakland Museums, 1988-89. This new body of research informed my thesis and, hopefully, it will stimulate further study into the postwar taboo of the figure.

In conclusion, postwar America was enthralled with its imminent role as a world leader, anxious to create and disseminate an image of itself as a free, capitalist society. The ideals of freedom which were synonymous with Americanism--free trade, free enterprise, free artistic expression--turned to propaganda, superseding the rights of the individual. The avant-garde, also caught up in the fervor to make history, saw this period as an opportune time to turn the eyes of Europe to the revolution

in art occurring in the New World. The banner of "freedom," carried by both the United States government and Abstract Expressionism, was not raised without cost to the cause. The dichotomy inherent in the "ideal" of freedom is exemplified in the artworld during the fifties. As we have seen throughout the discussion, the criteria established by the critics, most notably Greenberg and Rosenberg, and many of the Abstract Expressionists was, ironically, another set of rules--no content, no subject, no recognizable images. Individuality quickly became conformity in pursuit of the absolutes of the picture plane and in search of the NEW. The figurative art of David Park seems to highlight by contrast, especially in its lack of critical recognition, a restricted, rather than granted, individuality in the 1950s.

The taboo of the figure is emblematic of the devaluation of the individual, of an increasing distrust in humanity. Abstract Expressionism's "ban on images" seems not far removed from the Communists' "ban on abstraction"; both feared the power that resides within the free-thinking, creative individual. Park's rejection of the taboo on the figure is bound up in his humanistic belief in the individual. The figure is man's most potent reminder of his humanity--his limitations and his values, not the least of which is his need to communicate. For Park, the figure provides a

familiar context for the communication of all aspects--from the frail to the valiant--of being human.

Park went against the dictates of Abstract Expressionism with his insistence on the figure as a valid, contemporary image to paint. His work is psychologically moving because we, as viewers, empathetically engage in the human qualities Park intends to convey. One might even conclude, implied in Park's exclusiveness of subject is the belief in the "necessity" of the human figure in art during its postwar suppression in avant-garde circles. Park's decision to paint figuratively was, of course, personal rather than motivated by any responsibility to society. Yet one of the voids which his work filled during this period was the need for an art of an accessible nature.

In the ongoing process of re-evaluating history, it could be said that David Park proffers an art of "reenchantment," to borrow a notion from Susan Gablik.¹ In answer to the metanarratives of Modernism, Park painted the human figure from his experience of life as a humanist, if you will, as "sacred."

NOTES

Chapter 1. The Taboo

1. Henry Geldzahler, David Park, Exhibition (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc., 1985) Exhibition catalogue.

2. Paul Schimmel and Judith Stein, The Figurative Fifties: New York Figurative Expressionism (New York: Rizzoli Press, 1988), 37.

3. Ibid., 47.

4. Paul Mills, The New Figurative Art of David Park (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1988), 34-7. According to Park and Mills, the artist's change of direction--from his non-objective period in the 1940s to the later figurative work--was absolute. The artist retrospectively defines the differences between his former (paintings) and current (pictures) modes of expression in the statement of 1953, p.35. The fact that Park destroyed nearly all of his non-objective work in a trip to the Berkeley dump demonstrates his clear break with Abstract Expressionism; his commitment to figurative painting during the 1950s until his death would seem to disperse any question of the unmitigated nature of Park's decision.

5. Richard Armstrong, David Park (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1988) Exhibition catalogue, 11-46.

6. Interview with the author, March 1996.

7. Mills, 34.

8. Stein, 48.

9. Natalie Park Shutz, interview with the author. Natalie commented on the centrality of the figure in David's work. She stated that "The figure was the central, most intriguing thing....the figure becomes more and more sculptural, in scale--monumental. David stripped the figure..."

Chapter 2. Art Historical Context

1. Paul Mills, Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting: An Introduction to New Work by a Number of Bay Area Painters (Oakland: The Oakland Art Museum, 1957) Exhibition catalogue, 6-7.

2. For de Kooning's discussion of abstraction, cf., "What Abstract Art Means to Me," Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art (New York, Spring 1951), 18, in Herschel Chipp, Theories of Modern Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 556-61.

3. E.P. Richardson, A Short History of American Painting (New York, 1956), 313.

4. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," Art News 51 (December 1952), 22-23, 48-50.

5. David and Cecile Shapiro, Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record (Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1990), 1-2.

6. Rosenberg, 23.

7. Ann Gibson, "Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language," Art Journal 47 (Fall 1988) in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 196.

8. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," Art and Culture: Critical Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 3-21. Originally published in 1939 in Partisan Review.; "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Partisan Review (July-August, 1940) in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 61-74. In "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" Greenberg establishes a hierarchy of the producers of art; the avant-garde possess the requisite critical faculty to create high art forms whereas the kitsch producers, lacking this faculty, resort to imitative processes. Accordingly, the avant-garde's primary function is to "keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence." p.5. For his thesis on the supremacy of abstraction, see pp. 5-6; for the socialist critique of culture and the role of the avant-garde, see p.15ff. For the historical justification of the "present superiority of abstract art," see "Towards a Newer Laocoon."

9. Greenberg, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," 5.

10. Ibid.

11. For Greenberg's own account of Kant's influence, see n.13 below. Greenberg acknowledges Hofmann in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 7 n.2. See also, Irving Sandler, The Triumph of American Painting (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 20-21; Dore Ashton, "The New York School: Artists, Critics, and Dealers," from The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning (New York: Penguin, 1979) in Readings in Art History: Volume II, ed., Harold Spencer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 464f.

12. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," Art and Literature 4 (Spring 1965), in Gregory Battock, The New Art (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), 67.

13. Ibid., 68. "The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every affect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure,' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition..."

14. Ibid., 69.

15. Supra n.12.

16. Hans Hofmann, excerpts from his teaching, originally printed in Search for the Real and other Essays by Hans Hofmann, eds., S.T. Weeks and B.H. Hayes, Jr., translated by Glenn Wessels (Andover, Mass: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1948), repr., Theories of Modern Art, 538-39.

17. Ibid., 542. See "On Pictorial Laws"; "On the Picture Plane."

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 540. "Every creative act requires elimination and simplification. Simplification results from a realization of what is essential. The mystery of plastic creation is based upon the dualism of the two dimensional and the three dimensional..."

20. Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, "Statement," 1943. Published in Edward Alden Jewell's column in the New York Times (June 13, 1943), in Theories of Modern Art, 544-45.

21. Ibid.

22. Joan Chambliss Bossart, "Bay Area Figurative Painting Reconsidered." Master's thesis. (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 123. Bossart states: "hovered in the background throughout this [her] discussion: the concern if not obsession New York has for avant-garde art and its own status as the capital of that art." This "New York state of mind" in art criticism during the 1940s and 1950s contributes to one aspect of my analysis of the taboo of figurative painting and developments in the Bay Area, 121-3.

23. For Sandler's discussion of "myth makers" and "gesture painters," see Chapters 4 and 7 in Triumph. The designation "one-idea," which I prefer to use, comes from Rosenberg in his memorial, "Rothko," The De-definition of Art (New York: Horizon, 1972), in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 413.

24. Barnett Newman, "The Ideographic Picture," from the exhibition catalogue The Ideographic Picture (New York: Betty Parsons Gallery, January 20 - February 8, 1947), in Theories, 550-51.

25. Ibid.; see also Chapter 14, "Barnett Newman," in Triumph for Newman's transition in inspiration from primitive cultures to the notion of a "pure" ideal, a "self-evident one of revelation," which is not found in legend or myth; cf., Newman, "The Sublime is Now," The Tiger's Eye (December 15, 1948), in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 325-28.

26. Supra n.4.; see also, Sandler's discussion of this aspect of the gesture painters, 97.

27. Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberation Quality of Avant-garde Art," Art News, No.4 (Summer 1957), 38-40.

28. Robert Motherwell, "Personal Statement," A Painting Prophecy--1950 (Washington, D.C.: David Porter Gallery, 1945) Exhibition catalogue; see also "What Abstract Art Means to Me," (February 5, 1951), repr., S. Terenzio, ed., The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 84-7.

29. Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell, 86.

30. Willem de Kooning, "Content is a Glimpse," Location, I, 1 (Spring, 1963), 47. "The 'Women' had to do with the female painted through all the ages, all those idols, and maybe I was stuck to a certain extent; I couldn't go on. It did one thing for me: it eliminated composition, arrangement, relationships, light--all this silly talk about line, color and form--because that [the 'Women'] was the thing I wanted to get hold of."

31. David Park, The Artist's View (San Francisco: Painters, Poets and Sculptors, 1953) quoted in New Figurative Art, 35.

32. The history of the Bay Area activity and of the California School of the Arts has been covered by Albright, Bossart, Jones, McChesney, among others. See Thomas Albright, Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1980: An Illustrated History (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); Mary Fuller McChesney, A Period of Exploration: San Francisco, 1945-50 (Oakland: The Oakland Museum, 1957) Exhibition catalogue.

33. Thomas Albright, "A conversation with Clyfford Still," Art News 75 (March 1976), 33.

34. Clyfford Still, "Statement, 1959," Paintings by Clyfford Still (New York, Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1959) Exhibition catalogue, in Theories, 576.

35. Ibid.

36. New Figurative Art, 33-37. Elmer Bischoff insightfully states that "Park was not primarily motivated by a reaction to Still, he was only spirited on by it, he was given more fire by it."

37. Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 26.

38. Supra n.36, 34.

39. Caroline Jones, Bay Area Figurative Art:1950-1965 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 2.

40. Supra n.31.

41. Supra n.21.

42. David Park quoted in Time (November 9, 1959), 83.

43. New Figurative Art, 38.

44. Richard Diebenkorn, "David Park," David Park (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 1985) Exhibition catalogue.

45. Supra n.1, 7.

46. Jones, 12ff. Park's "defection" was so dramatic that a legend arose around the circumstances of his rejection of the abstract expressionist mode. Whether the change took place in an apocryphal "trip to the dump" or over a period of a few months is irrelevant to the prescience of his decision. For local reactions, see pp.16-20; cf., New Figurative Art, 42ff.

47. Supra n.45, 73-75. "When Park began his new figurative painting, he made an even stronger point of painting pleasant things pleasantly. He deliberately, almost rebelliously, contradicted the strident, sober, serious tone of most American abstract expressionism by pushing this pleasantness harder than he had in earlier years." See also, Armstrong, 33.

48. Thomas Hess, "Great Expectations, part II," Art News (Summer 1956).

Chapter 3. Criticism and the Art Market

1. Richardson, 313.

2. Eleanor C. Munro, "Figures to the Fore," Horizon (July 1960), 16-24, 114-16.

3. Richardson, 317; see also A. Deirdre Robson, Prestige, Profit and Pleasure (New York and London: Garland Pub., Inc., 1995), 233-52. "...for the first time the United States art consumers seemed ready to think of modern art in investment terms, if only because of the large sums now asked for art. But the final trend to appear in the New York art market, also the probable result of the efforts of cultural tastemakers and of the market trends seen so far, was an increasing bias toward American art.....on-guard collectors were increasingly willing to add American abstract art to their collections, secure in the knowledge that it was being accorded a much higher status by institutional tastemakers such as the Museum of Modern art." p.251.

4. Robson, 254.

5. Ibid., 234.

6. Ibid., 235. "But of particular concern to the art market was the fact that, for the first time since the war years, although there was almost no real wealth distribution from the wealthy to the poor nationally, there was some increase in the proportion of population in the highest income quintile (\$10,000 and above), the very people upon whom the art market depended."

7. Ibid., 239-42. "Braque and Picasso, whose work generally quadrupled in price in the decade after the war, became the first living painters of the School of Paris to attain six-figure prices in New York during the 1950s." The Cubists were a part of the group which Robson refers to as controversial in the forties, when "it was still possible to acquire good Cubist works by Leger for a few thousand dollars," yet by the fifties were "eagerly sought" by investors because they had achieved "uncontroversial art-historical status." p.240.

8. Ibid., 240.

9. For a discussion of MoMA's conception of Modern and Barr's institution of "the catalogue" as a means of disseminating this view, see Robson, 48-49; cf., Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, A Weapon of the Cold War," Artforum (June 1974), 47. "Barr was the single most important man in shaping the Museum's artistic character and determining the success or failure of individual American artists and movements." For the history of collecting practices under Barr, see Russell Lynes, Good Old Modern (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 284ff.

10. Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 95.

11. Robson, 248-49.

12. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 4-5; "Towards a Newer Laocoon," 65ff. "By 1948 Romanticism had exhausted itself. After that impulse, although indeed it had to originate in bourgeois society, could only come in the guise of a denial of that society, as a turning away from it... It was to be the task of the avant-garde to perform in opposition to bourgeois society the function of finding new and adequate cultural forms for the expression of that same society..." See also, Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 95-109.

13. David and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," Prospects 3 (1976), 182. "From somewhat different approaches and in different terms, both Greenberg and Rosenberg seem to agree that the artist must be freed from discipline, from the past, and from the public world for subject or even connection. Most especially, both believe in the 'new'." Cf., Rosenberg, 83-84; Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 5-6.

14. "Avant-Garde," 9. The art "created" by the avant-garde is of a genuine nature, always and only the product of a higher consciousness unlike the mechanically-produced, watered-down Alexandrianism of kitsch. Implicit in Greenberg's characterization of these social groups is a judgement: the avant-garde, because the survival of culture is in their hands, is sacred and the masses are profane.

15. Ibid., 5-6.

16. Ibid., 8-11.

17. Ibid., 15f. Greenberg continues to bring up the social divisions; here, in the context of an historical analysis, his thesis is substantiated by the following: "There has always been on one side the minority of the powerful--and therefore the cultivated--and on the other the great mass of the exploited and poor--and therefore the ignorant." In the twentieth century, the avant-garde assumes the former position in which all methods are justified and necessary in order to keep culture "moving." The latter social group is content "with folk or rudimentary culture, or kitsch."

18. Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 21. For a discussion of Greenberg's eminence in Modernist art criticism during the 1940s and 1950s, see Paul Wood et al., Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties (Yale University, 1993), 53-62.

19. Bossart, 123.

20. Guilbaut, 165-94. Guilbaut describes the political conditions of 1948 to be conducive to the firm establishment of an American art superior to Parisian art. In "Situation at the Moment"(1948) Greenberg states as much: "As dark as the situation still is for us, American painting in its most advanced aspects--that is abstract painting--has in the last several years shown here and there a capacity for fresh content that does not seem to be matched either in France or great Britain." Guilbaut credits Greenberg's "sufficiently aggressive" commitment to the New York artists and Jackson Pollock as a major factor in the successful attempt by New York to "steal" the seat of Western culture from Paris; Bossart, 103, for the relevance of New York's newly-acclaimed status in the area of criticism.

21. Shapiro, xii.

22. "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," 204.

23. John Canaday, "A Critic's Valedictory: The Americanization of Modern Art and Other Upheavals," New York Times (August 8, 1976).

24. "Apolitical Painting," 208. Shapiro brings the ideas of Christopher Lasch, regarding the "defection of intellectuals from their true calling--critical thought," into his discussion of the bias in art criticism for Abstract Expressionism.

25. Ibid., 203. For the most readable biographical material to date on Park, see Armstrong; esp. p.34 for Park's economic circumstances of the late forties and early fifties.

26. Greta Berman and Jeffrey Wechsler, Realism and Realities: The Other Side of American Painting, 1940-1960. Exhibition catalogue (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1981), 2.

27. "Statement" from Reality, A Journal of Artists' Opinions (New York, Spring 1953) in Realism and Realities.

28. Bossart, 111; Thomas Care Howe, David Park: Recent Paintings (New York: Staempfli Gallery, 1959) Exhibition catalogue, 2.

29. Many of the issues raised in Reality are ones which Park commented upon as well, e.g., that the exploration of the formal aspects of an artist's work is not the end, but the means; the artist should be free from the influence of external dogma; the values of painting are human values.

30. Alfred Frankenstein, "Northern California," Art in America (Winter 1954), 49.

31. "Your job is not to force yourself into a style, but to do what you want to..." Park, quoted in New Figurative Art, 81; cf., Jones discusses Park's disdain of style, 19. The issue of style was a popular topic during the 1950s; Rosenberg's comments, see "Parable of American Painting," Art News 52 (January 1954), 60-63ff.

32. New Figurative Art, 70.

33. Ibid., 113; Kids on Bikes reproduced in Arts Digest (February 15, 1953), 27:10.

34. New Figurative Art, 42. A reaction from his friend and future colleague, Mark Schorer epitomizes the general, less theoretical, art audience response: "We liked it very much. We found it very exciting and we were delighted that he had given up covering acres of canvas with non-objective work." The San Francisco Art Association, host of the San Francisco Art Annual, was composed of local professionals in some way involved in the Arts. Park served on the Arts Council of the association from the years 1946-51, of which he was chairman for two years, as well as elected to jury as many as five exhibitions. The local art scene was less concerned about vanguardism in the same way New York was; rather, as Albright so eloquently states, "in the dialectical tug-of-wars that are always straining the seams of contemporary art, Bay area artists have generally favored home-grown elements over imported ones, personal experience over the supposed imperatives of art history, and a conception of art as a vision, process, and act of communication rather than as a matter of pure form." p.xvi.

35. Armstrong, 33.

36. See Sidra Stich, Made in U.S.A.: An Americanization in Modern Art, the 50s & 60s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) Exhibition catalogue.; Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," Artforum 11 (May 1973), 43-54; Moira Roth, "The Aesthetics of Indifference," Artforum 16 (November 1977), 46-53.

37. Herschel Chipp, "San Francisco." Review. Art News 55 (December 1957), 50.

38. New Figurative Art, 113-20. Before the group show of 1957, Park and other Bay Area figurative artists' shows were reviewed only by local critics. National recognition came slowly and not until the "Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Exhibition" (1957) did New York-based critics and the national press turn a head.
39. *Supra* n.36.
40. Hilton Kramer, Arts (December 1957), 26.
41. Armstrong, 11.
42. David Park, Contemporary American Painting (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1952) Exhibition catalogue, 220.
43. De Kooning, Theories, 560.
44. David Sylvester, "De Kooning's Women: An Interview with Willem de Kooning," Ramparts 7 (1960), in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 225.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Bossart, 107.
47. Hilton Kramer, "A Month in Review," Arts Magazine (January 1960), 42, 45.
48. Anita Feldman, "The Figurative, the Literary, the Literal: American Figurative Tradition at the Venice Biennale," Arts Magazine (June 1968), 22-27.
49. Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting, 7.
50. "M.S.," Arts 34 (November 1960), in New Figurative Art, 121.
51. Robson, 245.
52. Guilbaut, 178-79.
53. Geoffrey Wagner, "The New American Painting," Antioch Review (March-June 1954).
54. "The Image and the Void," Time (November 9, 1959), 80-83.

55. The comparison of the monetary worth of Pollock and Park demonstrates the difference created by the tastemakers' accolade. It also lends support to my discussion of the mores of the period which preferred an elitist art over a "democratic" art.

56. Robson, 249-50.

57. Lynes, 357-58. Lynes tells a delightful tale (told to him by a retired museum director) of just how influential MoMA was in the 1950s: "'If Alfred Barr got off a plane in Rome or New Delhi and, having a few hours, went into town... and visiting a local gallery, spoke well of an artist's work, the little artist became a great one instantly. The dealer quickly added three zeros to his prices; museums and collectors rushed to buy.' He [the friend] added what many artists have felt achingly in their bones, to be true and have said so. 'The Museum's approval was obligatory if an artist was to have a career.'" See also, Cockcroft, 45-47.

58. Robson, 220-234.

59. Guilbaut, 56-57.

60. Ibid., 57.

61. Ibid.; Clifton Fadiman, in the panel discussion "Art and Our Warring World," rebroadcast by NBC on November 24, 1940, stated in response to Wirth on the subject of art: "What you are saying seems enormously important from the point of view of national defense: Art is a method of unifying people....One of the things that makes people agree with each other is the observance or enjoyment of a work of art... I think the enjoyment and appreciation of art is one means of insuring the kind of psychological unity we are after, and that is why it is important in national defense." (Emphasis added.)

62. "Apolitical Painting," 183; see also Guilbaut's references on the popularization of Abstract Expressionism by Life.

63. "A Life Round Table on Modern Art: Fifteen Distinguished Critics and Connoisseurs Undertake to Clarify the Strange Art of Today," Life (October 11, 1948), 56ff.

64. Ibid., 65. The panel chose the term "ordinary layman" for the viewer which lacked the art expertise possessed by them. Accordingly, the panel agreed, the expert approached a work of art with a certain attitude--"one of seeking an experience"--that was not part of the layman's approach. The panel concurred that this lack of attitude was the "key to the whole problem."

65. Ibid. Aldous Huxley added, "the esthetic experience is the analogy of mystical experience."

66. Ibid. Janson's comment would have created a leveling pause in this discussion that bordered on the metaphysical.

67. Ibid., 68.

68. Ibid., 70.

69. Ibid. Dr. Greene's comment, quoted here in full, is a response to the question of the highly private symbols in modern art. "Now there is nothing you can do about that directly. You have got to try to build a community, and as you build a community you will get a common language and common beliefs. Then you will get art that communicates more easily." The flaw in this argument is that the art of the avant-garde was intended to be an art of alienation, therefore, difficult to understand by the masses.

70. The examples are numerous and a compilation of articles that popularized avant-garde art in the 1940s and 1950s would be a valuable aid. The most famous introduction of a controversial painter in this period was the article of 1949 that launched Pollock into the living rooms of America. "Jackson Pollock: Fraud or Genius?" Life (August 8, 1949); cf., Guilbaut, 185-86.

71. See Cockcroft for the politics affiliated with the promotion of Abstract Expressionism, the "ideal style." See Robson, 69-75, for a discussion of the ways in which MoMA "encouraged" the consumption of modern art.

72. "Apolitical Painting," 185; Guilbaut, 248 n.27.

73. "Apolitical Painting," 184. "No movement given this kind of mass-media coverage [referring to Life's "Round Table"] within less than a decade of its birth can make too great a case for neglect." Shapiro goes on to list an impressive number of early publications and exhibitions that promoted Abstract Expressionism, as well as Pollock's debut at the Venice Biennale in 1948. In conclusion he states, "all this, and only a partial list at that, occurred in the years before Abstract Expressionism is acknowledged to have become important!"

74. Lawrence Alloway, The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1968), 135.

75. Ibid., 133-155. Alloway's analysis of the postwar Biennales (1948-1956) is immensely fruitful to the discussion of MoMA's categorization of Abstract Expressionism as historically significant. "The past and modern art became historically continuous." p.135; see also, p.154 n.3.

76. Ibid., 139-141; "Apolitical Painting," 186.

77. New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries 1958-1959 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959) Exhibition catalogue. Foreword by René D'Harnoncourt, 5.

78. Cockcroft, 47; Jane De Hart Mathews, "Art and Politics in Cold War America," American Historical Review (October 1976), 780. Both scholars refer to Alfred Barr's introduction in which he tries to dispel the association of Abstract Expressionism with propaganda; ironically he confirms their eminent role in the politics of Americanization by the words: "their paintings have been praised and condemned as symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude."

79. New American Painting, 7.

Chapter 4. Historical Profile of the Chosen Ones

1. David Shapiro, Social Realism: Art as a Weapon (New York: Frederick Ungar Pub. Co., 1973).

2. Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 13-16. For a comparison of the 1930s and 1950s, see Richard M. Fried, "Two Eras and Some Victims," Nightmare in Red (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

3. "Apolitical Painting," 209. Shapiro argues that Abstract Expressionism exuded "freedom" which was wholly consistent with the shaping of the image of postwar America; Cockcroft, 46.

4. Guilbaut, 18.

5. Social Realism, 13. "Many artists came to interpret what they saw happening in the United States as a class struggle between capital and labor; in a word they became Marxists."; cf., Guilbaut, 17-47. Guilbaut describes the distinctions between the communism of the Popular Front as socialist (realist) and the American Artists' Congress as idealist (formalist) in this detailed account of the events which occurred between 1935-41. He cites the influence of Marxist Quarterly, especially the writings of Meyer Schapiro, e.g., "The Nature of Abstract Art," as the cause of the shift in the artists' leftist affiliation.

6. Daniel Aaron, Writers on the Left (New York: Avon, 1969), 278, in Guilbaut, 18.

7. This characterization of the relations between the Communist party and the United States is cited by both Aaron, 445 n.2, and Guilbaut, 18.

8. "Apolitical Painting," 210-11.

9. Cockcroft, 45.

10. Supra n.8, 206.

11. Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 79. "The big moment came when it was decided to paint...Just To Paint. The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value-- political, aesthetic, moral."

12. "Apolitical Painting," 206. "Art became a weapon... Yet art so used might be difficult or pure or experimental-- as abstract art was--thus showing that American society was so free ideologically that no form was too experimental or abstruse for toleration and even support. We wanted our art-as-propaganda to show that we were a rich and free country..." For Barr's contribution to the Americanization of abstraction, see "Is Modern Art Communist?" New York Times Magazine (Dec.14, 1952), 22-23, discussed by Cockcroft, 47; De Hart Mathews 775.

13. Ibid.

14. "Apolitical Painting," 209.
15. Quoted in Guilbaut, 60.
16. Ibid.
17. Henry Luce, "The American Century," Life (February 17, 1941), 63.
18. Ibid., 61-65. Luce's combination of incentives-- economic and international superiority--were driven home by his appeal to the Christian side of the American people. By casting America as the Good Samaritan, his proposal was divinely sanctioned.
19. "Avant-garde and Kitsch" is the seminal reference for these notions. Guilbaut, 37f., discusses the transvaluation of avant-garde values specified in Greenberg's article.
20. Luce, 65.
21. Guilbaut, 60-61.
22. Kozloff, 109. "At Truman's disposal, significantly, were two important psychological levers: the recent illusion of national omnipotence, and the conviction, no less illusory, that all the world's people wanted to be, indeed had a right to be, like Americans... To galvanize such attitudes, and to justify the allocation of funds that would contain the communist menace, Truman dramatized world politics as a series of perpetual crises instigated by a tightly coordinated, monolithic Red conspiracy."
23. De Hart Mathews, 774.
24. Cockcroft, 47; Hauptman, 48. The alliance of realism with nationalism was also characteristic of the PCF whose doctrine of Socialist Realism opposed abstraction. See Modernism in Dispute, 129-33; Guilbaut, "Postwar Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick," Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 43ff.
25. "Postwar Painting Games," 34ff. This transformation is discussed eloquently by Guilbaut. One key example of the events that forged this new alliance was the letter written by Alfred Barr to Henry Luce in 1949 containing a reasoned argument for America's embrace of abstraction.
26. De Hart Mathews, 763.

27. The break in political engagement is generally cited as occurring in the year 1939, with the Hitler-Stalin pact, the division of Poland, the entry of France and England into the war, and the publication of "Avant-garde and Kitsch" which denounced Stalinist communism; See "Apolitical Painting," 178; New York Stole Modernism, 37ff.

28. Linda Nochlin, "The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law," Art in America 61 (September-October, 1973), 56; De Hart Mathews, 763.

29. "Postwar Painting Games," 37.

30. The avant-garde insistence on freedom has been discussed throughout the thesis gathered from many sources, not the least of which is "Apolitical Painting," 181-83, in which Shapiro develops the connections between Greenberg's notions of freedom and Trotsky's idea of "complete freedom for art."

31. New York Stole Modernism, 36.

32. Ibid.

33. The term "postwar painting games" comes from the article of the same name written by Guilbaut (1990).

34. Cockcroft, 45. John Hay Whitney quoted.

35. Ibid. 45-46. A partial list of "cold warriors": John H. Whitney was Chairman of the Board of Trustees in the years before World War II and worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, predecessor of CIA); Rene d'Harnoncourt was appointed head of Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs in 1943, a year later he became vice-president in charge of foreign affairs for MoMA and in 1949, director of MoMA; Porter McCray had been in the Office of Inter-American Affairs during the war, after which he was hired by Nelson Rockefeller as a director of circulating exhibitions and served as director of the Museum from 1946-1949. In the 1950s McCray remained in directorship positions for MoMA and its international programs under the Marshall Plan.

36. Thomas Braden, "I'm Glad the CIA is 'Immoral'," Saturday Evening Post (May 20, 1967), 10ff.

37. Russe11, 233.

38. Cockcroft, 46. The struggle to define an art that represented America as the postwar heroine produced a nation obsessed with its cultural inferiority. See Stich's discussion of America's "unprecedented pride in the discovery of its heritage as well as... urgency to assert its cultural leadership." p.8 f.

39. Guilbaut, 182f. According to Jerome Melquist, writer for Commonweal, in 1949 the liberals were determined to forge a new image of an America as global player, indeed, bestowed by history. The art of realism was rejected and the new art of abstraction was embraced in reply to the "challenge of the hour."

40. Hauptman, 49.

41. Ibid.

42. Fried, 120.

43. Ibid., 29. "The mid-century Red scare targeted ideas as well as people. Critics feared that it had spawned 'thought control' and fed deep springs of anti-intellectualism." Conformity, true to the nature of social conditions, reveals itself in the particulars of a period. Fried provides the reader with those "dramas" which played out in the arts and humanities, education, entertainment, politics, sports, just to name a few. Of particular interest is the bibliographical essay; see also, "Apolitical Painting," 205. Shapiro suggests a parallel between Abstract Expressionism and McCarthyism, in that their authoritarianism produced the defining reality of the 1950s--conformism; Kozloff reminds us of the self-imposed censorship of the "haunted fifties" (I.F.Stone), acting as a "psychological depressant on the nation."; New York Stole Modernism, 11, 208 n.19.

44. Fried, 9.

45. Ibid.; De Hart Mathews' perspective on the issue includes a discussion of anti-communism as a manifestation of the anti-radical tendency in the United States, 763.

46. Supra n.44.

47. "Apolitical Painting," 205.

48. Hauptman, 48; De Hart Mathews, 777; Fried, 31-34.

49. Ibid.

50. De Hart Mathews, 763. The author is interested more in the psychological impulses entailed in censorship, i.e., the reasons behind the conservatives' labeling of modern art as "un-American," than the notion that censorship itself meant that artistic freedom no longer existed in the United States during the forties and fifties; Guilbaut, 118.

51. George Dondero in an interview with Emily Genauer (1949) quoted in Hauptman, 48.

52. De Hart Mathews, 777; Alfred Frankfurter, "American Art Abroad: The State Department's Collection," Art News 45 (1946), 21-30ff. Regarding the Portrait of an Old Woman, the writer discredits Watkins's training in Paris, where realism connotes a socialist political attitude, and addresses the "reserved style" and palette without a mention of the highly expressive depiction of despair on the woman's face. Below Philip Guston's portrait, Shanah, the writer comments solely on the formal properties of composition, color, and structure; again foregoing the work's obvious similarity to those by Andre Fougeron, the leading artist of the French Communist Party.

52. De Hart Mathews, 761-768; Hauptman 51-52.

53. Ibid.

54. Hauptman, 49. "The commission required that the artist must 'relate to the people in contemporary idiom' the history of their own experience, not as a pageant, but as a growth of the city, a struggle of men against nature, and later on, the development of various inner tensions."

55. De Hart Mathews, 765.

56. Hauptman, 52.

57. Dondero quoted in De Hart Mathews, 766.

58. Supra n.52.

59. Supra n.56.

60. Fried, 112.

61. Ibid., 161.

62. De Hart Mathews, 769.

63. Ibid.

64. Hauptman, 50-51; De Hart Mathews, 769-771; Fried, 33.

65. Supra n.164.

Chapter 5. The Broken Silence

1. Paul Tillich, "Prefatory Note," New Images of Man (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959) Exhibition catalogue, 9. Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of Existentialism is a quintessential example of the postwar search for what it means to be human. See Jean-Paul Sartre: Essays in Existentialism, ed., Wade Baskin (New York: Citadel Press, 1993), v-viii.

2. Dwight MacDonald quoted in New York Stole Modern Art, 107, originally published in Politics (September 1945), 175.

3. Erwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955), 1-2.

4. Gibson, 206.

5. Ibid., 196. See also, Max Kozloff, "The Authoritarian Personality in Modern Art," Artforum (May 1974), 40-47. Kozloff explores the issue of the artists' language as "two separate histories of thought... For practical purposes, the one mode might be said to be descriptive, neutral, informing--it deals with operations. The other is sententious and speculative, out to frame assumptions. In any text, the two modes might coexist cheek by jowl, juggling messages chaotically." He states that artists' statements are vital to our understanding of their works, which are intended to express values but fail to do so.

6. Gibson, 197ff.

7. Leonard Baskin, "The Necessity for the Image," The Atlantic Monthly (April 1961), 73.

8. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., "Validity in Interpretation," in Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory, ed., Stephen David Ross (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 348-54, originally published as Chapter 1, "In Defense of the Author," of Validity in Interpretation (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967).

9. David Park, The Artist's View, in New Figurative Art, 35.

10. Ben Shahn, The Shape of Content (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957), 53-72; Elaine de Kooning, "Subject: What, How or Who?" Art News (April 1955), 26-29ff.
11. Shahn, 53.
12. Ibid., 56-7.
13. Gibson, 205. "The evasion of intentional language by the Abstract Expressionists did, in any case, create a vacuum that was occupied by these two systems of criticism (Greenberg's and Rosenberg's), each of which narrowed the implications of the work to a significant degree."
14. Hirsch, 342-45; Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," from Against Interpretation (New York: Dell Publishing, Co., Inc., 1966), 10-14.
15. Munro, 115-16. Park's words: "I love the urgency of primitive art... the need, the anonymity."
16. Geldzahler.
17. Supra n.15.
18. Bill Berkson, "David Park: Facing Eden," Art in America (October 1987), 171.
19. Rothko quoted by Gibson, 196.
20. Mark Rothko, "The Romantics were Prompted," from Possibilities I (Winter 1947-8) in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 397f.
21. Ibid., 400.
22. Maurice Denis, "Definition of Neotraditionism," originally published in Art et Critique (1890), repr., Theories, 94.
23. Sandler, 179. "Rothko meant for his paintings to be perceived at once as a whole, and he achieved a holistic quality by spreading his color areas over the surface, terminating them near the canvas limits."
24. Dore Ashton, Arts and Architecture 75 (April 1958) in Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record, 402-3.

25. Baskin, 74. He added, "One wishes that it were possible to recapture, in viewing these works, the heightened emotional state of the artist while he was at work; and I fear that it is only through an act of gigantic self-deception that one can re-experience the meaning of the act of creation."

26. Panofsky, 13-14.

27. Sontag, "On Style," Against Interpretation, 28. "I have several time applied to the work of art the metaphor of a mode of nourishment. To become involved with a work of art entails, to be sure, the experience of detaching oneself from the world. But the work of art itself is also a vibrant, magical, and exemplary object which returns us to the world in some way more open and enriched." See also, Gilbert J. Rose, The Power of Form (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1980). In the foreword, Andrew Forge draws from Rose's accounts of the creative process and states: "The key development is that form and forming are seen as the upshot of a process of externalization and that content is provided by them rather than packaged within them. Although the words 'form' and 'content' are continually invoked, they appear as different ways of talking about the central dynamic process, which is not merely an upshot of a drive, but a directed search for rapprochement with the real world."

28. New Images of Man, 9.

29. Ibid.

30. Dennis Raverty, "Critical Perspectives on 'New Images of Man'," Art Journal 53 (Winter 1994), 62-4. The author places the figurative artist in the same category as the Abstract Expressionist--both "share a tragic view of the human situation." He draws on Stephen Polcari's ideas on the iconological nature of Abstract Expressionism to emphasize his claims which, in my interpretation, conclude more about the human element in Abstract Expressionism than the tragic aspect of figuration in the postwar era. For Peter Selz's view, see Joan Marter, "Recollections of 'New Images of Man'," in the same issue of Art Journal which is dedicated to Sculpture in postwar Europe and America.

31. Panofsky, 3-4.

32. Geldzahler.

33. Eleonora Bairati, Piero della Francesca (New York: Crescent Books, 1991), 10. The artists that influenced Park are mentioned by Signe Mayfield, David Park: Fixed Subjects (1993) Exhibition brochure.

34. Kenneth Clark, The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1956), 8-9.

35. John Berger, Ways of Seeing (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 14.

36. Ibid., "What is this 'seduction' he writes of? It is nothing less than the paintings working upon us. They work upon us because we accept the way Hals saw his sitters. We do not accept this innocently. We accept it in so far as it corresponds to our own observation of people, gestures, faces, institutions." See Ernest Gombrich, Art and Illusion (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 297-8, for his concept that a viewer never comes to the viewing experience with an "innocent eye."

37. Roland Barthes, quoted and discussed by David Freedberg, The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 430.

38. Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968), 6-9. Goodman explores Gombrich's notion of "no innocent eye" in the process of imitation, in the attempt to copy an object. He concludes that "In representing an object, we do not copy such a construal or interpretation-- we 'achieve' it."

39. Ibid., 36. In Goodman's discussion of realism, he adduces that "Reading of the first [painting which is rendered with fidelity to nature] is by virtually automatic habit; practice has rendered the symbols so transparent that we are not aware of any effort, of any alternatives, or of making any interpretation at all. Just here, I think, lies the touchstone of realism: not in quantity of information but in how easily it issues."

40. Adrian Stokes, Reflections on the Nude (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1967), 3-12.

41. Ibid., 4-5. "But if the nude in this sense is a somewhat rarefied conception, it remains an immense power. The human body thus conceived is a promise of sanity.... I propose that the respect thus founded for the general body is the seal upon our respect for other human beings as such (and even for consistently objective attitudes to things as such); an important factor, therefore, in regard not only to respect but to tolerance and benevolence."

42. "David Park: Fixed Subjects," (January 20 - April 24, 1994) The Palo Alto Cultural Center, Palo Alto, Ca.

43. Contemporary American Painting, 220.

44. Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting, 7.

45. Mayfield.

46. Berkson, 167.

47. Park, Artist's View, 4.

48. Park's enthusiasm for Jung in the formative years of his mature period seems to be overlooked by recent scholarship with the exception of Gibson's reference, 199. McChesney, 21f., quotes Hassel Smith, a colleague of Park's at CSFA, in reference to the conflict between Still/Abstract Expressionism and the ideas of Park and Bischoff. "And about that time, they were promoting very aggressively, as later they did in a somewhat different way, a certain kind of attitude about things which I disagreed with. It was, in part, political. I can remember, in fact, getting into a hell of a fight with them about this book Modern Man in Search of a Soul...They were all hung up on this Jung scene. Dave and Elmer were actively promoting this. They were handing out copies to everybody..."

49. C.G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York and San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company), first published in 1933.

50. Ibid., 156.

51. Ibid., 197.

52. Ibid., 171. The visual artist is interchangeable with Jung's reference to the poet. "In this way the work of the poet comes to meet the spiritual need of the society in which he lives, and for this reason his work means more to him than his personal fate, whether he is aware of this or not. Being essentially the instrument for his work, he is subordinate to it, and we have no reason for expecting him to interpret it for us."

53. Ibid.

54. David Park, Exhibition of Paintings (San Francisco: M.H. De Young Memorial Museum, 1959), quoted in New Figurative Art, 34.

55. Munro, 114.

56. Lydia Park, quoted by Berkson, 167. Jones points out that Mills and Armstrong reject the notion that this painting is a self-portrait, 169 n.76. Whether the subject is Page Schorer or Park, the effect of the image remains the same, as Lydia's reaction suggests.

57. Jones, 27. Berkson interjects Park's thoughts into his discussion of the sense of "lack of purpose" he finds in Standing Nude Male. "Park was once quoted as saying that he liked to paint 'people who could do anything but don't--people of potential.'" from "Up from Goopiness," Time (April 27, 1962), 48; Armstrong sees Park's change, from the narrative format of his group paintings to the isolated figure compositions, as transformative in the psychological impact of his work. "By using a single monumental figure and situating it in a richly ambiguous habitat suggestive of nature, Park completed his move from ordinary and locatable subjects to figurative symbols that can allude to universal human conditions." p.39.

58. Betty Turnbull, David Park Retrospective (Newport Beach, Ca.: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1977) Exhibition catalogue. "He felt clothes were frivolous and indulgent, and personally enjoyed wearing hand-me-downs."; Mills, in New Figurative Art, states that "Park's figures eventually begin to transcend their life studio origins and go beyond the level of merely naked into the more ideal realm of the nude. No longer does the viewer ask whether they are bathers of life models, whether they are clothed or naked. Clothes assert the social personality and deny the animal, physical organism; mere nakedness does the opposite, asserting organism, denying personality. Park's

58. (cont.) nudes unify personality and organism again; they are members of that ideal race which exists only in the imagination and on the painted canvas, in which flesh and spirit are again one." Mills also observed Park's art as working towards a humanist synthesis of body and spirit.

59. Freedberg, 51. The author defines "the first stage of making it [the artwork] operative, is....the painting of the eyes." As a case in point, Freedberg presents the "all-seeing eye of God" as a metaphor for the phenomenon of "the unchangeable gaze" of great artworks viewed by the 15th century theologian Nicolas of Cusa.

60. New Figurative Art, 98; Jones, 27.

61. Berkson, 199.

62. Margaret Walters, The Male Nude: A New Perspective (New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978) 104-5. "But in the self-portrait, the genitals are drawn with painstaking accuracy; hard and knotted, all the troubling and rebellious life of the body seems concentrated there. Durer breaks one of the deepest of all taboos: he brings scientific curiosity to bear even on his own sex; and his uneasiness before his own double, that beautiful dying body, only sharpens his perceptions."

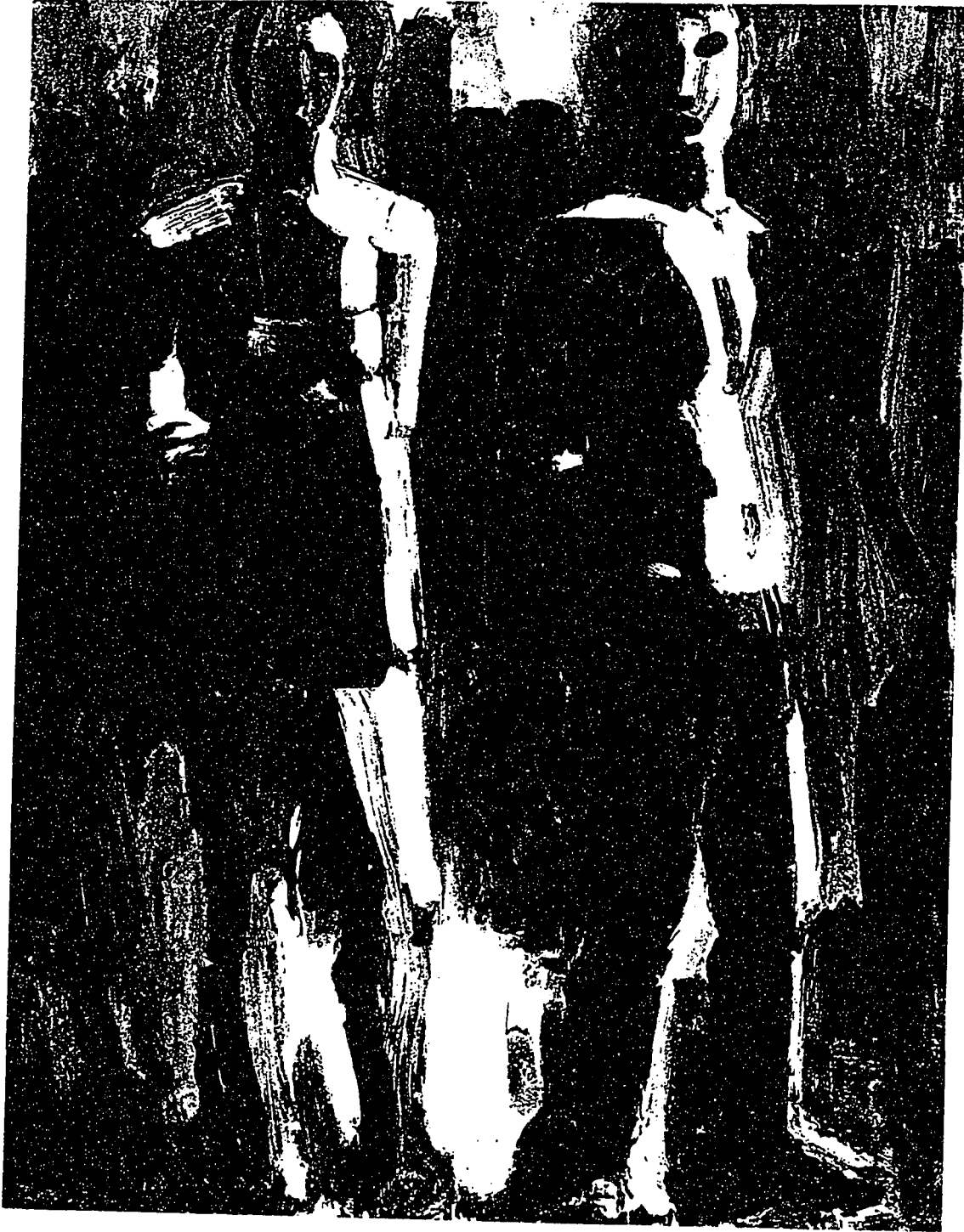
63. Armstrong, 39.

64. José Ortega Y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956), 6.

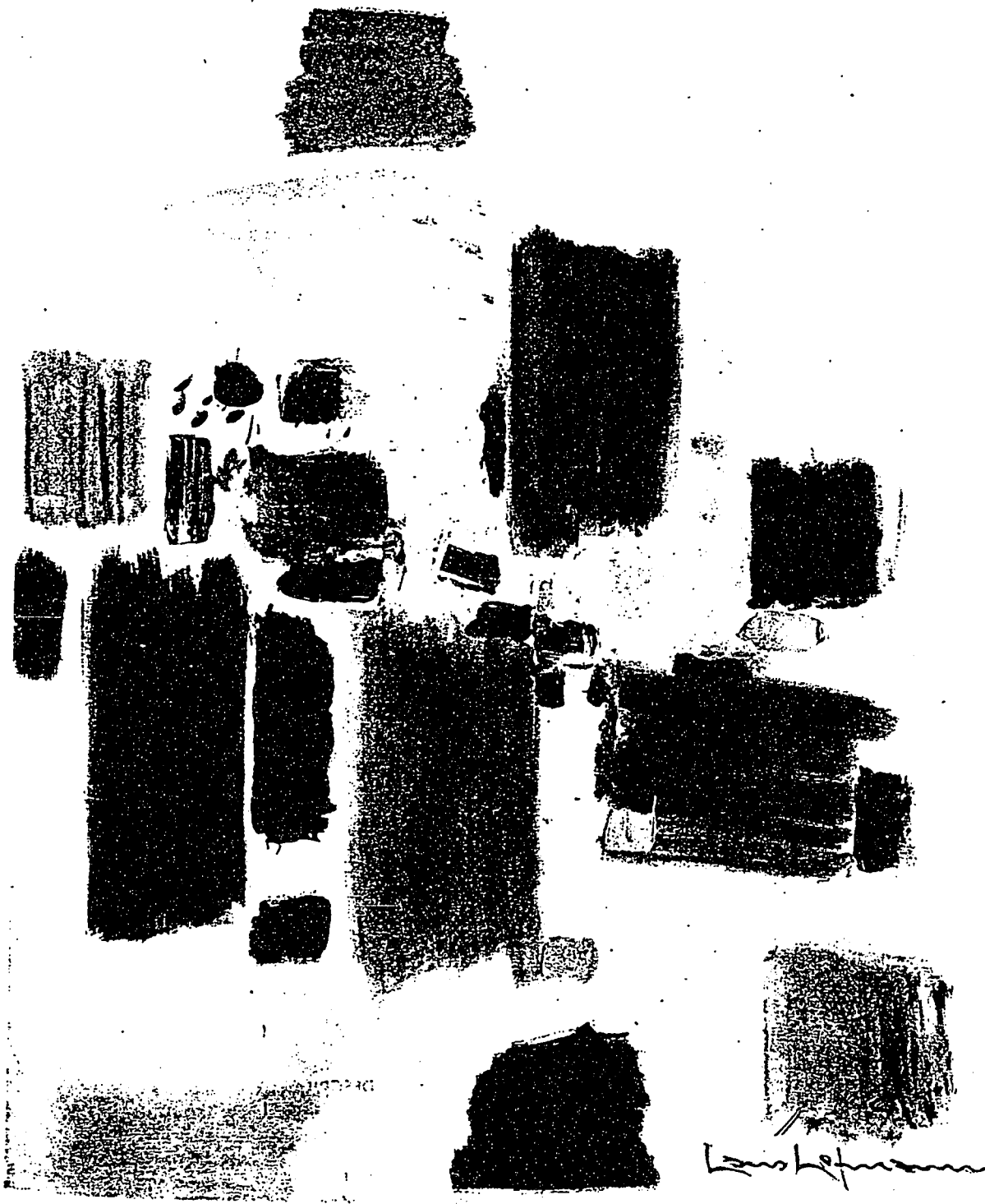
65. Thomas Albright, "The Shaky Position of a 'New Realist'," San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle (Dec.18, 1977), 48.

Chapter 6. CONCLUSION

1. Susan Gablik, "The Reenchantment of Art," New Art Examiner 15 (December 1987), 30-32. As an antidote for alienation--a product of modernism--the author states, "then the need to re-experience the world as sacred will be a crucial factor in transforming the dominant social paradigm." Park's return to the representation of the figure, deeply involved with a dialectical process and invested with personal significance, was his way of pushing aside the modern world of the 1950s.



1. David Park, Standing Couple, 1958. Oil on canvas, 75 x 57 inches. Krannert Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.



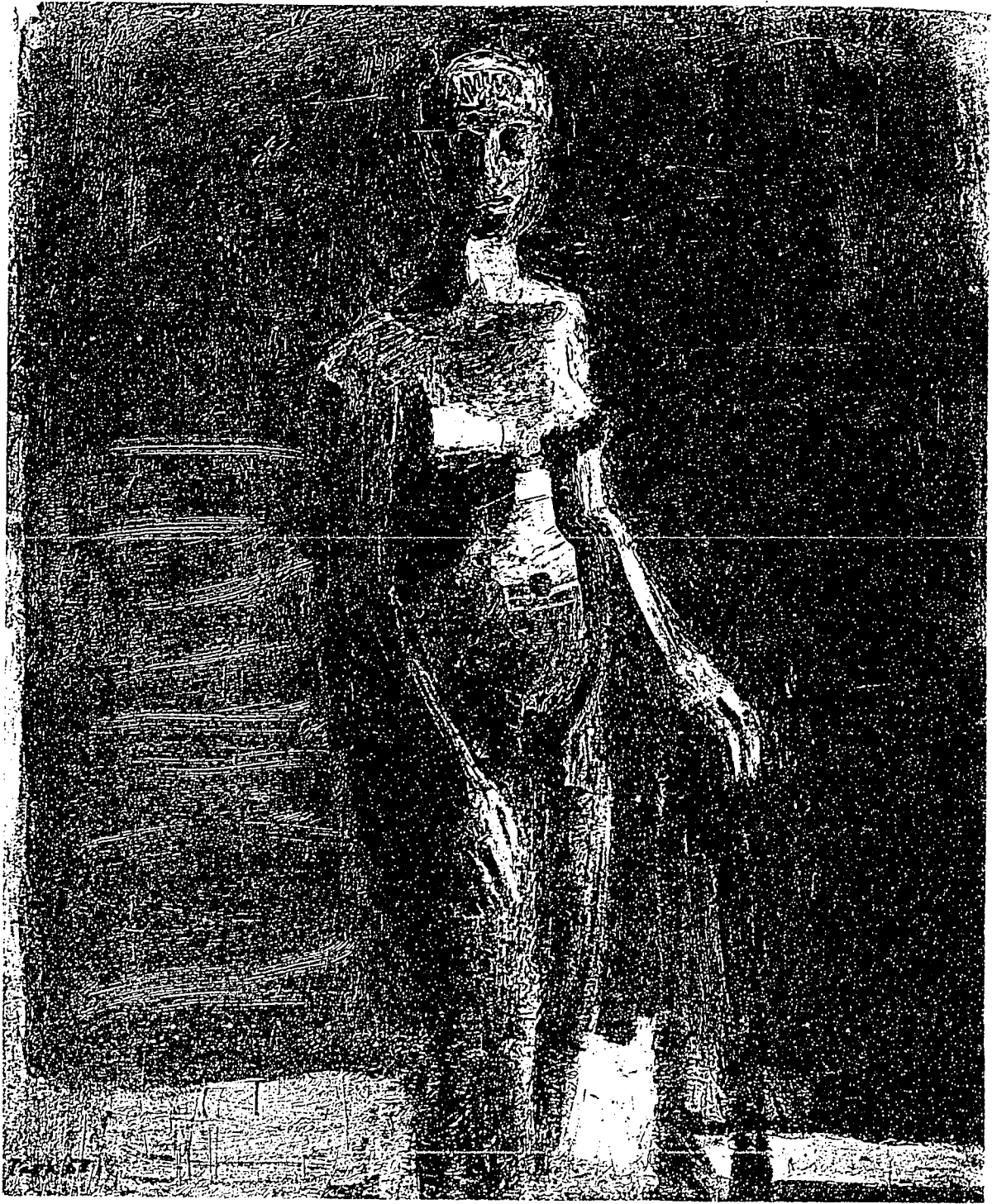
2. Hans Hofmann, Sparks, 1957. Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Theodore N. Law, Houston, Texas.



3. David Parks, Non-Objective, 1949. Oil on canvas, 34 x 25 inches. Art Department, The Oakland Museum.



4. David Park, Kids on Bikes, 1950. Oil on canvas, 48 x 42 inches. The Regis Collection, Minneapolis.



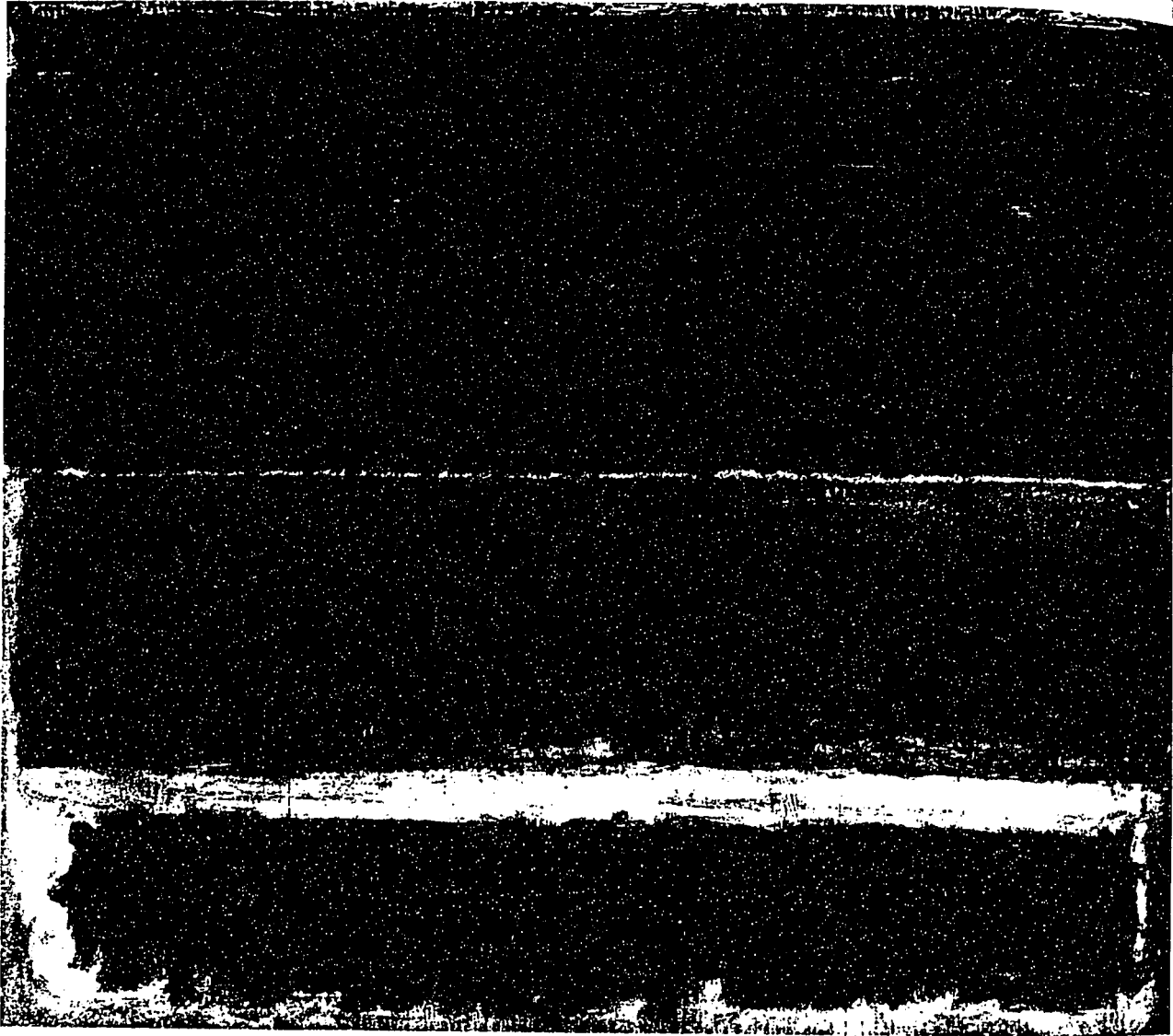
5. David Park, Nude - Green, 1957. Oil on canvas, 68 x 56 3/8 inches. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Julian Eisenstein, Washington, D.C.



6. David Park, Daphne, 1959. Oil on canvas, 75 x 57 inches.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. James R. Patton, Jr.



7. David Park, Head, 1959. Oil on canvas, 19 x 16 inches.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy J. Younger.



8. Mark Rothko, Four Darks in Red, 1958. Oil on canvas, 102 x 116 1/4 inches. Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



9. David Park, Four Men, 1958. Oil on canvas, 57 x 92 inches.
Collection Whitney Museum of American Art.



Photograph by Imogen Cunningham.

10. Photograph of David Park by Imogen Cunningham.



11. David Park, Standing Male Nude in The Shower, 1957.
Oil on canvas, 70 1/4 x 37 3/4 inches. Private collection.
Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York.



12. Albrecht Dürer, Naked Self-Portrait, c. 1503.
Schlossmuseum, Weimar.

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