NOTE TO USERS

On Sentimentality

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On Sentimentality" describes sentimentality as a space-biased mode of perception. Set in a theory of modes, it is argued that, much less than being a manifestation of emotion, sentimentality is a rational conceptualization of experience and meaning. The expression and experience of meaning is considered by tracing the relationship of time and space dimensions from the mythic and rhetorical modes which emphasize the time dimension, to the balance achieved in the formal mode, to the dominance of the space dimension in the descriptive and sentimental modes. It is suggested that where the descriptive mode analyzes the entities and conditions of the mundane world, the sentimental mode applies these rational methods of analysis to the expressive dimension of human experience.

"On Sentimentality" also proposes a perspective for understanding the significance of the sentimental phenomenon in contemporary Western culture. Bringing examples from literature, criticism and art into the discussion, this study draws connections with parallel space-biased modes, and offers a reappraisal of the value and function of criticism and tradition.

« Sur la Sentimentalité » décrit la sentimentalité comme étant un mode subjectif de perception. Organisé dans une théorie de modes, on démontre que, bien plus qu'une manifestation d'émotion, la sentimentalité est une conceptualisation rationnelle d'expérience et de sens. L'expression et l'expérience de sens sont considérées, en traitant les relations de temps et d'espace, depuis les modes mythiques et rhétoriques soulignant la dimension de temps, jusqu'à l'équilibre atteint dans le mode formel et la prédominance de la dimension spatiale dans les modes descriptifs et sentimentaux. Il est suggéré que le mode descriptif analyse les entités et les conditions de l'être humain, le mode sentimental applique ces méthodes rationnelles d'analyse à la dimension expressive de l'expérience humaine.

« Sur la Sentimentalité » propose aussi ouverture pour comprendre la signification du phénomène sentimental dans la culture occidentale contemporaine. Apportant des exemples provenant de la littérature, de critiques ou encore de l'art, cette étude établit des connexions avec les modes subjectifs parallèles, et offre une réévaluation des valeurs et fonctions de la critique et de la tradition.

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Forward: Regarding a Sentimental Art World

In 2002 while beginning my work on this study of sentimentality I went to an exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art. The show included prints by Piranesi, Goya, and a pair of contemporary British artists Dinos and Jake Chapman. Despite my familiarity with Piranesi and Goya, and awareness of the Chapman Brothers—who have gained notoriety through Saatchi's "Sensation" and other Young British Artist (YBA) vehicles-- I was doubly struck by this show and returned to see it on several occasions. On the one hand, I was stirred and enlivened by the artistic boldness of Piranesi and Goya, their experimentation, their formal and imaginative reinventions, and the individual expression of their work and vision. Then there was the Chapman's work, a bland series of mostly obscene prints void of skill, invention, and meaning. But what struck me most about the Chapmans was despite the aggressively obscene images, the work felt distinctly sentimental. Sentimentality is usually associated with warm, fuzzy, saccharine effects, so how is it possible that prints whose images are clearly intended to offend and disgust, simultaneously bring off the sensation of a preciously unveiled cliché? What are the underlying mechanics of such a cliché? And what makes the work of Piranesi and Goya different? The contrast between the earlier masters' vitality and dignity, and the contemporary brothers' ineptitude and sentimentality could not have been more dramatic, and in the subsequent months and years that I have gone on to think of the nature of sentimentality this exhibition has taken shape as a framework for my thoughts.

This study proposes a definition for sentimentality and as such endeavours to achieve conceptual clarity on a matter about which much has been written and said. However, concepts only have value when they are envisioned in a broader context of meaning. In recent years, with the ascendancy of critical theory in the academy, there has been a tendency to elaborate complex concepts with very little attention to developing an understanding of their meaning and value to human experience. The emphasis has been on abstract description and analysis, while questions of human significance have often been assumed to be self-evident, or a subjective matter which muddies the systems of information being produced. In a class that combined Renaissance literature and feminist and gender theory concepts such as "transvestite ventriloquism" were eagerly applied and embellished, while questions like how and why feminist theory is a valuable means of approaching literature were received with silence. The inability to discuss these questions does not mean that the questions themselves lack answers, but rather that in the labyrinths of abstract conceptualization the disciplined art of self-reflection has been sidelined.

As Michael Bell observes the absence of conversation on the more general meaning of theoretical insights has lead to criticism which on the one hand is a kind of "emotional indulgence" and on the other "a going through the academic motions, and sometimes both at once."[1] He goes on to caution, "ideological perception has itself to be accompanied by emotional self-knowledge. Otherwise, ideological critique becomes the characteristic late twentieth-century form of sentimentalism: the too-ready justification of feeling by a moral idea."[2] In order to indicate a sense

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[1] Michael Bell, Sentimentalism, Ethics, and The Culture of Feeling (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 204.
[2] Bell 204.

of why a definition of sentimentality has importance, I will offer a perspective. Perspective is a statement of a position, but it is also our best chance for objectivity because it provides analysis with an integrated vision of meaning. No perspective is ever complete—there will be biases and oversights—but the very nature of its limitations is its strength: perspective is social; it opens opportunity to others to propose further perspectives and by these means it freely participates in the culture it observes. Theory allows us to achieve clarity over our concepts and language, but it is in adopting a perspective that one is able to pose questions and frame concerns. While sentimentality in itself can never be strictly good or bad, the all-pervasive nature of its presence in our culture should give us pause. We should be keen to understand the possibilities and limitations of sentimentality and ask questions of it which address our most valued principles: To what extent does sentimentality free us? What does it free us from? And to what extent does it reorient us within new bonds?—questions which speak to the ethical dimension of sentimentality.

Questions of ethics are not foreign to scholarship on sentimentality. In its historical context, the emergence of sentimentality is connected to the rise of the middle class, the expansion of Modern rights and freedoms which have given political reality to the autonomous and democratically empowered individual, and the progressive dissolution of hierarchies of every shape and form. For some critics, these social developments have an inherent rightness which outweighs any costs or side-effects, and such individuals perceive it as a moral and social duty to extend Modern individualism and self-empowerment wherever its progress has

been impeded. To other observers, the expansion and elaboration of individual rights has atomized society to such an extent that forms of social coherence have been jeopardized, if not altogether undermined. To such individuals, the leveling of all forms of cultural standards and traditions, including those of a disciplinary nature, has "flattened" the cultural sphere, reducing the scope of human experience and expression: they perceive the paradox that while the individual has gained unprecedented rights, he has lost a dimension of the self, and, with the skepticism of a more conservative spirit, critics observe the irony that modes of militant self-empowerment can frequently look a lot like mass conformism.

The exhibition in Montreal is one example of this very debate put to the test. Sentimentality exists beyond the art world, but the specific occasion at the Montreal Museum provides me with an occasion to consider sentimentality *in situ*. In the show there were Eighteenth Century formal masters juxtaposed with Twenty-first century sentimentalists. These artists are well representative of their periods—so the question is how did we get from one to the other? This is not a history paper, but I will give a brief account of significant intellectual turning points that offer a suggestion of the larger historical picture in which the movement from formal art to sentimental art occurred. To do this I must also consider aspects related to qualities of the work and practice of these respective movements.

When one defines Piranesi and Goya as formal masters one means that they have been trained in the Western discipline of formal composition. As the word discipline implies, the individual, to acquire skills and understanding, must submit

to a body of distinct practices. One acquires training in the principles and elements of composition, and learns to see subject matter in the form of composition. Through such vision, the artist transforms his subject matter, giving it heightened reality. This process is the cultivation of the individual's means of seeing expressive and poetic meaning in the human condition and the world.

While acquiring discipline requires the individual to submit to specific practices, what one finds, and what Piranesi and Goya themselves serve to demonstrate, is that formal discipline is the means to individual expression. Piranesi and Goya share much in the way of a common formal discipline, yet the works reveal two artists of wholly different natures, each with an independent vision and distinct expressive sensibility. Acquiring artistic discipline is achieving fluency in a visual language. More than, merely, recognizing its symbols, it is taking possession of the structures of a language such that one may create meaning anew. Language is a compact of mutual belonging, and in this it is also the means by which we can communicate how we perceive and experience differently. The artist's vocation is to practice the art of conveying with directness and precision a vision and expressive truth of the experience of being human in the world. Art takes us beyond ourselves and brings us home again to a deeper and more expansive appreciation of human meaning.

The examples of Piranesi's work represented in the Montreal exhibition include two of his major etching series: *Le Vedute di Roma* which pictures the architectural monuments of Rome, and his celebrated series *Carceri d'Invenzione* which depicts the vast interiors of imaginary prisons. Piranesi is often remembered

for the seeming novelty of his subject matter—the prisons are highly evocative and compelling in their symbolism, and the *Vedute* satisfy the viewer's eye with abundant detail of the architectural splendor of Rome; yet, while we may think of Piranesi in terms of his subject matter, in his day they were quite conventional. Like Shakespeare, Piranesi took the material at hand and transformed its meaning and expressive potential. Through the formal discipline of a master, Piranesi reconceived conventional visual tropes and themes, and reinvented how we imagine prisons and monuments. Like Dante's Hell and Kafka's modern bureaucracy, we are able to *see* prisons—see in prisons a profound expression of human experience—because Piranesi imagined them for us.

Piranesi's power to renew conventional themes is born of his ability to articulate his vision of such imagery in compositional form. Though attracted by the range and variety of his subject matter, Piranesi shows disinterest in matters of iconology and symbolism and as an artist he is best understood as an inspired formalist. What is profound in Piranesi's vision originates in the works' formal conviction: the *Carceri* depict vast cavernous spaces, and as such give focus to interior volume, and the *Vedute*, in representing the architectural monuments of Rome, feature powerful central masses. This compliment functions on a poetic level as well: the *Carceri* express the depth and pathos of the interior life, while the *Vedute* convey the endless variety, and industry of external existence. In the *Carceri* we find despair for the human soul's captivity, yet to see the monumental proportions of these limitations—the massive stone walls, the domes and arches, the staircases leading to further chambers—is also to witness their transformation.

These barriers are the means by which the beauty of the interior world is defined. The massive and inert walls convey the living expansiveness within. The *Vedute*, in contrast, are often comic in nature and frequently tend toward irony; and most impressive is their power to represent monuments while remaining free of any propagandistic burden. Piranesi views his subjects with the eyes of a common spectator; he combines a keen empiricism with a human propensity for theatre. It is not the monumental thing itself which is the subject of these prints, but, more fully, the contradictory nature of monumentality. The monuments emerge as vast forms from the vegetation or haphazard roadways as a crystallization of human industry. Yet, while they represent order, power, and impressive achievement, their states of completion remove them from the activity and spontaneity of the street. The monuments are established and complete, but the life around them has the lasting freedom of spontaneity and improvisation. Before the grand Palasso Barberini we find peasants reclining and gesticulating among the ancient debris and shrubs; among the monuments and ruins of the Roman Forum we find cattle and their herdsmen about their daily activities; next to the Portico of Octavia we see laundry hanging from a balcony. Piranesi's view of monuments attends to the life of worldly contradictions: the eye of the independent spectator is not precious or censorious, but democratic in its vision.

In *The Disasters of War*, Goya makes use of the series' linearity, conceiving each print within a larger narrative sequence. The first print depicts a Job-like figure—his clothes are rent, and he is debased and kneeling in the dust, peering ominously into encroaching darkness above—but unlike the Biblical myth, Goya's

sequence does not offer the consolation of restoration. The penultimate print shows truth lying dead at the feet of the throngs which have come to bury her, and the final print captioned, "Will she rise again?" depicts truth as she is momentarily resurrected, the glow of her light disfiguring the world by revealing the demons which lurk behind the crowd's masked countenances. As Goya perceives, it is the legacy of war which is the final and lasting disaster: a culture's horror at its own violence and inhumanity stunts life and its capacity to heal; unable to admit truth it becomes a diabolical world of darkness beset by secrecy, hypocrisy, and perpetual conspiracy. In this manner, Goya renews the classical imagery of war—the Iliadic rage and sorrow—in a manner both profound and arresting.

Though this review of the art of Piranesi and Goya exhibited in Montreal is brief, certain qualities about the philosophical framework and artistic context of their work stand out. As I have stressed both artists trained in a discipline, but what one quickly ascertains from looking at their work is that a common discipline is the means by which they are able to express meaning and articulate vision. Their expression develops out of a formal interplay between the artist's subjectivity and the cultivated objectivity of perspective, between the individuality of the perceiver, and the commonality of artistic language and its forms. The viewer is able to enter these artists' works and be moved, because as artists they have transformed experience into forms of human expression. They are able to renew the meaning of old forms and eternal human concerns because they can articulate with conviction how they, unique from others, see and interpret them. That every individual is unique from all others is a material fact which we recall whenever we look at

snowflakes, and the ideal of formal discipline--as Piranesi and Goya demonstrate so well--is to liberate such individuality from a material condition into articulate form: to be able to express oneself is a form of human freedom, but, by the same token, one can only be *free* to express as one is *capable* of expressing.

The recent trend of juxtaposing the work of earlier Masters with Contemporary artists is sometimes referred to a "dialoguing." The impetus behind this is not unfounded. All art has a period in which it is "contemporary" and it is quite nature to want to understand the present in relation to the past. However, dialogue relies on the presence of a common language, and between the formal Piranesi and Goya, and the contemporary Chapmans no common language exists.

The Chapman's are not alone in breaking away from formal artistic language, and, indeed, it would be difficult to find a contemporary artist today with a significant profile who could participate in a visual dialogue with Piranesi and Goya. Formal art relies on a balance between cultural cohesion and individualism, between intuitive expression and analysis, between the human artist and his practical technique, and though this balance may be stretched and emphasis may shift, these forces must maintain an active interdependency. Over the course of the Modern period and into the present we see traditional forms of intuition and cultural cohesion slipping away and a rationalized individualism making its dramatic ascent as the prominent ideology and methodology of the West. Armstrong suggests that the significant and mainstream break occurs in the late fifties and early sixties[3]

[3] Karen Armstrong, The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001) 233.

when art becomes an institution of radical individualism in a manner that has since remained sacrosanct.

In his study of the history of art education, Carl Goldstein gives a succinct depiction of the mainstream shift from formal discipline to the institution of Contemporary art in the break between the art and philosophy of Josef Albers and those of his famous student Robert Rauschenberg.[4] Albers began at the Bauhaus in Europe but later brought the movement's theories to America, first to Black Mountain and latter to Yale University, directly teaching and more broadly influencing a generation of American artists who came to prominence in the fifties and sixties. Among the Bauhaus' founding tenets was the belief that art cannot be taught. What this meant was that in teaching art one does not address the human subject, the developing student artist, but devotes all energy and insight to the properties of materials and their abstract principles. The belief was that in working toward total refinement and perfection in analysis "work [would] blossom into art"[5]: out of a completely rationalized process, expressive meaning would magically emerge. The Bauhaus' approach to art and teaching was in no sense holistic; despite Walter Gropius' utopian ideals of initiating a revival of artisan fraternity modeled on medieval craft guilds, in practice this highly analytical discipline did nothing to address the cultivation of the artist's inner spirit or human vision; the focus was emphatically on external methods of analyzing materials and abstract concepts. The Bauhaus took the principles and elements of the traditional formal discipline and distilled them to produce a "pure" and highly rationalized

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[4] Carl Goldstein, Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[5] Goldstein 261.

approach to art. Because, as Albers believed, art could not be taught, he taught what could be taught: the exacting science of abstract visual relationships. It was a discipline which denied the intuitive and spontaneous dimension of visual form, and as his "Homage to the Square" series attests he has able to produce visual effects, but not visual forms of expression.

It was this rationalist orthodoxy and purified aesthetic that Rauschenberg, in concert with the times, *in part* rebelled against. His large collages like those from the *Combine Series* demonstrate an appetite for extravagant gestures and his brash stylishness and bravura recall the showmanship of the archetypal nineteenth century salon painting—the very type of painting which the Bauhaus sought to repudiate. Inheriting the concept from Albers that art can not be taught, Rauschenberg turns its meaning on its head. Instead of saying art cannot be taught *thus* one teaches principles, analysis, and technique, Rauschenberg and other artists of his ilk inaugurate a new and mainstream radical stance: art cannot be taught, therefore the artist must exist *a priori* of acquiring artistic discipline. Under this belief, art training becomes an individual's search for his own artistic self, an exploration of his own innate creative genius. Within this mindset any traditional authority or artistic standards cease to have relevance, for who can have authority over my inner artist other than myself? If this is the case, what then *can* anyone teach me?—and in a revealing comment concerning his former teacher, Rauschenberg remarks, "He wasn't easy to talk to, and I found his criticism so devastating that I never asked for it"[6]--thus evidently the answer, for Rauschenberg, is "nothing that I can't do without." The tendency towards extreme individualism is a systemic undermining

[6] Goldstein 283.

of tradition and discipline; and, at the same time, as Rauschenberg's comment indicates it is a highly defensive stance that is both anti-social and aggressively present-minded.

Concerning Rauschenberg's work, Goldstein perceives that the "stroke, smear, drip, splatter" marks on his collages appear as a self-consciously devised inventory of motifs.[7] Where Albers directed his exacting analysis towards the properties of the materials and pure abstract principles, Rauschenberg turns the same attention to his *own* mark. Furthermore, where Albers sought to empty materials of any associative content, Rauschenberg seeks to invest his marks with potential meanings that are pseudo-totemic. In Rauschenberg's work artist's marks are de-contextualized and become singular objects of attention. In contrast, the marks or lines of Piranesi and Goya function in the context of the forms they describe—they are the *means* of creating the composition in concrete visual terms. In the process of creating, these lines are transformed by what they have created, becoming in the context of the work expressive of the artist's concentration and spontaneity, delicacy and force. In Rauschenberg's work his marks exist without context; instead of being a means to create and express, the marks are an end in themselves. A mark is a mark; one sees the mark—the stroke, smear, drip, splatter, etc...--and it *is* that mark. The meaning of the mark becomes mundane, typifying the ultimate reductionism to which rationalism can lead.

Such reductionism is cynical and to live at this level of debased purpose is something humans have ways of distracting themselves from—thus we come to the other aspect of the artist's mark. Where the mark has no context *in* the work in

[7] Goldstein 283.

which the mark may function in a meaningful way, external commentary can be supplied: we move from "a mark is a mark" to "this mark is Rauschenberg's mark," "this mark is meaningful because Rauschenberg made it." What we find here is a rational identification, but instead of turning outward it enacts a personalization which is strikingly sentimental.

The most complete precedent for Rauschenberg's work is in Dada, the primarily European movment founded in 1916 whose agenda was to produce an anti-art that demonstrated the members' anarchical and nihilistic views. While they sought to draw attention to the illogical and absurd nature of art and society, in practice their work and program was highly rationalized. The works and methods were calculated to be nonsensical and were inseparable from the group's manifesto which explicitly outlined their intentions. Thus we find in Dada the contemporary art formula of a variously wrought object with no autonomous meaning paired with a critical manifesto or artist's statement. Rauschenberg's talent lay in repackaging Dada reductionism with pop icons, thus fabricating a product that was slick and palatable to the mainstream.

The individualist ideology which is fundamental to Rauschenberg's work and success has become more tenacious with time. Radical individualism has become ubiquitous and as viewers of contemporary art we have become inured to the absence of traditional standards and discipline in contemporary art spaces. Trained by habit, we know not to expect to find meaning *in* the contemporary art object, but to be fed meaning through a separate, critical, non-visual source.

Recently, a culture journalist reported seeing a show by a New York artist of pedestals with nothing on top of them. He relates that the artist

> gave an articulate talk in the gallery about why she was preoccupied with pedestals, with different ways of seeing art, and with what was the connection, in her mind, between the photographs and the video and the boxes. (The connections turn out to be idiosyncratic, abstract and largely punning.)[8]

Here the Rauschenberg model is repeated, though, in place of marks, we find pedestals. The irony and failure of this kind of work is that visual art ceases to be about vision or seeing, and rather becomes a conceptual fantasy about what one might see if only it were possible for the artist to represent it in visual terms. Not having been trained in a visual discipline, artists like this New Yorker do not know how to see or envision in articulate form the very abstract and esoteric concepts they seek to convey. Another way of looking at it is to observe that the concepts which "interest" the artist have insufficient depth, meaning and subtlety to warrant and sustain a pictorial composition. While formal discipline trains the artist to represent how she sees, it also trains her how to see and think in a manner that is more dynamic and profound.

The Chapman brothers reproduce the same model of mundane object and external individualized conceptual framework. Not surprisingly the work itself is uninventive and uses much the same ingredients as Rauschenberg's collages and silkscreens. In the Chapman's series we find the now thoroughly commonplace juxtaposition of reproductions of "old" masters with more contemporary images

[8] Russell Smith, "Virtual Culture," The Globe and Mail 28 Sept., 2002.

and icons layered with self-consciously produced marks—a practice that is technique without substance. The Chapmans reproduce images from Goya's *Disasters of War* and variously enlarge, repeat, colour, and manipulate them. In one such example they have reproduced a child from one of Goya's etching and changed its nose to an erect penis. Images of genitalia and Nazi insignia are scrawled randomly here and there, arranged and layered with other images. There are also other marks which crop up throughout the series that imitate a child's manner of drawing. As a final embellishment, the etchings have been given washes of water colour--on some prints just in the odd spot, on others the entire page is saturated with colour.

The Chapman's have stated that it is their intent to make "dead" art, "[d]ead in content and dead—or inert—in materiality," and to achieve a cultural value of nil. As their work attests, this is as easily done as said, and they have, perhaps rightly, mocked what they term the "secular humanist" effort of critics, museum administrations, and contemporary art scholars to find and interpret meaning in their work. While they are correct in their estimation of their own work, this rightness merely reflects their timidity. While seeking to explode the triviality of the contemporary art world, the Chapmans simultaneously capitalize in perpetuating it: the art work means nothing and they say it means nothing, a formula which has brought the brothers prizes, inflated sale prices and art world celebrity status.

The Chapmans' work and program is, like others we have observed, a highly rationalized affair. Their work contrives a recognizable inventory of

obscene images and concepts: the prints are offensive, but more accurately they are the concept and image of offensive. As a metamorphosis of the human into the dehumanized, Picasso's *Figures at the Seashore* (1931) is a profoundly unsettling work. In contrast, the Chapman's offensiveness is offensive-*light*—the effect of the calculated image of the child with the disfigured nose is, merely, gratuitous and predictable. That the Chapman's accept their own triviality is cynical; that they relish in the emptiness of their work conveys a self-reflexivity that is precious and sentimental.[9]

Producing concepts and images of obscenity is an adolescent caprice with dark consequences. As Jane Jacobs notes in her most recent book, "the substitution of image for substance" entails and perpetuates a "disconnection from reality."[10] As we have observed, Piranesi and Goya transformed conventional themes and imagery, renewing their urgency and significance, by conveying them through independent vision. Lacking discipline, the Chapmans can only redeploy conventional images and icons. Unable to depict their vision of human brutality, they insert commonplace and recognizable icons of brutality—Nazi motifs and insignia—into their works as required and inevitable replacements. The result of this strategy is mundane, unfortunate, and disrespectful. Instead of renewing our memory and understanding of the horror of Nazi brutality, their process, disturbingly, turns Nazi symbols—and historical memory—into clichés of brutality and horror.

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[9] The Chapman's stance recalls Milan Kundera's succinct description of sentimentality: "Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch. Qtd. in Solomon.

[10] Jane Jacobs, Dark Age Ahead (New York: Random House, 2004) 136.

Extreme rationalization is coextensive with an obsession with control. As we observed earlier on with the Bauhaus who rejected more holistic teaching philosophies and methods, this kind of control is only possible by radically reductive means. It is easier to control images and concepts than such vagaries as human life and arts of self-knowledge; and it is easier still to control images and concepts when they have been rendered virtually devoid of substance through unintelligent overexposure. That the collector Saatchi has invested and promoted artists like the Chapmans is not surprising. Their blatant lack of artistry and skill is an asset, as there can be no doubt about what the buyer is getting. These works are simple to control—indeed, are made to be controlled—because they have no vision, no autonomous meaning and are effective in expressing nothing. Saatchi can use them to any end or effect which he dreams up, because he can always rely on these works to be nothing other than their base material conditions.

To seek near total control over effect is to surrender the means of expression. While their individualism is monumental, the Chapman's ability to articulate anything meaningful about themselves and the world is insignificant and unsubstantial. In their individualistic efforts to control effect, they lack the means to control even the most elementary terms of their self-expression and are confined to reacting against the work and expression of others.

The violence and hostility underlying the Chapman's preoccupation with Goya—like other post-Modernists' obsession with formal masters—should not be taken lightly. For the series exhibited in Montreal the Chapmans' expropriated images from Goya's *Disasters* and disfigured them in a manner already outlined.

Elsewhere they have exhibited an actual edition of Goya's *Disasters* on which they had drawn clown faces over the faces of Goya's figures. They have also won fame for producing a life-sized diorama of one of Goya's prints using mannequin body parts. The Chapmans' effort to expropriate, undermine, and destroy Goya's work is real and intense. The eloquence and artistic competence of the formal master provokes a willful rage that is manifest in the Chapmans' work and program. In rejecting the past, its standards and discipline, the Chapmans are confounded by Goya's shameless ability to express and speak frankly of human truth. Next to the independence of his voice and vision, they must fade into inarticulate conformists.

The degree to which some museum curators and art scholars loathe and fear the work of great artists of the past seems to rise in proportion to their acceptance of contemporary art's anti-art as a legitimate standard. Inserting the Chapmans' series at the end of the larger exhibition of works by Piranesi and Goya struck me very forcibly as an act of spite; and spite is always intended to lock us up and turn us away. To appreciate expression in art one cannot adopt a defensive stance; to experience the art of Piranesi and Goya one must be willing to accept the experience. One enters their vision by leaving behind the daily armour of pre-conceived notions: to see art we must admit of our vulnerability—our vulnerability to being wrong, to being fixed in our thinking and seeing, to being uncertain, and unknowing—and only as we are unburdened by our defenses are we able to experience our liberty in forms of human expression. To move from art that allows us to participate in the life of the imagination and trust in the meaning we find there—indeed, art that acknowledges our humanity—and move to the glib cynicism

of the Chapmans is akin to a slap in the face. The Chapmans deny what is human in art and ourselves, replacing experience with a degraded surliness.

In a culture that is oriented to extreme rationalization, the experience of expression is an ever rarer phenomenon and many out of fear of appearing simple in their trust are inclined to forgo it—a cynical individualism, we are lead to believe, is the sophisticated stance. Thus the truly destructive consequence of juxtaposing the Chapmans with Piranesi and Goya is to further marginalize expression in a context where it should be most freely available—in art galleries and museums. As we have observed, there is no dialogue between the Chapmans and the formal Piranesi and Goya; and where there is no sense of a relationship, there can only be, to borrow the terms from Foucault, difference or analogy, rejection or conformism.[11] Thus, formal masters are reduced to "traditional" against the Chapmans' claim of "contemporary." In the Montreal exhibition, the Chapmans' work is not only defensive and aggressive; it acts as a censure against meaning, expression and valuable forms of human freedom. When contemporary artists claim to be challenging traditional art forms and art spaces with their anti-art and sentimental conceptualizations, they are, merely, conforming to an over rationalized culture which is in danger of losing its freedom of expression through a loss of the experience and memory of what expression means and feels like.

While it is easy to regard the exhibition is Montreal as more shenanigans from an already discredited art world, art however absurd and self-indulgent is never separate from its larger context. For those who went to the show the

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[11] Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies. 4th ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (NewYork: Longman, 1998) 373.

relationship between art and the world could not have been more present. Only a few months earlier terrorists had piloted airplanes into the Twin Towers in New York, causing the buildings to collapse, taking the lives of thousands of people while injuring and causing anxiety to many more. With the planning stages well in advance of 9/11, curators of the show could never have imagined how urgent and relevant a show of Piranes's *Carceri* and *Vedute* and Goya's *Disasters of War* would be to its viewers. Seeing the images of the towers' massive debris and ruins, one is able to imagine them through Piranesi's vision as the immense monuments we humans fix for ourselves and which become instruments of our own imprisonment. And as the rhetoric of war quickly got underway, how vivid and true became Goya's vision that brutality is participated in from every side, and that the deeper disaster is the one we are less likely to see: the hypocrisy, secrecy, and conspiracy propelled by a lasting horror of truth.

Piranesi and Goya give us ways to see war and understand and express the human condition in these circumstances. Our culture has equipped us with such forms. Yet, one must ask, where are the living artists who can represent the profound nature of events in our own time? Where are the artists whose vision is capable of creating significant memory? Where are the artists capable of expressing what it is to be a human in this world? They are not in Saatchi's "Sensation", or in Tate Modern. They have not won the Turner prize or been to the Venice Biennale. Though they exist we hardly know of them--with an art world that supports anti-art they have become hard to find.

It is at junctures like these that we meet aesthetics merging with ethics, for how convenient it must have been for the Bush administration as it set about producing a war in a culture where there are no artists at hand with the discipline of Piranesi and Goya to give a frank and truthful expression of what they see. What could have been more perfect for a government with a preconceived determination to go to war than a public encouraged by its cultural scene to accept images without requiring substance?

In his article *The Last Critique*, Bruno Latour cites a recent comment from a Republican strategist: "Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainly a primary issue."[12] In light of this admission, Latour then wonders who is serving whom when

> [e]ntire Ph.D. programs, ostensibly under the guise of liberalism, are running to ensure that good American kids learn that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular stand point and so on.[13]

How can there be any expectation of substance when there is no appreciation of human forms of truth? To what extent does the institutionalization of cynicism in the academy, art world and other cultural institutions help render a public apathetic and inarticulate, while leaders advance short-sighted and destructive policies?

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[12] Bruno Latour, "The Last Critique," Harper's Magazine April 2004, 15.
[13] Latour 15-16.

While high emotion is an understandable response to an event such as 9/11, in the weeks, months and years which have followed no meaningful form has emerged to give these emotions a profound and coherent expression—rather, the American response has been, simultaneously, radically critical and overwhelmingly sentimental. But sentimentality has also been the official state response and here one must wonder, where, then, is the line between strategic ideological and rhetorical manipulation and a President so thoroughly sentimental that he is the first to be absorbed by the clichés he perpetuates? And if we can't gain perspective on ideology through forms of truth, how do we achieve any sense over the beginnings and ends of official state censorship? For where is the line between state censorship and a culture that is already in conformity with sentimentalism of its leaders?

High profile cases of censorship within Western culture may be the least of our worries where the question of freedom of expression is concerned—censorship at its most potent is at its least apparent. It is possible to violate our freedom of expression by clipping its very potential at the root—by rejecting its discipline, denying its substance, and, by such ubiquitous means, undermining the necessary conditions of creating and experiencing it.

Introduction: What is sentimentality?

In the previous section I outlined an example of sentimentality and the particular context in which I encountered it, but the example, as I noted, was somewhat unexpected: the Chapmans' work does not fit standard notions of sentimentality. Generally, the term "sentimental" brings to mind images of puppy dogs with big glassy eyes, or the fantasy of romance novels, or the plots of mainstream Hollywood movies which present the image of a perfect kind of love. We do not generally think of contemporary art in established museums displaying provocative images of brutality. The practical use of the Chapman example is to allow us to see sentimentality beyond its familiar guise with the aim of distinguishing the phenomenon from preconceived notions of it. While identifying examples of sentimentality is easily done; determining its precise nature is far less so—indeed, this may be the most challenging question of all: what *is* sentimentality?

The question of sentimentality is one about which, to borrow a phrase from the critic Northrop Frye, "there has been much endeavor and little attempt at perspective."[14] So my first task is to assert some order over previous ventures which I see as falling into a pattern of three general misconceptions. The first misconception is also the easiest to address. There is a common tendency among critics to cast the matter of sentimentality in terms of a socially and politically inflected hierarchy. Sentimentality is often described as low-culture, an assumption made by Dagmar Buchwald when she describes sentimentality "as a product of low

[14] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 3.

artistic quality but high sales records."[15] For some critics the low-culture designation is perfectly apt,[16] but to others the low status makes sentimentality morally worthy of some kind of critical-redemptive process. Buchwald, for one, argues that anti-sentimental critics practice an "emotional discrimination"[17]--a position used to launch an argument that more authentic values are found in sentimental works, with an eye to subverting a high-culture's apparent "authority." The difficulty with this position, however, is that categorizing sentimentality under low, or indeed, high-culture merely obscures its very nature which emphasizes relativity, not hierarchy. Furthermore, such an approach runs contrary to fact. Many of the works featured in the Nineteenth Century Salons of high-culture were ardently sentimental. In contrast, folktales, ballads, and other popular forms are not sentimental, and one might argue that it is the inability to experience and directly appreciate these popular forms which makes way for the sentimental response. Sentimentality may have mass appeal, but one must resist the temptation to conclude that mass appeal is a simple response to innate virtue. Its strikes me as just as likely that mass appeal could be based on far more complex processes. Sentimentality is not only a modern decadence, but a pervasive phenomenon found in esteemed cultural institutions as well as the gift section of the drugstore.

The second misconception is that sentimentality is constituted by certain kinds of subject matter. For example, the critic Winfried Herget presents sentimentality's "constituent features" as various core plots: plots of "underserved

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[15] Dagmar Buchwald, "Suspicious Harmony: Kitsch, Sentimentality, and the Cult of Distance," Sentimentality in Modern Literature and Popular Culture, ed. Winfried Herget (Tübingen: Narr, 1999) 35.
[16] Hermann Broch, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch," Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste, ed. Gillo Dorfles (New York: Universe Books, 1970) 49-67.
[17] Buchwald 35.

suffering, abuse and affliction," or stories of "self-denial, sacrifice, and even death as the ultimate sacrifice."[18] The weakness here is that these plots and motifs may also be found in *The Book of Job*, or *The Iliad*, or Christ's Passion. Indeed, there is nothing inherently sentimental about them. The critic, Winfried Fluck has similarly argued that sentimental literature is defined by themes of seduction and deception, and plots entailing "the strong affirmation of the family, the violation of the moral order and subsequent loss of family protection [...] separation and tearful reunion."[19] But again, the latter plot could easily apply to *The Story of Joseph*, and, regarding the themes, one has to wonder how many literary works exist which do not entail seduction or deception in some form or other—surely seduction and deception are two kinds of conflict that make plot possible. In defining sentimentality, one cannot rely on tabulations of common subject matter as a key to the phenomenon's peculiar structure. Rather, one must consider the way in which *any kind* of subject matter may be perceived in sentimental terms, for sentimentality exists not in the subject matter, but in the mode in which the subject matter is perceived.

That sentimentality is a mode of perception is reinforced by common experience. When two people regard the same object it is possible that only one of them will respond to it sentimentally--it is not the objects themselves are sentimental, but the person's mode of perceiving them. However, works of art, architecture, literature, music, performances, movies and other cultural works are a

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[18] Winfried Herget, "Towards a Rhetoric of Sentimentality," Sentimentality in Modern Literature and Popular Culture, ed. Winfried Herget (Tübingen: Narr, 1999) 4-6.
[19] Winfred Fluck, "Sentimentality and the Changing Function of Fiction," Sentimentality in Modern Literature and Popular Culture, ed. Winfried Herget (Tübingen: Narr, 1999) 16-17.

different case, because they are not objects in the normal sense. Such works, in their nature and purpose, are a representation or manifestation of the artist's perception and where the artist has been sentimental in his perception, the work itself will convey this sentimentality. Thus we may call a painting sentimental even if we don't feel particularly sentimental about it. At the same time, it should also be apparent that art which is not sentimental has and can be perceived as such--the sentimental use of reproductions of unsentimental art in gift shops and commercials is ready evidence of this.

While sentimentality is a question of individual perception, the mode itself is a characteristic of our age. In contemporary Western Culture we are all to some extent sentimental, and for an individual to refuse sentimental tendencies altogether would be a considerable and even perverse feat. Sentimentality may be alienating and incapacitating, but we would not be able to recognize ourselves or our society if it were expunged from daily life; so while I express concern at the pervasiveness of sentimentality, my thoughts are directed towards forms of balance and not eradication. We often observe our sentimental tendencies through the manner in which we perceive feelings. Everyone feels, we assume, but we regard our feelings as our own. Individual feelings, we believe, are a primary part of being a member in society: we instruct children on how to respect other people's feelings; we enter therapy, read books, or take courses on how to recognize and manage our feelings; we expect our leaders to demonstrate personal feeling; and even in the process of deciding what to eat, or drink, or buy we ask, "What do I feel like?"

In contemporary culture the sphere of individual feeling is a very public focus, but this highly visible preoccupation is not the norm for all times in all places. In the Eighteenth Century we find authors keenly absorbed in the nuances of a character's inner feelings, but less than two hundred years earlier the poet Edmund Spenser (1552-99) presents a view of individual feeling which is very different. In the Third Book of the *Faerie Queene* the unfortunate miser Malbecco succumbs to his inner feelings of "long anguish, and self-murdering thought."[20] Where we might find pity for such a character and even see his expression of despair as part of a process that will ultimately redeem him in our eyes, Spenser regards Malbecco's surrender to his feelings with the utmost disdain. By our standards Malbecco has much to pity himself for: his castle has burnt to the ground; his beautiful wife has left him for a life of debauchery with the Satyrs; and he is the certain object of other men's ridicule and loathing. Despite such personal catastrophes, Malbecco is depicted as a true grotesque, and his decline into unchecked feelings is portrayed as merely continuous with his reprobate miserly ways. As the story proceeds, he is reduced to living on "toades and frogs," becoming a monstrous creature with "crooked clawes," and a "cold complexion [that] do breed/ A filthy bloud."[21] It is clear that in Spenser's vision Malbecco is thoroughly deformed by the unchecked power of his inner feelings. Rather than viewing personal feelings as a means of entering society as we might do, Spenser presents them as a force which alienates the individual from all forms of human

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[20] Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1987) 534.
[21] Spenser 534.

association—and appropriately in Spenser's eyes at the end of his story Malbecco is condemned to a fate of eternal paralysis and isolation.

Malbecco is a marginalized figure in every sense, but even Spenser's central and decidedly noble characters are threatened by the corruption of their inner feelings. In Book I, the brave knight Redcrosse is seduced and infected by "a man of hell, that cals himselfe *Despaire.*"[22] Despaire taints Redcrosse by leading him into self-pity, and from this encounter Redcrosse becomes a "soule-diseased knight."[23] Fortunately for our knight, his fair lady commits him to the "house of Holinesse" where, through arduous training and many successive stages, he is eventually purged of his "inward corruption, and infected sin."[24] For Spenser, permitting oneself to become absorbed in one's own feelings is wanton self-indulgence. To explore one's inner feelings for their own sake is turning away from society and, for Spencer, the only true source of knowledge, God. Redcrosse is redeemed not by his suffering, nor by his individualism, but by the process in which he acquires the discipline of transforming his feeling into an outward contemplation of God. For Spenser, disciplining personal feeling is not, or at least is not entirely, a question of dogma, but rather a genuine form of liberation. Many of us in our post-Freudian age would regard Spenser's treatment of individual feeling as cruel and unnecessary repression. It is valuable, however, to consider whether our habits of laying our feelings on the surface and analyzing their parts—in essence willing our emotional lives into a transparent prattern—is not in itself an authoritative, though granted a more diffuse, mode of control.

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[22] Spenser 153.
[23] Spenser 166.
[24] Spenser 166.

The highly visible state of feelings in our culture and the association of feelings with sentiments now bring us to the third and most significant misconception in the study of sentimentality. Sentimentality is frequently regarded by critics as a mode of perception that is determined by the emotions. Among those who have accepted this position, the critic Erik Erämetsä gives it the simplest formulation when he suggests that sentimentality is a mode of perception in which "the Heart, and not the Head [is] looked upon as the principle guide to man's virtuous conduct."[25] In other words, sentimentality is not rational in nature, but operates as a direct emotional response. This is a theory broadly accepted in the critical literature concerning sentimentality. In more recent scholarship this assumption is often put to use in a binary structure in which a rational and distant Modernist rationalized aesthetic is opposed, to a sentimental aesthetic which relies of "common emotional" bonds.[26] Robert Solomon in his article "On Kitsch and Sentimentality" suggests that the Modernist aesthetic is responsible for the "poor opinion of the emotions in general and in particular the 'softer' sentiments."[27] Solomon goes on to declare that it is the intended purpose of his article to "defend" kitsch and sentimentality[28] as an aesthetic that rescues the emotions from obscurity in a Modernist culture determined to negate them, arguing that anti-sentimentalism is nothing less that the undue suppression of "common human sentiments" and a "sophistry that is devoted to making fun of and undermining the legitimacy of such

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[25] Erik Erämetsä, A Study of the Word 'Sentimental' and of Other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth Century Sentimentalism in England. (Helsinki: Helsingin Liikekirjapaino Oy, 1951) 33.
[26] Fluck 15.
[27] Robert C. Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Culture. 49: 1 (Winter 1991): 1.
[28] Solomon 1.

emotions."[29] Suzanne Clark in her book *Sentimental Modernism* takes up this binary again and sets in within an explicitly politico-critical framework. Clark's feminist interpretation supposes that Modernism's "rationalized order" "subjects the order of the emotional connections" and "narratives that have explained and legitimated feeling" to its "domination" in an effort to reverse the "increasing influence of women's writing."[30] These arguments seem straightforward enough, but if we take an example, and consider Picasso's formal Modernist painting *Bathers at the Sea* against a sentimental illustration by Norman Rockwell do we really accept that Rockwell's work has more to do with emotion? Or, is it possible that where Picasso's painting conveys emotion as it moves and reacts and is difficult to fix, Rockwell's work quite consciously addresses concepts of emotion, or, more specifically, concepts of identifiably American emotions?

Among those who are more apt to critique sentimentality, the assumption that the emotions are the dominant faculty persists. The argument is commonly made that sentimentality is an excess of emotion, or misplaced emotion.[31] However as Barzun observes, "Shakespeare is full of 'exaggerated' emotion, but never sentimental"[32] and, if we take an example in the visual arts, artists like Rubens and Bernini are famous for portraying emotion at ecstatic heights, though they too are never sentimental. Indeed any question of whether an emotion is appropriate in its quantity and identifiable object is thoroughly absent from these artists' work. One

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[29] Solomon 13-14.
[30] Suzanne Clark, Sentimental Modernism: Women Writersand the Revolution of the World (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) 1-5.
[31] Jacques Barzun, "On Sentimentality," A Jacques Barzun Reader, ed. Michael Murry (New York: HarperCollins, 2002) 107.
[32] Barzun 107.

does not ask whether the emotions of Hamlet's reaction to his mother and stepfather are suitable; or whether Rubens' representation of his wife as Venus is a disproportionate depiction of spousal devotion; or whether Bernini's Saint Teresa is exaggerating her feelings in her encounter with the Divine. These artists do not view feeling from so mundane a perspective. In contrast to the range of emotion in these artists' works, the emotions of characters in a sentimental novel like *The Color Purple* appear comparatively anemic. Indeed, as a reader one senses that a conscientious effort is being made by the author to equate experiences with their appropriate emotions. In *The Color Purple* and other sentimental novels we get the taste of feelings being measured and quantified, and we sense that emotional responses are being determined by rational, external methods. Here we must wonder: if sentimentality primarily concerns feeling, why does the quality of the feelings feel diminished?

The common assumption underlying these arguments—whether the author is seeking a positive value for sentimentality, or establishing its shortcomings—is, as we have seen, that sentimentality is a mode in which the emotions are given a primary role in perception. While this theory seems plausible, outward manifestations can be misleading. A reviewer in *The New York Times Book Review* has described sentimentality as "a justly despised display of unfelt feeling powerfully unfelt"[33]; and what *unfelt feeling powerfully unfelt* must surely mean is that sentimentality is not a display of emotion, or emotional knowledge but a display of its absence. But if emotion and the meaning it illuminates are absent,

[33] Geoffrey Wolff, "Hardhearted Margaret," rev. of Expensive Habits, by Maureen Howard, New York Times Book Review (8 June 1986): 9 qtd in Herget.

what, then, is present? To explore the possibilities, it may be useful to consider certain findings in neurological research. Neurology shows that the human brain encompasses "a thinking mind and a feeling mind" but, studies in the evolution of the brain reveal that the emotional brain developed before the rational one, and that when the rational mind developed it emerged out of the emotional centres in the brainstem.[34] The conclusion drawn is that we were creatures of emotion before we were Cartesian beings. Similarly, the emotions are the dominant faculty in children during their early stages of development. Research demonstrates that it is concepts "embedded in an emotional context"[35] that allow children to develop a powerful foundational memory for later flexibility. If the thesis put forward by Erämetsä and others were correct it would imply that children and our early ancestors are fundamentally sentimental in nature, but this is a conclusion that runs contrary to observation and experience.[36] In this light and with other more intuitive misgiving

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[34] Dan Goleman, "Emotional Intelligence," qtd. in Perry R. Rettig and Janet Rettig, "Linking Brain Research to Art," Art Education November 1999: 20.

[35] Rettig 20.

[36] Because adults are prone to sentimentalizing children, there is a tendency for them to misinterpret statements made by children as unfeeling when they are actually expressing powerful and deep emotions. For many years I have taught and worked with young children and in conversation the topic of death is a perennial favorite. At the ages of three and four children have reached a stage of considerable accomplishment in their speech, but have generally not adopted adult affectations and rationalizations, thus their lack of sentimentality is most apparent at this age. During a class discussion about summer activities, it only takes one child to recount a story of a dead squirrel in the family pool and the rest of the students will be clambering to give similar reports. "My cat died!"; "My fish died!"; "My Grandpa died!"; "I saw a dead skunk on the side of the road!": though some children clearly just want to join in on a topic that has stimulated the class, for many children these blunt direct statements actually express the immediacy of the emotions they experience, and I would suggest that their manner recalls the very direct kind of expression of emotional experience that we find in myths, though, of course, myths develop this emotion and give it cultural form. As adults we tend to identify emotions through codes of outward signs, so we may perceive these blunt statements made by children as unemotional, but I think this is a misinterpretation. Adults often observe that young children don't really *understand* death, but what they mean is that children don't fully understand the values and distinctions *in life*—the ease with which they jump from the death of a family member to that of a family pet makes this clear. I would argue that children experience very powerful intuitions and emotions through their encounters with living things that have died and their spontaneous recall of these events and the urgent need they feel to relate them are evidence of this. In contrast, ask a child to remember a mundane fact like what she had for breakfast half an hour ago and she will all but have

in mind, it becomes evident that one must challenge the assumption that the sentimental mode gives priority to the emotions.

In order to consider what sentimentality is, if it is not a mode of perception based on the emotion, we would do well to first consider the word's semantic development. Though given little consideration by critics in the field, it is significant that the original meaning of the word "sentimental" when it emerged in the Eighteenth Century was "of thought, opinion, notion," "of the nature of thought, opinion, notion"[37] and it is this quality of a rational dimension to which we should attend. In his *Study of the Word 'Sentimental' and of Other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth Century Sentimentalism in England*, Erämetsä suggests that the semantic development of the term has, roughly, two phases.[38] In the first phase, an expression like "Sentimental differences" would have referred to the original meaning and been interpreted as "differences in opinion."[39] Similarly, "Sentimental Liberty" would have denoted "liberty of thinking" or "freedom of

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forgotten; if she is able to relate the details it will be in a rather self-conscious humdrum way—breakfast for most children on most days is not emotionally stimulating which, for balance with other events in life, is no doubt how it should be.

[37] Erämetsä 25.

[38] Erämetsä documents, and it only seems fitting, that the first recorded uses of the word is in the form of a question: in a letter written in 1749, Lady Bradshaigh asks Samuel Richardson,

> What, in your opinion, is the meaning of the word *sentimental*, so much in vogue among the polite. Everything clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word; but I am convinced a wrong interpretation is given, because it is impossible everything clever and agreeable can be so common as this word. (22)

Over two decades later sentimentality is still provoking questions: John Wesley writes in his *Journal* in 1773:

> I casually took a volume of what is called A Sentimental Journey through Italy and France. Sentimental, what is that? It is not English; he might as well say *Continental*. It convays no determinate idea; yet one fool makes many. And this nonsensical word (who would believe it) is become a fashionable one. (22)

[39] Erämetsä 26.

thought"[40]—the element of thought and mind would have been commonly understood.

Early usage, as Erämetsä goes on to explain, would also have been closely connected to the Moral Sense School of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Adam Smith. Thus a phrase like "a sentimental man" would have implied "a man of the 'right' kind of sentiment, a man of lofty moral thoughts, opinions, notions."[41] To be sentimental, then, was to experience moral feeling, a condition which implies a cultivated practice: "Moral feelings, prompted by the Heart, were to pass through the Head, to be filtered by the 'universal faculty' of Reason, before being accepted by the Man of Virtue."[42] Qualities of this process hearken back to Redcrosse and the house of Holiness: the individual disciplines his internal processes by addressing himself to a greater body of order and meaning—for Spencer this means the Christian church, and for the Moral Sense School it means a Christian oriented yet more abstractly defined morality. What is important to observe is that sentimentality in its original sense was not especially individualistic. It was a secular response to the question of socialization which adopted the new empirical methods of science and turned them towards man and his inner life. This inner exploration was directed towards social ends: the inner life of man was to be understood in terms of one's belonging in a whole and moral context.

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[40] Erämetsä 26.
[41] Erämetsä 28.
[42] Erämetsä 15.

Erämetsä sees sentimentality's second phase exemplified in the work of Laurence Sterne, author of *A Sentimental Journey* (1767). With Sterne 'sentiment' acquires the sense of "refined and tender emotion."[43] As Erämetsä explains,

> The concept of 'sentimental' for Sterne included the quality of being emotionally susceptible to certain kinds of experience and situations, which were likely to create the highest possible degree of sensational pleasure. These sensations were savoured with witty and whimsical impulsiveness and subtle allusions to amorous intercourse.[44]

It is evident that here, in the second stage, the moral context is diminished, and that the aim of exploring the inner life has become more individualistic: sentimentality has become the "cultivating and indulging [of] emotions for their own sake."[45] Sterne's writing had considerable influence, and sentimentality during the mid to late Eighteenth Century was the height of fashion. However, the many derivative works produced at this time—a process accelerated by innovations in printing technologies and expanding markets--eventually brought the concept to mawkish absurdity and ill-repute, making it an inspiration for parody and humour. And it is through Sterne and his mimics that sentimentality takes on the sense of affectation which we are familiar with today.

Erämetsä's detailed account of the word's semantic changes is informative, but his theory as to how sentimentality functions is less certain. As we have seen, Erämetsä theorizes that in the first phase the rational function leads the emotional one in the mode of perception, but in the second phase he reverses his argument and

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[43] Erämetsä 54.
[44] Erämetsä 51.
[45] Erämetsä 40-41.

suggests that it is the emotions which become dominant. Instead of a sudden reversal, I would argue that the shift from the first phase to the second is, in fact, an intensification of the rational tendency already in place. Rather than diminishing, sentimentality from Sterne onward moves towards increasing rationalization in matters of perception, and, we should also note, as sentimentality becomes less a matter of emotional intuition, it becomes increasingly individualistic.[46]

Structurally and in practice, sentimentality is a mode of rationalized perception. It is the way of perceiving all subject matter, including the *emotions as subject matter*, with the tools of scientific analysis, making every unit of man's inner world, however ephemeral or infinitesimal, visible in a mundane framework of concepts and images. While sentimentality in its original phase interpreted man and his inner life through traditional structures of morality and in this sense was more conservative in nature, sentimentality in its mature state is radical in nature, meaning that the significance of concepts and images is given to subjective interpretation with no reference to whole forms of traditional expression that would actively contextualize individual meaning. Although sentimentality may have mass appeal, it is in many senses exclusive. It relies on radical subjectivity, and only emerges in cultures that are largely urbanized, highly developed and highly literate. Sentimentality is primarily conceptual, rather than experiential; it is the compression and identification of meaning as an image or concept, rather than an experience of forms of emotion and expression.

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[46] Northrop Frye, Words With Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992) 33.

How does one encapsulate the various characteristics of sentimentality in a concise definition? How does one capture a sense of its social conditions, its individualism, and the rational nature of its structure and practice? While Fluck states that all efforts to "arrive at a comprehensive definition of sentimentality" are in vain,[47] I disagree and am willing to make the leap and define sentimentality as a space-biased mode of perception. I have formulated this definition by bringing together concepts and insights developed by Harold Innis and Northrop Frye, and by refining ideas further through the additional insights of Karen Armstrong and Henri Focillon.

The concept space-bias is derived from Innis' *The Bias of Communication*. Innis comes to the question of perception indirectly by examining modes of communication, stating that

> the character of the medium of communication tends to create a bias in civilization favourable to an overemphasis on the time concept or on the space concept and only at rare intervals are the biases offset by the influence of another medium and stability achieved.[48]

He gives the example of the Classical Greek period where the oral tradition, a time-biased mode of communication, offset the space-bias of a written medium, producing balance and a period of innovative cultural activity.[49] The stability Innis argues on behalf of is not only social and practical, like the terms and conditions of

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[47] Fluck 15.
[48] Harold Innis, The Bias of Communication, intr. Paul Heyer and David Crowley (Toronto: UTP, 1999) 64.
[49] Innis 64.

economic stability,[50] but also existential in nature. Where time and space are in balance the human individual will be brought to the centre of concern, and such a period will assume a humanist form and character.

Oral culture is the definitive time-biased mode of communication, because it is passed on through direct contact from one person to another. It generates and functions by continuity, but is limited in its proliferation in space because of the necessity of direct access; hence, as we observe, the territory of oral cultures are generally defined by geography, because mountain ranges, dense jungles, and bodies of water set the limits of access. Next to oral culture, script gives more emphasis to space because it is portable and less contingent on direct contact; however, as Innis notes, the practice of the scribe is learned by the few in an agrarian culture and is often subject to ritual and a centralized priesthood, elements which restrict its expansion in space.[51] So while script has greater possibility than oral culture to expand in space, it is still deeply time-biased. In contrast, we can see that communication based on modern technology typify the space-biased mode of communication. Innis' particular moment in history prevented him from observing the full impact of television--or, indeed the computer and internet, as Innis died in 1952—but we can see that television and other such technologies exemplify the space-biased mode of communication. For example, television technology does not function in terms of person to person contract. Rather a single message can be widely and instantaneously broadcast. The space-biased mode places emphasis on

[50] Innis 88.
[51] Innis 38.

difference and simultaneity with the effect of undermining continuity and encouraging present-mindedness.[52]

Time and space more than being mere qualities of a mode of communication are the essential dimensions of existence, and as such can never be experienced in a pure or abstract form. In his work, Innis demonstrates the manner in which concrete conditions and practices give substance to these dimensions and shape the character of a society. We experience time in the seasons of the natural world and the process of living, but we give these experiences greater definition and cultural specificity through rituals, and the religious calendar. Beginning in the Eighteenth Century, when the newspaper becomes an important mode of communication, previously defined experiences of time and space are reshaped again. With the press we attend less to continuities and more to the simultaneous presence of multiple differences.[53] We are more attuned to concepts and images, and less immersed in practice and experience. Time-bias and space-bias media, do not determine human activity and interests, but shape the nature of pursuits within certain tendencies. Humans are the inventors of technology and determine when and where it will be employed; however, every media has certain limits and possibilities, and the individual, in using it, must work with and improvise around them.

While Innis observes perception as it is shaped by external social, economic, and technological conditions, I will consider perception as it shapes forms of meaning, focusing my observations on works of art and literature. The way in

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[52] Innis 62.
[53] Innis 78.

which a work of art represents time and space is central to the nature of a its expression, but I have also adopted Innis' concepts of space-bias and time-bias to maintain a connection to the social and material conditions which he outlines and to which works of art are connected. While it is not the focus of my study, it is important to appreciate that the sentimental mode emerges with improvements in Eighteenth Century printing technology and paper production which made broader scale publishing more profitable; and, as Innis notes with the "[s]uppression of writing in the political field," including the stamp taxes and the beginning of the Walpole administration, writers and publishers "were compelled to turn to satire, miscellanies and compendia, the weekly newspaper, the monthly magazine, the novel and children's books."[5455] These conditions do not define sentimentality and the meaning we make of it, but are an indication of the forces which promote it.

Frye forcefully argues that it is literature that primarily creates literature, and that the question of social, technological and ideological conditioning should not be overly exaggerated.[56] Frye argues that there are archetypes, the "myths and units within myths"[57]--the essential elements of a work which Focillon describes as forms—and these form a continuity in literature and are given new and distinctive shape and articulation by artists from specific times and places. These shapes and articulations can be observed and gathered under broader types or modes. In *Words With Power*, Frye outlines a theory of four literary modes. These modes move on a

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[54] Innis 155.
[55] Barbara Benedict discusses the important relationship between sentimentality and miscellanies and the 18th century print culture in her insightful study: Barbra Benedict, Framing Feeling: Sentiment and Style in English Prose Fiction, 1745-1800 (New York: AMS Press, 1994).
[56] Northrop Frye, "Anatomy of Criticism," Northrop Frye in Conversation, ed. David Caley (Toronto: Anansi, 1992) 76.
[57] Frye, In Conversation 76.

scale running from perception as *mythos* to perception as *logos* with the intermediary modes demonstrating combinations of both. *Mythos* and *logos* are terms to which we will return. Frye acknowledges that these modes will be somewhat historically contingent—for example, the final mode, the descriptive mode is the last to fully mature[58]--but that they also form a cycle in which the last mode turns towards the first, and for this reason one finds these modes repeating throughout literary history.[59]

In an effort to give sentimentality definition in a wider spectrum of perceptual tendencies, I have adapted some of the insights and structure of Frye's theory of modes. I should emphasize that I have taken many liberties with Frye's theory, but as Frye himself has said when he looked to other critics "[i]t was [...] a matter of looking for what I could use, but not for something to believe in"[60]; thus, in adapting Frye, I remain true to the spirit with which he regarded the critical enterprise. In the first place, where Frye is speaking specifically of literary modes, I am concerned with modes of perception. Perception is a more inclusive term, allowing the connections between different artistic and cultural practices to be more fluid. In defining and observing sentimentality such flexibility is important because sentimentality manifests without discrimination in all areas of culture.[61] In addition, where Frye identifies four modes I will be considering five, the last being the sentimental mode. In the *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye defines sentimental as referring "to a later recreation of an earlier mode. Thus Romanticism is a

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[58] Frye, Word With Power 4.
[59] Frye, In Conversation 80.
[60] Frye, In Conversation 64.
[61] For an impressive selection of the fields where sentimentality emerges see, Gillo Dorfles, ed., Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste (New York: Universe Books, 1970).

'sentimental' form of romance, and the fairy tale, for the most part, a 'sentimental' form of the folk tale."[62] This notion of sentimental as repetition is fair, and it is often argued that sentimentality is a kind of rhetoric, a designation which could situate it in Frye's second mode, the rhetorical mode. However, I would argue that sentimentality is repetition with a difference, and the addition of a fifth mode allows me to emphasize this point.

I have been able to appreciate the profound nature of the difference between traditional rhetorical modes, and the far more radical sentimental mode in part through Armstrong's history of fundamentalism. In her study she also follows the shifting relationship between *mythos* and *logos*, as it applies to religious structures and beliefs. Armstrong contrasts the nature of faith in its traditional mythic modes with later fundamentalist modes which are structured by *logos*. Armstrong persuasively argues that while fundamentalism is in many respects a reaction to the Modern ethos, it is equally a phenomenon of its rationalist culture, and I would suggest that sentimentality, in many of its structural aspects, can be seen as a secular parallel to religious fundamentalism.

Although it may be symptomatic of the time I have recently devoted to thinking about sentimentality, it does seem striking that Frye, whose interests in literature and culture were diverse and plentiful, had so little to say about the subject. The only other reference to sentimentality that I have come across in his writing is in the *Harper Handbook to Literature* where Frye defines it as "[a]n indulgence in pity and tears to enjoy one's benevolence or self-pity without paying

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[62] Frye, Anatomy of Criticism 35.

the psychic dept exacted by Aristotle's tragic terror"[63]: in other words, sentimentality elicits a superficial emotional response This conclusion is no doubt true, but as a definition it describes an effect, rather than articulating how the phenomenon operates. Perhaps for Frye the nature of sentimentality appeared self-evident; or, perhaps, with its negative connotations in criticism, attending to sentimentality suggested something to Frye that came too close to a criticism based on value judgments which he was so outspoken in rejecting.[64] Also, Frye envisions his four literary modes within a cyclical framework with the final ironic mode forming the basis of a return to the original mythic mode[65] and the addition of a sentimental mode may complicate this model somewhat. Certainly we see mythic attributes in many sentimental manifestations, and it may be that the radical individualism and conformism of sentimentality will one day in the future initiate a deeper mythic psyche; however, for the present I think it is important to differentiate between the nature of a way of life and a life style, between the conservation of forms and the radical impulse of concepts.

The final point to consider is the question of modes itself. History organizes knowledge into periods and movements, while theory works with patterns and sequences of modes. Inevitably both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. The strength of a historical approach is that it is better equipped to treat questions of development. History tends to be less detached from the role played by humans in creating cultural forms, because it is often traces the life of an

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[63] "Sentimentalism," The Harper Handbook to Literature, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Harper & Row) 462.
[64] Frye, In Conversation 82-84.
[65] Frye, In Conversation 80.

artist, or the spirit of a generation, locating ideas in their particular historical and geographical locale. Theory, of course, moves further into abstraction. It tends to focus on stable objects or states rather than living, moving people and times, and for this reason the object of theoretical study often appears divorced from human involvement, and the theorist, unless he believes in total conditioning, must explicitly state the terms of human agency. On the other hand, history can get mired down in debates over dates, precedents, and the foreshadowing of certain movements, forms, and outlooks. Who was the father of Romanticism? Who was the last Romantic? These are questions forever eluding consensus, and at the same time the concern always remains, how far back in time should one go? Theory, on the other hand, gives a broad view through more abstract and systematic arrangement. Many studies of sentimentality are presented as literary histories of the Eighteenth Century, or a particular writer, or genre, but a definition of sentimentality cannot be restricted to these terms. Defining sentimentality as a mode allows me to gather a phenomenon that stretches from the Eighteenth Century into the present day, encompassing many genres and cultural fields as an identifiable tendency, and it is my hope that the theoretical concision of this approach will be a compliment to past and future research.

In the study which follows I will explore the key terms which I use to define perception: time and space, *mythos* and *logos*, and form and style. I will then set-out a theory of modes demonstrating how each mode is shaped by a particular relationship between these contrasting tendencies. In observing these tendencies, it becomes clear that sentimentality is not an isolated phenomenon, but a

redistribution of emphasis. There is fluidity between the modes, and a move to lessen the preponderance of sentimentality in contemporary culture requires no external force, but, merely, a human effort to cultivate other forms of meaning. Having established sentimentality in a theory of modes, I will illustrate the sentimental mode through two pieces of writing by the critic Walter Benjamin: "A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," and "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting." Through Benjamin's writing I will explore in more detail the nature of meaning achieved by the space-biased mode.

Part 1: The Space-Biased Mode of Perception in the Context of a Theory of Modes

Life is movement in time and space--the continuity in time between birth and death, and, within this continuity, the different spaces, or stages that we occupy; the manner in which we repeat and change. We often picture life as an arc, a rising and falling, a development in time which describes a whole gesture. We see heroic tragedy as the arc cut short at its apex, and it is the cathartic experience which fulfills the whole gesture--the fall of a society insufficiently great to hold the exceptional individual, and in the consciousness of falling lies the promise of renewal. Though in a more ironic tone—that is in the life of an average individual where the apex is not so high, and the contrast from rise to fall not so extreme—we often perceive human life as tragic in nature, not because life is sad but because it is whole; an individual life is of-a-piece, and the fulfillment of this whole, its limited potential--but potential just the same--seems a very human kind of redemption.

Though we may live in time and space we do not always perceive life in the fullness of these terms; various tendencies will lead us to dwell on certain aspects and so our perception of life is changed. To illustrate different perceptions of the same thing, we can think of a simple example like a flip book. Imagine your flip book of a dancer has come undone and the individual pages are spread out on your desk: how do you perceive what you are looking at? You look at each image separately; and you see differences and similarities, but no movement. Here is the figure with her arms in the air. Here is the figure with her arms down. Here is the figure with her leg in the air. All are the same but all are different, and a level of arbitrariness emerges. Which do I look at? Which is the most significant? Why is

her foot like that?—one asks these questions and many like them. There is relativity and no order. Now imagine that you have put your book back together in the proper order. Flip it and what you see is very different. Depending on how well you flip, you see the dancer moving through her steps. You have taken what exists in space—separate images—and introduced an element of time. While to some extent there is less to look at—you had forty images and now there is but one dance—the effect is more satisfying. The sense of arbitrariness recedes because the purpose of each individual image is fulfilled in the logic of the movement. Meaning is in the coherence of movement.

Perception which emphasizes time and perception which emphasizes space function on much broader levels as well and these biases, as Innis observes, define the nature and tendencies of a culture.[66] Ours is a culture which emphasizes space in its mode of perception. We seek wisdom not from our elders, but from those who have achieved material success; we are obsessed with differences and similarities; our thinking is characterized by binaries and models; and in our attitudes toward life we experience an overwhelming sense of arbitrariness, in part, because the question of meaning has become personal and without context.[67] We have compartmentalized time into spatial production units[68] and brought it under the authority of choice. Phrases like "You are as young as you feel" demonstrate our belief in the power of the will to chose one's place in life, and even more dramatic interferences like plastic surgery conceptualize age as a commodity. While all cultures have some quality of a spatial dimension, we have exaggerated

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[66] Innis 33.
[67] Armstrong 199.
[68] Alan Lightman, "The World Is Too Much With Me," Ideas, CBC, Toronto, 18 April 2002 1.

the space-bias to a radical and unprecedented extreme and this has given rise to unique phenomena of which sentimentality is one. Sentimentality, like other space-biased phenomena, surrenders movement, the life of meaning, and replaces it with conceptual control. The exaggeration of the space-bias is due in part to the advances in science and technology which have progressed throughout the modern era, with particular intensity in the Twentieth and Twenty-first centuries. Technology and science have allowed us to describe in spatial modes of analysis what in the past we could only experience in time. These days we can observe cancer by laying it out in a pattern of complex data and procedures, where in the past we only new it through the experience of affliction and degeneration.

The space-bias of our culture finds its extreme in the time-bias of early cultures shaped by myth, but the movement from time-biased modes to space-biased modes has not been a steady historical progression. I will examine five modes—mythic, rhetorical, formal, descriptive, and sentimental--which are situated in a range from extreme time bias to extreme space bias, but as history shows cultures not only progress, they also rise and fall; so we find these modes repeated at different times, and it is only the sentimental mode, in its mature state, that is unique to the Modern age. Each of these modes should also be understood as constituting a range which overlaps and merges with aspects in the range of other modes. For example, the formal mode encompasses elements of the rhetorical and descriptive modes, yet remains a form unique in itself. In its early stage of development we see the formal mode emerging from the patterns of time-biased rhetoric, and at the other end we see it giving way to sentimental spatialization. The

formal mode always entails qualities of the descriptive mode, but is in no way synonymous with it. One also observes that different modes can exist concurrently; so today we find formal practitioners working next to those who employ the descriptive and sentimental modes. We may even find the earlier rhetoric—rhetoric with a time bias—but the mythic mode, in our own day, is primarily filtered through anthropological research, formal imagination, and sentimentalizations. In a fast culture overwhelmed by visual information it is difficult, if not impossible, to recapture the wholeness of the life and depth of mythic perception.

Innis uses the terms time and space in a manner that might suggest a singularity in definition, but time and space, respectively, can be perceived in contrasting ways. We think of time as circular, but also as a progression[69]; and we can perceive space from the centre looking out (a centrifugal experience of space) or from an external position looking in (a centripetal view). Time as a circle conveys a powerful sense of context--events in time happen within a whole cycle--and we are acquainted with this sense of time in the Old Testament verses: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven...." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). The conservative nature of this time sense is apparent—everything belongs in its time—and we can see that this perception of time is centred in the cycles of the natural world. Man too exists within his allotted time and it is here that he must be fulfilled, "for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" (3: 22), the passage asks at it conclusion. Time as a repeating circle envisions existence in terms of depth and wholeness and, within this context,

[69] Grant gives an extended discussion of time in: George Grant, Philosophy in the Mass Age (Toronto: UPT, 1998).

unique occurrences--a flood for example--signals to the mysterious depths of the whole and greater reality which humans left to their own intuitions can never fully comprehend. Unique occurrences alert the individual to the limitations of his perception, inspiring the human subject with an awareness of a greater reality beyond.

When time is viewed as a progression, unique occurrences are no longer given holistic meaning as messages conveying the presence of a great and mysterious reality, but rather they become the means to identify reality's constituent parts as an order that *is* visible and differentiated. Where difference in circular time is complimentary in nature—spring is different from fall but the two seasons are understood by their relationship contextualized within a whole--time as progression adopts a symmetrical attitude towards difference--time has progressed *because* the past is different from the present, and the present is different from the future. Where the ethos of circular time would be idealized in forms of husbandry, time as progression celebrates the notion of an individualized will, be it the will of a person, or people; and in place of the sense of context emphasized by circular time, time as a progression looks back to a unique founding moment—the birth of a leader, the founding of a nation, the discovery of a place or technology—and forward to an ever delayed destiny.

Distinct from one another both time senses manifest peculiar fatalisms. Time as a circle becomes a revolving wheel of fortune in which the individual is

subject to its inevitable rotation[70]; while, on the other hand, the fatalism of time as progression is well expressed in Tennyson's poem *Ulysses*,

> Yet all experience is an arch wherthro'
> Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever when I move
> How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
> To rust unburnish'd not to shine in use![71]

Here the individual is without a vision of context in which to fulfill his purpose, and the image of an ever delayed destiny—an arch wherthro'/ Gleams that untravell'd world who margin fades/ For ever—expresses the futility of human action in the face of an ever present eternity. The two time senses, however, need not be mutually exclusive. Though the emphasis is generally on circular time, we nevertheless find the two time senses combined in many world faiths. The unique destinies of the Biblical Jews, or Jesus, or the prophet Mohamed are set within the context of nature's circular time, and the singular importance of a unique event like the Crucifixion is renewed with each rotation of a natural year.[72] Similarly, the historical frame-of-mind while generally focused on time as progression also employs cyclical forms. Historians make the past humanly intelligible by perceiving the plethora of facts and details in the form of movements which rise and fall, movements whose spirits are reborn in subsequent periods.[73]

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[70] Margaret Visser, Beyond Fate (Toronto: Anansi, 2002) 1-28.
[71] Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses," The Poetical Works of Tennyson, ed. G. Robert Stange (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) 88.
[72] Armstrong 38.
[73] Innis 61.

From the structures of time we move to the structures of space, and certain parallels emerge. The centrifugal experience of space is a deep, fundamental experience of context, and as a powerful experience of belonging it depends on the whole nature of sensual experience, giving importance to the senses of hearing, touch, smell and taste. Though the centrifugal experience is a deeply centred experience of space, its effects on the individual are the very opposite from *self*-centredness, because it is an experience of space in which context dominates the individual. It is a powerful experience of belonging, and the experience is all the more profound in that the terms of such belonging must also include those forces which threaten human life. Belonging, in any powerful sense, is not merely connection with its positive connotations, but the devastation of being overwhelmed and annihilated by the conditions of this connectedness—one is one's place; one is bounty as one is famine. The centrifugal notion of space is a deep consciousness or awareness of where one is, and this consciousness of belonging is different from self-consciousness which implies an exterior view of oneself. In contrast to self-consciousness, the centrifugal experience of being in continuity with a place forms the conditions for intuition, and one must emphasize that intuitive forms of knowledge may only develop out of a deep and powerful experience of context.[74]

In contrast, the centripetal sense of space exists in the individual's distance and exterior view. Rather than being an experience *in* space it is a view *of* space, and, as this implies, sight is the dominant sense. The centripetal sense of space exists in the will or power of the individual to make space visible, a rationalized process of identification entailing systems of analysis that mark difference. Thus

[74] Armstrong 35.

where the centrifugal form is a fundamental experience of space in radiating depths, a centripetal view is the radical visualization of things in complex simultaneity. The centripetal perception of space might also be described as the critical stance. The paradox of the centripetal view is that while it perceives the individual as alienated from the centre of experience, it heightens individual self-consciousness. Where intuitive knowledge exists in the experience of context, analytical knowledge exists through conceptualized patterns devised by humans; so where the goal of analysis is total awareness, this awareness is ultimately subject to questions of human motivation and intention. It has been the post-Modern enterprise to give a rationalized account of such human motivations and intentions. However, while post-Modernism has demonstrated many of the assumptions behind analytic objectivity, it has also that the effect of bringing the phenomenon of human knowledge, whether intuitive or rational, to a condition of hyper self-consciousness.

As with time, the differing approaches to the nature of space need not exclude one another. The Ptolemy system demonstrates the centrifugal experience, but in the astronomer's effort to theorize the universe one recognizes the centripetal impulse; and when the theory of the heliocentric universe was first presented, Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo demonstrated their cultural roots in a centrifugal understanding of space, believing that their investigations were "essentially religious" and that their "research had been inspired by divine grace"[75]—even a heliocentric universe, it seemed, could belong within a greater sense of a context. The crisis which the heliocentric discovery sparked was only partly and perhaps less significantly a war over the nature of the church's social and political authority.

[75] Armstrong 68.

For in gaining freedom from the church's dominance, common people lost the authority of their intuitive knowledge to the scientific and conceptual expertise of specialists. The more profound crisis, as Armstrong describes, was existential in nature:

> Copernicus had initiated a revolution, and human beings would never be able to see themselves or trust their perceptions in the same way again. Hitherto, people had felt able to rely on the evidence of their senses. They had looked through the outward aspects of the world to find the Unseen, but had been confident that these external appearances corresponded to a reality. [...] Where myth had shown that human action was bound up with the essential meaning of life, the new science had suddenly pushed men and women into a marginal position in the cosmos. They were no longer at the center of things, but cast adrift on an undistinguished planet in a universe that no longer revolved around their needs.[76]

The existential desolation that emerges from the Modern attitude has much in sympathy with the bleak and ironic vision of *The Book of Job*. This connection may seem surprising, as *The Book of Job* conveys a profound centrifugal experience of space; however, the connections between ancient and modern existential experiences suggest that each sense of space in its separate extreme can give way to a sense of an arbitrary and alienating universe.

Within the pairs described, it is evident that depending on one's sense of time and space one's perception will have a tendency to be conservative in nature or radical. As Innis observes, time-biased perception is more conservative in nature; it

[76] Armstrong 68.

is a mode that emphasizes centralization, continuity, and coherence, and as such is shaped by cyclical time and centrifugal space. The space-bias, on the other hand, is radical in nature, emphasizing individuality, discontinuity, and present-mindedness, and manifesting the sense of time as progress, and the centripetal view of space. Time-bias and space-bias set the broader terms and tendencies of the different modes of perception; however, to move into the manner in which these biases structure the nature of meaning, we need to consider the two dimensions of human meaning: *mythos* and *logos*. *Mythos* is the depth of meaning that evolves in time. *Mythos* conveys circular time and centrifugal space, and *logos* demonstrates progressive time, and a centripetal view. *Mythos*, we can say, is a structure of meaning that is time-biased, and *logos* is a structure of meaning that is space-biased. *Mythos* concerns the expression of experience and expressive truth, *logos* the identification of experience and relative truth.

While *logos* has become the authoritative structure of thought and perception in our own day, in earlier cultures *mythos* "was regarded as primary; it was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence."[77] Myth expresses human truths and meaning which are whole in nature; it conveys knowledge of the human condition which is not subject to divisions, and it intuits meaning at a deeper level of consciousness than rational thought can penetrate. The word "mythic" is popularly identified with genres featuring galactic battles waged by the forces of good against the forces of evil, and on these grounds any gesture of *mythos* in public life is viewed critically as a virulent distortion of reality--but the association of *mythos* with this kind of aggressive simple-

[77] Armstrong xv.

mindedness is a serious misrepresentation. If we look at the myths themselves--at the battles between the Titans and Olympians, the Greeks and the Trojans such binaries are exactly what we do not find. Instead we find the nature of war—the energy, violent excess, pride, honour, futility, and inevitability--conceived and expressed as a whole form. *Mythos* is an intuitive understanding of continuity that expresses human experience as whole forms of movement, and does not see them as distinct states set in binaries, or patterns.

When humans begin to rationalize these intuitions though, myths are reshaped as ideologies, propositions, and arguments and we recognize that *logos* has entered the picture. Where *mythos* conveys meaning in its depth and wholeness, the impetus behind *logos* is to make the parts of what is known visible by organizing them in spatial systems. *Logos* is rational, pragmatic, scientific thought which offers an analysis of the world in its mundane and relative parts. While the import of myths require time for understanding, *logos* attempts to make knowledge readily apparent by directing us logically through its parts. *Logos* makes for efficiency, innovation and standardization. Its ideal is embodied in the scientific method which seeks to outline the process of an experiment in precise terms so that it can be reproduced anywhere and by anyone with the same results. The drive of *logos* is to advance—"it forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel"[78]; but as the Tennyson poem suggests the drive to progress can quickly outrun any vision of meaning and purpose; so while *logos* can take us to immediate, particular goals, it cannot fulfill

[78] Armstrong xvii.

us with an understanding of "the ultimate value of human life."[79] *Logos* has brought material comfort and individual freedom to many of us in the West and we would not wish to be without it, but the limitations of *logos* become acute where its systems do not attend to the whole nature of human experience, and we witness the limitations of *logos* in the all too common spectacle of dogma and science which obey prejudice and private interests. In other words, while a theory may be highly rational in abstract terms its human purpose may be misguided and its meaning obscure, exclusionary, or even trivial. Thus we recognize that reality can never be comprehended by strictly analytical means. *Logos* may allow us to accumulate vast quantities of data at considerable speed, and though the information may be "objective" the extent to which we are able to objectively appreciate its import requires not further information, but a deeper of understanding of human reality, an understanding that may only develop at the human pace of lived experience. In this light we must consider that objectivity, a necessary condition of knowledge, is not merely access to a perspective which demonstrates the relativity of parts, but equally a quality of knowing that can only come through time in the fullness of lived experience. Just as humans exist in time and space, their understanding of the world and its meaning must also emerge in the fullness of these dimensions. In forming judgment the spatial structure of *logos* needs *time* to refer back to the deeper forms of human meaning conveyed by *mythos*, suggesting that objectivity is a cultivated process which combines analysis with depth of experience in time.

Mythos and *logos* form the dimensions of meaning, but what qualities of reality do they allow us to see? *Logos*, as we have seen, shows us the mundane

[79] Armstrong xvii.

parts of life and the world as they exist in relativity to one another. They identify material states and functions, breaking down movement into the steps of processes. *Logos* shows us anything to which an image and concept may be attached, and in this *logos* is able to go beyond the material and into the abstract and hypothetical. This capacity for the abstract has led us to define even the most ephemeral qualities of our inner lives as concepts. Happiness is a concept, and we can identify ourselves as being happy; however, as a concept it is the distillation and compression of experience into a fixed and compact state, and often in identifying ourselves as happy we feel the limits of the concept; we feel there is something much more that has not been conveyed.

This mysterious quality, this experience of something moving beyond the concept brings us back to *mythos*. *Mythos* is the dimension of meaning which is able to reveal and convey these qualities, and it does so often through myth and metaphor. Frye has suggested that *mythos* reveals the "structure of practical human concern" which he defines in the four areas of "food and drink, along with related bodily needs; sex; property [...]; and liberty of movement"[80]—but I am reluctant to accept this definition, or would only do so with considerable qualifications. In the first place, a "structure" of human concern is something that the methods of *logos* would be equally, if not more adept in deciphering. In analyzing the functions of living organisms, science is well equipped to determine the necessary elements which make life possible. It also seems that in identifying *mythos* with primary concerns, Frye is seeking to invest *mythos* with a moral weight that may not be

[80] Frye, Words With Power: On Being a Second Study of The Bible and Literature (Toronto: Peguin Books, 1992) 42.

justifiable. In their separate states neither *mythos* nor *logos* have any moral credence; morality is an important form of judgment, and as such is always the combined fruit of both dimensions of meaning. *Mythos* is not practical, but fundamentally beyond the practical. It is not the structure of human concern, but the urgent force which gives life—indeed the essential meaning--to this structure. In my equivocations with Frye, I would say that *mythos* is not and cannot be practical, *because* it is essential. Frye writes that "[t]he general *object* of primary concern is expressed in the Biblical phrase 'life more abundantly'"[81]—but the forms of meaning *mythos* conveys have no anterior object or purpose: rather than speaking *for* "life more abundantly," they are the very expressive experience of "life more abundantly." Frye has said that it is his intended purpose to learn "about the place and social function of literature in the verbal cosmos"[82]; but to learn about *mythos* we cannot be restricted by questions of functions—we do not ask, "What is the function of life?" and for the same reason, to appreciate the full import of *mythos*, we cannot ask "What is the function of life expressing life?"

Mythos reveals the expressive reality of living in the world. It is the gestures, transformations, and continuous movement of forms which express the turning of life's potential to its outer most limits and back. As Focillon writes in *The Life of Forms in Art*, "form is primarily a mobile life in a changing world,"[83] an understanding which expresses well the nature of myths and metaphors. Myth and metaphor are not fixed states of identity—they are not concepts and images, but

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[81] Frye, Words With Power 42 emphasis added.
[82] Frye, Words With Power 29.
[83] Henri Focillon, The Life of Forms in Art, trans. Charles Beecher Hogan and George Kubler (NewYork: Zone Books, 1992) 44.

whole forms of meaning that express life's continuities. Frye defines metaphor—giving the example, "Joseph is a fruitful bough" (Genesis 49:22)—as a "statement of identity."[84] Here I must beg to differ with Frye again. Concepts and images are statements of identity. "Joseph is a fruitful bough" is an expression of continuity; it is not a fixed and identifiable state. It is a whole form of meaning in which Joseph gestures the fruitful bough, and the fruitful bough is a metamorphosis of Joseph. There is always movement between and through the two elements of a metaphor; they exceed and multiply one another; and are an expression of "life more abundantly." The forms expressed by metaphor—and all forms within the realm of *mythos*--is a reality that is specific to its realization. "Form has meaning--but it is a meaning entirely its own, personal and specific that must not be confused with the attributes we impose on it."[85] Forms are not abstract, but, as I have suggested, essential. The meaning of the form or metaphor, "Joseph is a fruitful bough" is the essence of the expression, not the result, the moral, or the function. Forms of expressive meaning or *mythos* cannot be detached from their context as an image can. Such meaning is continuous with its context and is not relative or transportable.

Though I am hesitant to accept some of Frye's later formulations, in an earlier work Frye does describe form or *mythos* in a manner that comes closer to the understanding I am trying to put across. In discussing poetry, Frye suggests that in a rational culture poetry is mistaken as "pieces of more or less disguised

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[84] Frye, Words With Power 71.
[85] Focillon 35.

information,"[86] but poetry, he goes on to say is in no sense a rarefied language: "[p]oetry is the most direct and simple means of expressing oneself in words," and "what poetry can give the student, is, first of all, the sense of physical movement. Poetry is not irregular lines in a book, but something very close to dance and song, something to walk down the street keeping time to."[87] In other words, poetry is the expression of the essence of one's reality. It is not why or how one is physically or practically capable of walking down the street; but, rather, it is the essential meaning of what one walking down the street is, the expression of this activity or movement in the fullness or wholeness of its reality. In this description of poetry, Frye is describing *mythos*. *Mythos* is the dimension of life's expressive meaning. It is a depth of reality that *logos* can not attain. *Mythos*, rather than being practical, analytical, or conceptual, is aesthetic, spiritual, and fully experiential.

Mythos perceives the world as forms and humans as inherently artful creatures, and we can appreciate the quality of such perception by considering *mythos* in terms of a subject as familiar to us a sport. If we think of sports in terms of its rules and regulations, in terms of game averages and statistics, and in terms of players' records, contracts, and histories, we are relating to sport in terms of *logos*. *Logos* makes sport specialized a matter, defining it in terms of different classes of information. But without knowing the ins and outs of a particular sport, there remains something universally pleasurable in watching a fine athlete on the field, and it is this expressive quality, the *mythos* of sport, that we respond to in the forms of the athletes' movement. In the movements of a fine player we sense the athlete's

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[86] Northrop Frye, The Educated Imagination (Toronto: Anansi, 1993) 49.
[87] Frye, The Educated Imagination 51.

deep intuitions of the body's potential, and we see his gestures articulating human movement at its most swift and agile. The fine athlete's movements distinguish themselves in that they become more than action and physical exertion, taking on form, an essential, expressive reality. In form no movement is isolated; movement is a fluid whole, a metamorphosis of human energy within the parameters of a specific place and the governing rules of engagement. All movement fulfills a gesture expressing further movement beyond. Forms, the essence of *mythos*, "mingle with life, whence they come; they translate into space certain movements of the mind."[88] Forms are expressive life. They emerge from experiment and experience by intuition worked through matter. Forms cannot be self-consciously invented and deployed. Their motivation is their expression and their expression is a further revelation of life.

While *mythos* perceives form and as such is united with aesthetic perception, aesthetics often raise the question of style. As Focillon explains, style is "a state in the life of forms."[89] Style is definition and identity. In style, we recognize *logos* and here we must add that *logos* is not only the practical and conceptual perception of reality, but the potential for reality's stylization.

As *mythos* perceives forms of expression and experience--that which is profound but whole and entirely specific in its realization--*logos* perceives style or that which can be abstracted and isolated and transported elsewhere—the identity, concept or image--and the mundane functions and conditions of material states. In other words *mythos* perceives reality as a indivisible expressive whole, whereas

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[88] Focillon 60.
[89] Focillon 61.

logos interprets reality in terms of a competing duality between the highly abstract—style, concepts, images, etc-- and base material conditions. *Mythos* and *logos* convey different dimensions of meaning, and these dimensions reflect the dimensions of time and space. *Mythos* reflects the dimension of meaning that is time-biased, and *logos* reflects the dimension of meaning that is space-biased. As I have suggested these dimensions of perception are never entirely distinct, and the various relationships they adopt become the different modes. In the first mode we will see that time dominates; in the second time still dominates, but the spatial dimension is an emerging force; in the third the two dimensions form a balanced relationship; in the fourth the space-bias becomes dominant; in the fifth, the sentimental mode, the space-bias achieves a new and more extreme dominance.

Of the five modes I will consider, the mythic mode of perception is the first that can be historically identified, and has provided human culture with a body of forms--myths and metaphors--which we have renewed and reinvented in subsequent modes. Though we should not imagine it as pure and entirely without *logos*, it is a mode of perception in which, as the very name suggests, *mythos* predominates. Myths in themselves have no exclusive identity, no style; their forms are universal and derive from direct experience of life. Myths emerge in time and become a concentration of their development; they are experiment and intuition layered and weaned and given coherence in the course of their oral existence. The mythic mode perceives the world in its continuity, the wholeness of which is very foreign to our Modern sense of reality. We see ourselves as distinct from the environment and from our neighbor, and we have separated our experiences into public and private,

work and play, action and thought. Within mythic perception though, such divisions do not exist. Myths were inseparable from the rituals of the cult[90]; meaning was continuous with practice and belief with experience; and--as the many mythological deities of the natural world demonstrate--subject and object were not rigid in their distinction, but perceived within a continuous and expressive whole.[91]

Instead of looking back to an originating event, myths are liberated from such literalism by the essential universality of their forms,[92] but at the same time the fullness of their meaning may only be experienced and renewed as these forms are appreciated as alive within the real time of an individual's and community's life. In other words, mythic forms, to be deeply experienced, must be lived as a continuous, meaningful reality. Today we are more likely to come to myths individually by reading them, but "reading" myths interrupts their very being; they become stories relative to other stories and cease to be myths. To appreciate myths in any genuine sense we must not be able to pinpoint the moment we first read them; they must exist in the mind as far back as our memory can travel; they must be continuous with our consciousness, a constant feature, indeed the very form of our imaginative life.

Myths are forms that come to us in childhood through our immersion in culture and their meaning grows with us all our lives. Mythic meaning, then, is a lifelong development, the maturation of experience into wisdom. As an example, we can think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden— a myth whose meaning is not static, but evolves and we mature. As children we are horrified at the couple's

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[90] Armstrong xvi.
[91] Frye Words With Power 22.
[92] Armstrong 49.

defiance of authority, the wrath of God, and the loss of the Garden's protection. We think we would not be so stupid (for the sake of a mere apple!); and that we would know the snake and his malevolent designs. As children, we feel certain that we would not be fooled and persuaded by him; we would never lose our place in such a splendid world as Eden. As we grow we experience the meaning of its form differently. The tree of knowledge terrifies us as much as it intrigues us, and the apple's prohibition becomes a focal point for our feelings of rebellion. Now in our youth, we ask, "Why can't the apple be eaten?" feeling the arbitrariness of its exclusion. Yet when is comes, Adam and Eve's shame is real to us and we feel their humiliation. We suffer their exposure and are stunned at how suddenly and irrevocably life has changed. We wonder now: "How did it happen?" "Why was the apple eaten?" "What do we do now that we cannot go back?" As adults the meaning gains further reality: we see the necessity of these events, the necessity of living the life we have made and the life which presents itself. We understand Adam and Eve's loss, because it is the loss we live in an imperfect world where we are faced with affliction and death. We see the fruit of knowledge as an essential experience in life—we understand now that the fruit is sweet and the experience long. In old age, perhaps, we gather this fruit again in the wisdom that has become our own, wisdom that comes of the life we have planted and toiled over, and in these experiences we taste something of the apple's fulfillment.

On the surface, the language of myths and metaphors may appear spare and minimal. The creation of the universe happens in a mere thirty-one verses, each of which is direct and brief. How many pages or chapters would a novelist require to

describe the same activity? Or a scientist?—how many volumes, and charts and diagrams would be needed to detail these events? Yet the true life of myths exists not on the page, but in time. One lives in mythic form and the meaning of their form is revealed in lived experience. Myths illuminate the subjective realm and their significance is refreshed by particular experience; but myths also take us beyond particular experience to the constant and universal.[93] Myths unearth the deepest forms of experience and connect us to an order of life that transcends the mundane variations of individualized time and space. The mythic mode is a continuity between the subjective and objective. Experience of life *is* the context of meaning and the objectivity which emerges comes not of distance but through an intuitive knowledge that perceives life in fundamental terms as a continuous whole.

When meaning appears as a possibly separate matter from practice, the life of the coherent whole is disrupted. Different ways of life, specializations and stratified experience emerge and where an economy is still conservative and based on agrarian life, it is necessary for such difference to be brought within a more delineated yet still coherent structure. This structure of meaning is no longer one with experience, but one with an expanded, more varied and more consciously detailed ordering of experience. This element of structure more consciously invested and elaborated with the forms of lived experience and meaning gives shape to the second mode, the rhetorical mode. Through an abstracted structure—abstracted in the sense that the structure has evolved to a degree that makes it external to primary experience--rhetoric expresses forms of fundamental belonging in a world of various and unequal experiences. The work of rhetoric is to reveal the

[93] Frye Words With Power 35.

variety, mobility and metamorphoses of experience and yet define the significance of this in terms of its connection within a greater whole. It is a practice that draws from both *mythos* and *logos*: it is a mode of practical ends and expressive means. *Mythos* reveals forms of experience, and *logos* gives these forms an identity within the structure. In the mythic mode, the centrifugal experience of belonging in a whole remains powerful, but there is a new impetus to define and differentiate the parts of this belonging, indicating a centripetal view. The rhetorical mode can be witnessed in the great Gothic Cathedrals like Notre Dame. The cathedrals give evidence of structure, and their proportions which are not the measure of man confirm a deep and powerful experience of belonging: the cathedrals do not affirm human centrality; rather, the individual is brought within the reality of the Cathedral.

Frye describes the structure of the rhetorical mode as ideologies,[94] but the forms of meaning that ideologies structure are myths and metaphors, so we cannot consider the rhetorical mode and mythic mode as being holey distinct. With this in mind, when Frye writes that "the most elaborate developments" of the rhetorical mode "are the great frameworks of accepted (and by the great majority unexamined) assumptions we call ideologies," we must be careful to qualify this statement. It is the spatial drive of *logos* which establishes these frameworks, but these frameworks are elaborated and invested through time by *mythos*, and hold potential for depths of expressive meaning. As Armstrong urges us, we should not be too quick to imagine that these "assumptions" are in anyway slight. While they may be unexamined, in the sense that there is no perspective from which they may

[94] Frye Words With Power 16.

be self-consciously assessed, in a culture where living and meaning are not yet completely divorced, they may also be powerfully lived and experienced. In an individualistic society ideologies are strictly an imposition, but in a conservative culture where the individualism we take for granted is, in practical terms, unfeasible[95] the impulse of the creative spirit moves not to defend the individual's exclusive realm of the self, but to seek liberation in forms beyond the self that express the constant and universal. While ideologies and authoritative structures pose certain dangers alluded to by Frye, we must also consider them in light of the possibilities they afford. Ideologies structure meaning, and meaning transforms mundane existence into a whole and creative enterprise, offering purpose and belonging.

Structure implies limits, but limits make for difference, and ultimately diversity. Ideologies are a rationalized system of codes and styles that structure the life of forms, but forms themselves should not be taken as passive; their intuitive and experimental energies possess and consume styles, transforming rhetorical structures into a hive of intensified creativity. As Focillon remarks, "a large number of experiments and variations is likely to occur whenever the artist's expression is at all confined, whereas unlimited freedom inevitably leads to imitation."[96] This observation holds true of the rigid sonnet structure of *The Fairie Queene*, complete with allegorical codes, and intricate courtly style. Here forms have been stylized through a strictly patterned language, but even so the forms keep well in stride and ultimately transmute the rationalized order even as it seeks to

[95] Armstrong 33.
[96] Focillon 62.

establish its authority. The intuitive elaborations of myth and metaphor outdistance any methodized system, thriving on the structure they devour. We find examples of the rhetorical mode's impulse to life more abundantly in the Third Book of Spenser's great poem. Here the figure of Cupid is a presence that eludes any fixedness; like the figures which encrust and are absorbed by the walls of the great cathedrals, he weaves through the surface of the poem, emerging from the background on "fomy waues" as Proteus, metamorphosing into king, "Gyant," "feend" and "Centaure," and being consumed once again by the flow of dense imagery "then like to a storm,/Raging within the waues."[97] Cupid emerges later from tapestries, ornate walls and a masque, and finally from the interior chamber of the house of Busyrane in the monstrous guise of the "vile Enchaunter."[98] Cupid is the continuity of forms; his form gestures to further forms in a continual metamorphosis of life and expressive movement. Despite the apparent ideological rigidity which structures this work, the figures in *The Fairie Queene* exist in the spirit of transformation; at one moment they are fully integrated with the structure, and at the next they abolish its logic and overturn its reason. One chases the allegory, but its significance escapes in the work's inexhaustible variety, and the energy of the intuitive elaborations indicate the presence of a deeper force. *The Faerie Queene*, suggests the intricacies of the Celtic interlace which devour "the old iconographies" and, as Focillon beautifully describes, such work "appears as a

[97] Spenser 502.
[98] Spenser 552.

transitory, but endlessly renewed mediation on a chaotic universe that deep within itself clasps and conceals the debris or the seeds of humankind."[99]

While Frye is somewhat more reserved in his regard for the rhetorical mode, he does observe that

> [i]f we look at a fairly genuine and positive rhetorical situation such as those represented by Lincoln's Gettysburg address or the 1940 speeches by Churchill we can se how an ideology maintains itself in a historical crisis. The appeal to reason is not primary, though not denounced either. The principle invoked is that we belong to something before we are anything, that our loyalties and sense of solidarity is not simply emotional, any more than it is simply intellectual: it might better be called existential.[100]

In the rhetorical mode, a rationalized structure of ideology asserts itself, giving occasion for expressive forms, and these forms create and convey a deeply lived and meaningful urgency. The figured speech—"of the people, by the people, for the people"; "We shall fight on the beaches; we shall fight in the hills"[101]—convey the intuitive elaboration of forms, a metamorphosis of expressive meaning in which each expression suggests the next. Such language is the expression of the ever transforming potential of language and the human soul, and it is this expression of potential that reveals itself within the depths of the listener's experiences. The individual may identify with a particular ideological concept, but the rhetorical mode also offers an experience that is far more profound. The rhetorical mode, in its elaboration of forms, offers an expression of life's energy

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[99] Focillon 38.
[100] Frye Words With Power 7.
[101] Frye Words With Power 7.

and potency, and it is in such an expression that the individual experiences the most fundamental solidarity and belonging.

When the context for meaning moves from a great external structure to a context appreciated for its condition as a human creation, we move from the rhetorical mode to the formal mode. Frye calls the formal mode the conceptual or dialectical mode which emphasizes its rational dimension. But I have chosen to call it the formal mode, because its expressive dimension remains essential and the formal mode is the formal—in the sense that it negotiates between the private and public—representation of expressive forms. The context for meaning created in the formal mode exists in mutual relationships. Where in the rhetorical mode the structure was authoritarian and would, at least in Western Culture, been generally designated as the church or the thrown, the context of the formal mode is often described as common humanity. It is a context that only exists where humans actively and consciously create it—and here we can see the formal mode's close association with Humanism. The critic Harold Bloom argues that Shakespeare invented the human,[102] but, as Bloom himself would not doubt agree, the creation of the human individual is an imaginative enterprise that is born of a shared vision. Shakespeare represents the human in all of humanity's breadth and depth, but it is the members of the audience who confirm the reality of this creation when they perceive the common elements of human experience expressed in the artist's vision. The human always exists in a life that includes and goes beyond the individual subject; the human exists in the vision of one's relationship in time and space with the world and all that it contains.

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[102] Harold Bloom, Shakespeare the Invention of the Human (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998).

Vision, different from mere sight, is a form of perception, entailing both distance and connection. It is a formal relationship between perspective and expressive form. Vision is a rational analysis of relationships—it describes structure and difference and as such brings *logos* to the centre of its operation. But the *logos* of vision is met in equal measure by *mythos*. *Mythos* gives a whole form to the space defined by *logos*; *mythos* is the perception of the continuity among the parts. In the formal mode the representation of space is also the representation of time in forms of depth and movement. Where in the mythic and rhetorical modes the depth and movement in the continuity of forms between the individual and meaning are experienced in more outward aspects—as in ritual and devotional practices—in the formal mode depth and meaning are internalized, creating a dimension of autonomy both for the work of art and the new human individual. As Frye observes, in formal "writing the elements earlier called truth has to be looked for inside, so to speak: in what the words contain rather than in what they reflect from the environment."[103]

The great achievement of the formal mode is pictorial representation[104] which we find in many forms beyond painting, in sculpture, in formal dance, in literature, in philosophy, and in architecture. Shakespeare's imagination is formal in nature and the world he represents in literature is a pictorial vision. His plays are not merely a sequence of events in time that hearkens back to ritual, nor are his spatial elements—characters and places—allegorical entities. He combines time

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[103] Frye Words With Power 8.

[104] It seems to me that Frye might be suggesting this when he writes, regarding the conceptual (formal) mode that "the most impressive achievements in this mode are the great metaphysical systems, the structures that seek to present the world to the conscious mind" (Words With Power 10).

and space formally to create a whole vision of the human in the world, a human who moves in time and has an autonomous dimension in space. *Hamlet* is thoroughly emancipated from ritual and codes; its authority exists in the life it reveals, and not in its belonging to any external framework of belief. In the rhetorical mode *logos* is used to structure *mythos* as an authoritative context of belonging, and *mythos,* in the forms of expressive experience, takes possession of this structure as a living demonstration of the intensity of creative life and belief. In the formal mode *logos* is used to represent *mythos* as an inner dimension, and this inner dimension becomes a centre of meaning that transforms the rational structure into a coherent whole. Indeed, it is the aim of structure in the formal mode not merely to give occasion for a demonstration of human potential, but to liberate human potential in an expression of the profound regions of the interior life.

In the formal mode, vision is closely associated with perspective. Perspective is a form of objectivity that comes of an autonomous subjective position. Perspective describes space and in this sense it relies on the centripetal view—it is an analysis of distance and proportion, the application of the Albertian system. But perspective is also the analysis of distance and proportion *according to a human position*; thus perspective is also having *a* perspective. In other words, to have a perspective the individual must experience her own position, a place of deeper belonging, and in this one observes that formal perspective comes of a centripetal view grounded in a centrifugal experience. Frye observes the significance of the individual's position when he notes that the formal mode

represents "the orientation of a human body in space."[105] He is referring to the author here whose orientation is not the represented subject matter, but a living presence that vision comes through. As a balance between space-bias and time-bias, one can see that perspective is analytical *and* intuitive, observed *and* felt.

To examine the interdependent dimensions and forces of the formal mode, we can consider Rembrandt's painting, *Bathsheba With King David's Letter.* We find *logos* in the abstract construction of identifiable parts laid-out in space which correspond to a rational and visible reality in which things are recognized by there distinction from other things—gone is the continuum of external metamorphoses of mythical figure, into mythical creature, into a patterned environment. Instead, we see the seated figure, the letter in her hand, the elderly attendant, and the props and objects with sit in the background. Thus the formal mode gives us a rational structure and an analysis of parts, but these aspects are brought together in a whole form of representation that expresses an inner reality and truth. Rembrandt represents forms of movement and depth in Bathsheba's gesture, and it is here that we find the dimension of *mythos*. The forms we have been tracing in the mythic and rhetorical modes are renewed in Rembrandt's painting, and through an autonomous representation we find an expression of the depth and universality of human experience. One can look at a Rembrandt with a rational distance, but the deeper experience is in one's intuitive connection to the life of forms, and here one experiences what has often been called the aura of a work of art. Focillon writes that "form is surrounded by a certain aura: although it is our most strict definition

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[105] Frye, Words With Power, 13.

of space, it also suggests to us the existence of other forms."[106] Thus we see that Bathsheba comes to life because the form of her gesture expresses a whole movement in depth; though we see one pose, the gesture of her pose expresses the life of its movement, from the gesture that begat it to the gesture it moves to become, each a phase a deeper revelation of the whole. These forms possess the realm they inhabit, transforming it, and recreating it as a whole expression. We see this too in a formal tragedy where the hero and his world form a dynamic whole—the world defines the hero, bearing down on him, exerting its tragic limits, while the hero charges his world by unleashing his own potential, revealing life's urgency and vitality.

Where the rhetorical mode seeks to reveal an external yet greater life beyond the world and the individual's life, the formal mode reveals an interior life within this world and within the individual. Thus Bathsheba's gesture, the form of her movement, expresses the life and deeper transformations within her, just as Shakespeare represents the interior life of his tragic figures, "the human changes, alterations not only caused by flaws and by decay but effected by the will as well, and the will's temporal vulnerabilities."[107] The tragic figure, while having ties to religious tradition, is undoubtedly the most profound of secular creations. The formal mode is likewise secular; it releases inner life and sets it free, but this quality of individual freedom and autonomy exists in the deep consciousness of an individual's mortal limits.

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[106] Focillon 34.
[107] Bloom 2.

Tragedy is, in many senses, a paradigm of formal expression, but the urgency of its meaning gives birth to other qualities which typify the mode's ethos. The formal mode sees dignity in restraint. It envisions the radical force of individualism rounded out by a gesture to conserve. For the formal mode context is critical: context is meaning, and context is mortality, but context is also an active human creation that occasions freedom as it conserves meaning. Two primary contexts of the formal mode are tradition and discipline, democracy is another. Tradition and discipline are the means for independent individuals to create a living context of meaning that exceeds the limits of a single human life. The individual acquires the discipline to work in a tradition, and in doing so renews the discipline in the present and creates a tradition for the future. Tradition and discipline are a fraternity that exists in the continuity of time; they are a context openly created by humans and the authority of these contexts exists in the measure and variety of human achievement. As contexts they offer a framework for the memory and renewal of meaning; they attend to technical training and the cultivation of intuitive understanding. They only live as they are practiced, and they only have meaning as this practice is voluntary. Tradition and discipline are vulnerable to excess and are ritually reduced to dogma and opportunism, but in the face of extremism and conformity they are a human means of creating independent meaning and a free expression of experience.

Democracy is another human context that comes to life through formal perception. Frye identifies democracy with the descriptive mode—the mode I will turn to consider next--suggesting that "[t]he maturity of a democracy, today, is not

contained in its voting processes or its choice of leaders, but in the principle of openness in descriptive writing."[108] To some measure I must agree with Frye but only to the extent that descriptive writing overlaps with the formal mode. The descriptive mode gives us a rational map of the parts and it is undoubtedly the *modus operandi* of bureaucracy, but the formal mode gives us these parts in a coherent and human form. It gives us the shape of human significance against vast systems of information and processes. Democracy is the political representation of individual human subjects, before it is the free and open distribution of information and as such it is properly within the scope of the formal mode. Stated differently, democracy is the formal political recognition of the autonomous individual, and at the same time it is a body of these individuals willing to find themselves represented in a common vision. In recent times vision has been reduced to a political concept and rendered trivial as a cliché, but democracy is not a reality without it. Image or identity politics is a post-democratic phenomenon—it is the inability to perceive with a coherent vision and find and accept a common representation. We see the effects of such politics in new extremisms on the rights and left, and in a populace inured to democratic defeat by cynicism and apathy. Democracy is a human politics, but it is also a self-disciplined one. Its strength is that it is not reactionary, and here again we find the quality of dignity in restraint.

Where the formal mode composes time and space, *mythos* and *logos*, the descriptive mode, the fourth mode, is a spatial rationalization. It is, as Frye writes, the mode "in which we are reading to get information about something in the world

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[108] Frye, Words With Power 6-7.

outside the book."[109] The descriptive mode functions as a process of identification between "two structures, the structure of what is being described and the structure of the words describing it."[110] It is an abstract spatialized system--a system made of concepts and images—which set the many parts of the world in relative and distinct positions to one another. In other words, the descriptive mode is the centripetal approach, a literal account of the world in its mundane state.

The descriptive mode perceives in states or the succession of states, rather than in forms and continuities. It can not grasp the quality of lived experience and expression, but only the quantifiable effects and states of their manifestation. It is a way of looking at the world as definable objects in space, and even those aspects of the world that exist in the dimension of time are given object status as functions, processes, procedures and operations. Humans themselves become objects, and the goings on of their inner lives is turned out onto the surface as the matter and content of psychology. The drive of the descriptive mode is to externalize; its ideal is transparent information. Where the formal mode represents the dimension of the inner life as forms of movement is time and space, the descriptive mode brings the inner life to the surface, classifying its contents and analyzing its functions. The descriptive mode exposes and makes explicit; it recognizes complexity but cannot perceive or convey depth.

The descriptive mode is a feature of scientific method, and at the same time we must observe that the progress of the descriptive mode depends on social,

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[109] Frye, Words With Power 4.
[110] Frye, Words With Power 4.

technological and scientific development.[111] Technologies like the telescope and microscope have allowed us to see further and in greater detail, allowing humans to expand descriptive systems, abstract repositories for the ever increasing data of the world. We can think of Linnaeus' system of taxonomic classification as a particular example. It makes the relative differences among the living organisms of the world visibly apparent. Where the modes which entailed the element of *mythos* found meaning in wholeness, in the descriptive mode there is only meaning in relative completion and the binary is the basic unit of relative completion. Where journalists talk about getting the whole story, they are not looking for the expressive gesture but a complete set of facts; thus we can see that science, analysis and reportage function according to a progressive time sense.

The descriptive mode operates rationally and gives no scope to intuitive knowledge--indeed the excess of a highly conceptualized state *is* its chronic counter-intuitiveness. The descriptive mode is of practical use and the nature of its objectivity is highly specific. It produces a complete abstract system which objectively demonstrates the relative distances between distinct parts. It is a method of analysis, a conceptual means of registering difference and analogy. While the descriptive mode has practical use, its systems, in and of themselves, have no inherent meaning, nor do they create and interpret meaning. The meanings or the value of the information displayed by a conceptual system is external to the information itself, for meaning is achieved only through a piece of information's application. Thus, while the descriptive mode is the great leveler of the phenomena of the world—in the sense that everything is perceived symmetrically and in

[111] Frye, Words With Power 6.

universal relativity—its systems require external interpretation or translation, making the demand for specialists and experts. The flip side of this is that concepts and information in their abstract state are arbitrary; and certainly the over abundance of unprocessed information and decontextualized images in our world make this clear.

As we have observed with *logos*, the descriptive mode does not perceive the deeper and essential dimensions of human meaning and expression. Instead, the descriptive mode allows us to calculate the most efficient means of getting a package from location a to location b; or to compute the most cost effective ways of manufacturing a t-shirt; or to determine which is the best choice of appliance for our money. As we can see, none of these calculations propose meaning that reflects the human condition; rather, the import of these calculations is in the relativity of quantifiable data—speed, volume, cost--identified by abstract concepts such as efficiency and convenience. The irony of the descriptive mode is that while its methods increase material comfort, the mode of perception alienates meaning from the experience of the human condition—and, as many have argued throughout the modern era, the most practical and efficient method is not always in human terms the most desirable.

We come now to the sentimental mode. Where the descriptive mode conceptualizes the material reality of the world as quantifiable phenomena, the sentimental mode conceptualizes the expressive nature of experience, the forms and transformations of human meaning. Here we can see that in certain situations there would be a fine line between the descriptive and sentimental modes which is why

reportage is prone to sentimentality, or why pseudo-science is generally sentimental. We find a great deal of sentimentality in the self-help industry, for example: "The function of grief in the process of mourning", " the seven steps to well-being", "great ways of being successful in love"--each of these is a conceptualization of an experience that is fundamental to being human. We can also see how contemporary Western religious fundamentalism is persistently sentimental with Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's theme park, Heritage USA, as a stunning example.[112] Religion addresses deep forms of human meaning and experience and the conceptualization and literalization of these forms renders a religious institution both sentimental and fundamentalist.

The expressive nature of experience happens in depth; it is the movements of forms of meaning that are continuous with life. When such forms are conceptualized they are fixed and removed from their continuity in time; they are brought to the surface and rendered identifiable entities that are convenient and efficient but lack depth. In sentimental perception forms of meaning become decontextualized from lived experience, and human meaning ceases to have any intuitive dimension. Instead concepts-of-meaningful-experience and concepts-of-deep-expression are set within an abstract system that functions by a rational logic of difference and analogy. As we observed in the descriptive mode, the entities in a system are shown in terms of their spatial relativity, so meaning in the state of a concept becomes a matter in relative terms as opposed to being integral to a whole form of being. The condition of relativity radically reconfigures the very nature of meaning. Meaning is no longer a vision of urgent and lived truth; rather it is a

[112] Armstrong 356.

matter subject to the will and rational control. *A* meaning may be selected for convenience and efficiency, and it may be repeated at will for effect. In the sentimental mode meaning is no longer forms of lived connection: meaning becomes choice and as choice it becomes specialized, individualized, and ultimately trivialized. At the same time as meaning is conceptualized and removed from its context in lived experience, it is divorced from intuition--and sentimentality, as one will observe, is frequently distinguished by its counter-intuitiveness and arbitrary effect.

We see the effects of the sentimental mode's space-bias in a phenomenon like political correctness. In the early 1990's my Father, an illustrator, did some work for a California textbook company. One of his pieces was an illustration in a contemporary setting of two children around seven years old collecting water from a water pump. A white girl worked the pump; a black boy held the bucket. The girl was wearing a white t-shirt, jeans, and running shoes; the boy was wearing a yellow t-shirt, overalls, and running shoes. Although overalls are typical and often expensive pieces of children's clothing, the Californian company rejected the illustration because, they rationalized, an image of a black child *in overalls* could be identified with slavery. In this example we find that an experience of suffering has been conceptualized as an image, and through this rationalization it ceases to be an experience and becomes a concept relative to other concepts. The sanction on overalls seems arbitrary because a deep and sorrowful history has been assigned to a mundane article of clothing: the overalls are an image which has been identified with a concept, but nothing in the nature of overalls expresses the experience of

slavery. The company's homage to slavery was a rationalized sign of respect, but also a counterintuitive one. It is a sentimentalization of real and lived experiences, and one wonders what value respect of this kind can have when it functions on the surface as a question of choice in the arrangement of images.

Of course, the experience of slavery has been and can be remembered and communicated in ways that are meaningful and in no sense sentimental. Black spirituals like *Go Down Moses* are an example of one such kind. In this song there is reference to a mythic tale of oppression and suffering, but more importantly it is the expression of the melody—its resounding dignity--that renews our understanding of the meaning of human suffering. *Go Down Moses* creates a memory of African-American oppression by expressing it in mythic and musical forms—memory of an experience is conserved because the song is an intuitive expression in continuity with deep and universal forms of human meaning. *Go Down Moses* does not specialize suffering but expresses a real and particular experience as it is in continuity with universal human conditions. It is in the universality of the form that the memory and meaning of the experience is able to be passed on through time. No one who hears this spiritual can doubt its meaning: its heavy, plodding beat expresses the weariness and sorrow of the oppressed, and its commanding refrain declares the powerful truth and righteousness of a people's claim for freedom. Details, like the clothing worn by slaves, fleshes out the historical picture, but such details have no expressive significance, and when these details are decontextualized from a whole expression they are apt to become clichés. This, as we have come to see, is the fate of political correctness—every

experience it processes becomes a cliché, and our memory is reduced to banalities. Sentimental correctness also perpetuates social and cultural frustration. Among the common breed of human beings there is a desire to be respectful of other people's histories and experiences; but, political correctness, as we have seen, is a stylization of respect that removes it from common intuition. In conceptualizing expressive meaning, removing it from lived experience and surrendering it to infinite relativity, meaning becomes specialized and potentially exclusive. This is undoubtedly the effect of political correctness which though with good intentions nonetheless appeared academic, elitist and doctrinaire. It provoked excessive self-consciousness, unnecessary antagonisms, and ultimately apathy and cynicism.

While political correctness is a collective attempt at choosing concepts and identifying their significance, the sentimental process is often more individualized. In an abstract spatial system qualitative human meaning is excluded—there are no expressive forms to guide the interpretation--thus the determination of meaning gives way to radical subjectivity. The individual, faced with infinite relativity, must act as the fixed measure of interpretation. He becomes the specialist of his own meaning-making, providing the commentary that completes the system. Thus, where expressive forms direct particular experience towards connections beyond the self, concepts and images must be personalized, forcing particular experience back in on the individual. Meaning that is radically subjective is by definition alienated from greater significance, and with no sense of a whole context the individual's sense of meaning becomes highly self-conscious and self-centred.

The sentimental mode changes the very nature of human experience. Experiences are no longer lived in the continuity of time, but become distinct states in a spatialized pattern of existence. They become known by the difference in their style, hence the phrase "life-style". Concepts and images also become a means of self-stylization—one identifies oneself with a concept to stylize oneself in its image. However as a certain concept is repeated it quickly becomes a cliché, provoking anxieties about originality, freshness and newness, and making us present-minded in our attitude towards experience and meaning. At the same time, identifying ourselves with images and concepts becomes our means of identifying with others, and in this manner popular images and concepts becoming authorities for mass conformism.

When one has personally identified with an image it can be difficult to then see it in a new way. Often people familiar with a work of art in its image—let us say, a photographic reproduction of a painting--can feel disappointment when they encounter the original. They have identified the image of the painting with a personal significance that the work itself does not acknowledge. "A work of art rises proudly above any interpretation we may see fit to give it,"[113] so to see and appreciate the painting we must be willing to forgo fixed and personalized meanings. We must be willing to enter the life of its transformations and possibilities, the many interpretations it opens, renews and carries us beyond; and we must be willing to find our common experiences expressed as they exist in continuity with deeper human meaning. Forms are a "focus of a community, but instead of demanding a uniformity of response [they] foster variety. In the course

[113] Focillon 32.

of time the variety achieves some kind of consensus, but the flexibility remains"[114]: art gives time and place for meaning, and meanings are allowed to take their natural course in a life of unexpected change. Sentimentality in its absence of the dimension of time has no way of renewing meaning and hence is governed by the logic of analogy and difference. It is this logic that the Chapmans' work manifests so clearly. Their work uses images of Goya's prints to identify an analogy with artistic practice, yet in merely reproducing someone else's image they are forced to demonstrate their particular difference--hence their self-consciously scrawled marks and perverse signs. Of course as the reliance on sameness increases, the demand for seeming originality intensifies, and observers of Contemporary art will readily acknowledge that artists like the Chapmans are locked, like Ulysses, in a progressive quest for an originality that will only ever elude them. Their work is sentimental because it is merely will exerted in the effort of self-stylization; and, however mundane it appears to be, the abject spectacle of their work is the image of the personal identity they are absorbed in fashioning. Their work is the rationalization of expression to produce a concept of art, and the conceptualization of experience to generate an image of meaning.

Sentimentality is *logos* in the style of *mythos* but not in its form. Sentimentality removes meaning from its depth and movement in time, setting it in distinct and relative positions in space, and in this way meaning becomes a self-involved process concerning identity and choice. Sentimentality strikes us an inauthentic, because it is a *choice* of feeling, and a *choice* of meaning. In other

[114] Focillon 67.

words, it is an external act of the will, making its ends alienated from the means of lived expression. While emotions may be observed from a critical and rational distance they cannot be experienced there. Emotions are born in the centrifugal experience of belonging in time and space; their life is fundamental to the human condition and not merely relative to it. The emotions of an individual exist in continuity with the emotions of others, and, though experienced in the particular, are not personal. Homer's *Iliad* begins, "Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles"[115] and the emotion expressed comes to us a potent and terrifyingly real, because rage is realized as a force greater than the individual and yet alive in the individual. Rage is expressed as an eternal force that possesses us at the depths of our being. Rage is lived and not chosen, and as it comes from lived experience it is then *in* life that we have the occasion, and, indeed, the time to shape and be shaped by its energies.

Emotions in the sentimental mode are taken out of the context of lived experience. They become images and concepts to be identified by analogy and difference. While there is no doubt that we must be able to discipline our emotions, for practical, social and personal reasons, when emotions become a matter defined by choice and their end self-stylization we can become alienated by our intuitions and deeper experiences of emotion. Since to be happy is generally the feeling most people would chose to experience on a daily basis, it can begin to strike us as puzzling and problematic when we don't feel happy all the time. But in the context of life, emotion, a dimension of human experience, exists as continuity and transformation. One emotion is never distinct from another—the outward glow of

[115] Homer, The Iliad, trans Robert Fagles, ed. Bernard Knox (New York: Viking) 1:1.

happiness may turn inward towards melancholy, and then despair, and through despair we may feel an inner reconciliation which turns us outward to happiness once more. On our return to happiness its meaning is renewed, its experience deepened and refreshed.

Just as in life, the emotions conveyed by great works of art are difficult to pin down, describe and analyze because they are not perceived in isolation, but as a living whole in which forms of rage gesture towards sorrow, grief, joy and grace. Within the sentimental mode, however, governed by the logic of analogy and difference, emotions are rendered distinct and relative—the state of one emotion is a separate state from all others, and this simplification can produce complex frustration. In fixing the name or image of a particular emotional state we edit out its various possible transformations as well as the flexibility and subtlety in our interpretation. Sentimentality gives us no forms to express the whole of our experience, and consequently our failure in being able to communicate this fullness becomes a sentimental inevitability, increasing our sense of alienation, impotence and emotional exclusivity. Sentimentality is a mode of perception that subjects the life of emotions to an extreme rationalization. In practical terms, it is a highly efficient and convenient means of controlling and measuring our emotional lives, but in human terms its ends are less desirable as our interior life becomes a transparent film on the surface of our being, lacking the very substance of life and depth of human meaning.

Part 2: Modeling Sentimentality

In the previous section I examined sentimentality in the context of other modes of perception, and in this section I will observe the space-biased mode as it is demonstrated in two articles by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin, at least in popular conception, may be the exact opposite of the typical image of sentimentality: he is cosmopolitan, polemic and enigmatic, where sentimentality, as it is generally deemed, is unsophisticated, amenable and overt. However, the tendency of contemporary Western culture is toward the space-bias, so we should be prepared to find sentimentality beyond the categories—popular television and movies, for example—which we have comfortably designated as its sure place. Sentimentality is a highly pervasive phenomenon which respects no distinction between elite critic and industry commodity; it is not tempered, or alleviated by complex analyses, unconventional subject matter, or political commitment, but by the perception of deeper forms of experience and expression. More specifically though, Benjamin's criticism allows me to illustrate the nature of sentimentality in precise terms, because his work clearly and even self-consciously demonstrates the manner in which the descriptive mode in criticism gives way to sentimentality. This giving way is not inevitable, but comes of the critic's inability or refusal (or inability and refusal) to perceive form and appreciate expression. All criticism must employ the descriptive mode—among the expectations of criticism is an analysis of parts—but when the descriptive mode is engaged as more than a rational tool, and becomes the structure of belief and meaning, replacing perspective with commentary, and

philosophy with theory, the critic has moved into the sentimental mode. The price of adopting a radical critical stance where there is no vision of renewal, and only the expectation of instant gratification in the destruction of traditional modes and the promotion of cultural discontinuity is, on the one hand, cynical reductionism, and, on the other, a costly sentimentalism.

I will first trace Benjamin's use of the descriptive mode by outlining his theory of "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."[116] Though he does not explicitly state it in these terms, his theory functions according to the concepts of space-bias and time-bias which we have been tracing thus far. Indeed, it is by reading his article in these terms that one may perceive the import of his insights with greater clarity. Benjamin argues that technologies of mechanical reproduction produce and intensify the tendency in Western culture towards the space-bias, and he demonstrates how the dimension of time is radically diminished. But, as I will argue, Benjamin takes the space-bias of the descriptive mode and the rationalizing impulse of *logos* further, making them the structure of his beliefs and convictions. Benjamin perceives the human subject and human society in strictly space-biased terms, a mode of perception which reduces both to a fate of relative and disempowered objects. In striping humanity of its movement in time, Benjamin eliminates the power, responsibility and freedom of humans to shape the directions of society. Benjamin's space-biased perception of human life produces an overwhelming cynicism and as the critic and scholar Jacques Barzun notes, like Oscar Wilde before him: "the sentimentalist and the cynic are two sides of one

[116] Walter Benjamin, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," The Continental Aesthetic Reader, ed. Clive Cazeaus, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Routledge, 2000).

nature."[117] Following the analysis of "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," I will examine how its space-biased structure manifests more explicitly as sentimentality in his article "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting."[118] Benjamin's theory of collecting is analogous to his theory of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. "Unpacking My Library" makes use of the descriptive mode, but we quickly see that its space-bias tendencies become the mode of his convictions, and in this his essay becomes a paradigm of sentimentality.

As the title itself proclaims, Benjamin's article is a theory of "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin observes that reproduction technology—namely, photography and film--subjects the art of tradition to new space-biased conditions. Taking photographs of a work of art increases the latter's presence in space and detaches it from its place in time by bringing "out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens [...] processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, can capture images which escape natural vision."[119] These "aspects" which the camera brings out refer to the work's material content and state, and not to its expressive dimension; thus, the camera, true to the descriptive mode, gives increased focus to an analysis and enumeration of the work's quantifiable elements: its material state, the media used in its composition, and the content of its subject matter. The descriptive mode of the

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[117] Jacques Barzun, "On Sentimentality" 108.
[118] Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library: ATalk About Book Collecting," Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1969).
[119] Benajmin, "Art" 324.

camera emphasizes the work's object status at the expense of its expressive meaning which would connect it to its place of belonging in a tradition.[120]

The camera not only alters the status of the work, but changes the conditions of the work's reception. As Benjamin notes, "technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself"[121]; "it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."[122] This process, Benjamin suggests, interferes with the work's authenticity and liquidates "the traditional value of the cultural heritage."[123] Increased presence in space, Benjamin theorizes, undermines the nature of a context defined by time; but we can go a little further than Benjamin here, and specify that in interfering with a work's authenticity it is the work's authentic and unique *expression* which is lost, while--in a manner that it seems Benjamin did not anticipate--the status of the work as an authenticated *object* increases. As an authenticated object the work of art now exists in a spatial system of discontinuous and relative images and concepts. The traditional value is lost because tradition, by definition, implies continuity, and it is the expressive forms of a work, the mythic dimension which is the source of such continuity, which are no longer perceived.

While reproduction technology alters the perception and presence of the traditional work of art, space-biased media also generate their own artifacts--namely, photographic images and films--as entities in their own right. Reproduction technology eliminates the time needed to create a work of art by

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[120] We can see here the meaning of the influence of photography on Rauschenberg's work.
[121] Benjamin, "Art" 324.
[122] Benjamin, "Art" 325.
[123] Benjamin, "Art" 325.

hand[124] and, in the case of film the element of time that is done away with is the continuous time before an audience needed to create a dramatic performance.[125] Hence, the means of cultural production becomes a technical matter that is divorced from its ends by the very elimination of time in the creative process. As Benjamin observes, the images generated by mechanical reproduction technologies are received in terms of their "exhibition value"[126]--a concept which conveys a material end, rather than an on-going life of meaning. Benjamin opposes "exhibition value", or status in space, with the concept, "cult value" which implies significance in time. The word "cult" has particular connotations for the contemporary reader that Benjamin himself raises later in the article. When we think of cult we tend to think of very marginal "out there" groups. We think of movies as "cult classics", or of violent and perverse groups like those led by Jim Jones, or David Koresh. In other words, we think of cult in spatial terms as objects or groups with powerful identities. However, in order to make sense of the contrast Benjamin is making, we must understand cult in its original sense, and in the sense being invoked by Benjamin, in terms of its association with time as a wholistic integration of practice and belief. While the word cult invokes considerable mistrust today, Armstrong does much to de-demonize the term, as it were, and return it to a far more neutral status as an aspect that it is essential to all religious belief and practice. While cult value stems from "the earliest art works [which] originated in the service of ritual"[127] Benjamin applies the term to art in the formal mode. As we have

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[124] Benjamin, "Art" 323.
[125]Benjamin, "Art" 329.
[126] Benjamin, "Art" 326.
[127] Benjamin, "Art" 326.

considered earlier, art of the formal mode has a dimension of autonomy that distinguishes it from the mythic and rhetorical modes, thus applying the term "cult value" to formal art can only be done in a highly qualified sense as an aspect of a formal work's dimension in time. As we have seen works of the formal mode are born of a whole and integrated practice in which the physical work of the hand in shaping the art work happens in continuity with the creation and expression of meaning. In other words, a formal work's "cult value" is nothing more than the depth of its expressive meaning.

Benjamin argues that where "cult value" is based on the ritual function of art—a function that exists in time--"exhibition value" engenders a political function—a function that exists in space. This polarity between ritual and politics suggests highly organized ends which set the various possibilities for art in a strict binary. This tactic prevents us from seeing the various gradations of these functions and the manner in which they combine and overlap in the different modes we have considered. Furthermore, and this is a symptom of the limitations just considered, when Benjamin designates the new function of art as politics, it is not democracy or feudalism that he is referring to. His notion of politics is apocalyptic in character--there is no integrated dimension of continuity. Rather he envisions political systems as total states. Politics, as Benjamin sees it, is *either* Fascism *or* Communism. To say that the cult value of art serves ritual and the exhibition value serves politics is somewhat restrictive, and we can open up the suggestion being made by Benjamin by saying that art which tends toward a ritual function reflects

perception shaped by forms of *continuity*, and art which tends toward a political function demonstrates a perception defined by objects and states of *identity*.

Photography manifests the descriptive mode. The camera produces images which identify the material phenomena—persons, places, or things—of the mundane world. Benjamin writes that in photography "the exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to the ritual value."[128] In other words, photography generates identifiable images, rather than expressive forms. Benjamin acknowledges photography's province in matters of identity when he writes, "photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences"[129]: evidence, of course, being a kind of identification. Benjamin goes on to explain that photographs "demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them."[130] As a result, "magazines begin to put up signposts for them, right ones or wrong ones, no matter. For the first time, captions have become obligatory."[131] Captions, or commentary, as we have seen, are a necessary aspect of the descriptive mode. Images and concepts exist in terms of spatial relativity, and the significance of relative and discontinuous entities, which have no dimension or depth of continuity in meaning, must be externally elucidated.

Film, likewise, is an instrument of the descriptive mode, and functions in a manner similar to photography; however, as Benjamin describes, in a film the relative parts or images are assembled to give the effect of a performance in its proper sequence:

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[128] Benjamin, "Art" 327.
[129] Benjamin, "Art" 327.
[130] Benjamin, "Art" 327.
[131] Benjamin, "Art" 327.

> Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positional views which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film. It comprises certain factors of movement which are in reality those of the camera, not to mention special camera angles, close-ups, etc.[132]

Images identify an occurrence--though not an historical one in the case of film, but, more plainly, a situational one--and the significance of the relative image is then elucidated by its position in a larger narrative commentary. As an example, Benjamin describes that when an actor is "supposed to be startled by a knock at the door" and is unsuccessful in acting startled, the director can contrive to affect a "real" startled response. The actor can be filmed when he "happens to be at the studio again" and a shot is fired behind him without forewarning[133]. This situational occurrence with the identity of "startled" can then be set in a sequence entirely alien to its origins. Again the descriptive mode's rational nature comes to the fore—the film is a calculated montage of identifiable effects. Commentary for the relative images of film though, not only exists in the film's sequence, but in commentary that extends outside of the studio as well; one such manifestation is the "artificial build-up of the [star's] 'personality' outside the studio,"[134] another is political propaganda--whether its aim is to maintain the status quo or to "promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions."[135] Completed by an external system of commentary, Benjamin demonstrates that art in the age of mechanical

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[132] Benjamin, "Art" 329.
[133] Benjamin, "Art" 330.
[134] Benjamin, "Art" 330.
[135] Benjamin, "Art" 331.

reproduction--work produced in the descriptive mode--is not only highly conducive to propaganda, but, in fact, demands it.

The central insight of Benjamin's article is not only the manner in which reproduction technologies are an instrument of a new space-biased mode, but that wide spread habituation to this mode of perception shapes and organizes human society in distinctive patterns. It is the new space-bias with the emphasis on manifest visible states—the exhibition value—that generates the social phenomenon called the masses. Benjamin argues that with the introduction of statistics—an exemplary manifestation of the descriptive mode as the tabulation and categorization of identifiable states of being—there occurs "an adjustment of reality." He goes on to explain, when people adjust their perception of humanity to the "reality" of statistics they become statistical entities themselves, and come to perceive themselves as the masses.[136] Humanity becomes the statistics of the masses, and, Benjamin suggests, a mechanical reproduction of their descriptive, space-biased reality. Humans begin to see and understand themselves, not in any deeper sense of meaning and belonging, but in terms of their own "exhibition value."

Benjamin examines the nature of this perception in closer detail when he considers the role of film in adjusting individual and public consciousness. He writes that "the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor."[137] In other words,

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[136] Benjamin, "Art" 326.
[137] Benjamin, "Art" 329.

before a film the audience must take a centripetal view of the actor and performance as identifiable images and concepts. The audience no longer perceives forms of experience and expression--there is no continuity between audience and performance, and no centrifugal experience of depth. As a montage of states, a film fractures, by changing angles and making cuts, the whole and expressive movement of the performer's gesture. Instead the audience, "takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing."[138] The testing, which is the critical centripetal approach, is the practice of identifying difference and analogy. The camera takes different shots of the same entity or situation, and over the course of the film--and also cinematic history--these different shots can be categorized by analogy and difference, as cinematic techniques and conventions like the "close-up." The image of the close-up is, rather arbitrarily, identified with the concept of emotional intensity, but the close-up is an image of an emotional state and not an expression of emotion. As states are conventionalized and repeated they become clichés--the fate, surely, of the close-up. Benjamin's insights lead to a sober pragmatism concerning the uses of film. Benjamin quotes Abel Gance as exclaiming: "Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films...all legends, all mythologies and all myths, all founders of religion, and the very religions...await their exposed resurrection, and the heroes crowd each other at the gate."[139] To such naïve enthusiasm Benjamin responds: "Presumably without intending it, [Gance] issued an invitation to a far-reaching liquidation."[140] The liquidation Benjamin predicts is that in subjecting traditional art to space-biased technologies and the logic of

[138] Benjamin, "Art" 329.
[139] Benjamin, "Art" 324.
[140] Benjamin, "Art" 325.

difference and analogy, the cinematographer is subjecting movement and depth to convention and ultimately cliché.

Where the individual's perception of a work of art changes, the individual's perception of himself, Benjamin argues, will follow and adapt accordingly. Where paintings invite independent contemplation, and, thus, rely on an audience of autonomous subjects capable of objective appreciation, films are presented to a mass of critical spectators in which, Benjamin suggests, "individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response."[141] In other words films instigate a radically subjective reaction which is subordinated to the mass response by the very conditions of total relativity. At the same time while films induce mass conformism, they heighten self-consciousness—"apperception."[142] "[T]he filmed behaviour item lends itself more readily to analysis"; and through techniques such as close-ups and slow motion the individual witnesses his everyday actions in minute and mundane detail. The self-consciousness which film induces is never able to come together and take on a whole form of meaning, however, because a film, as Benjamin suggests, is a media of distraction and will interrupt any intuitive tendencies towards reflection and contemplation. Benjamin contrasts the experience of viewing a painting with that of watching a movie:

> The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested. Duhamel [...] notes this circumstance as

[141] Benjamin, "Art" 332-333.
[142] Benjamin, "Art" 333.

> follows: 'I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images.' The spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change.[143]

In the state of distracted self-consciousness the spectators in the masses cannot perceive reality with any reliable or conscious objectivity. However, as Benjamin suggests, "the distracted person *can form habits.*"[144] He goes on to theorize:

> Distraction as provided by art [art, that is, which is produced by the media of mechanical reproduction] presents a *covert control* of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. Since moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses.[145]

In other words self-consciousness is a form of paralysis, but the simultaneous state of distraction permits action or "tasks", in the form of habits, to be carried out with the individual having only a limited awareness of its social effect. As Benjamin sees it, the quality of the habits forwarded by a film—or, more precisely, the nature of the politics which determines the propaganda in the film--attains a level of total control and unprecedented significance.

The two politics observed by Benjamin which function in terms of the masses' spatial formation are Fascism and Communism; thus they become the two

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[143] Benjamin, "Art" 335.
[144] Benjamin, "Art" 336 emphasis added.
[145] Benjamin, "Art" 336 emphasis added.

political systems and ideologies—given apocalyptic anti-Christ and Christ like proportions—by which propaganda will be determined. According to Benjamin, Fascism seeks to render politics aesthetic where "Communism responds by politicizing art."[146] Since art in the age of mechanical reproduction is already oriented to a political function, the suggestion here is that Communism is merely making this orientation transparent. Where the space-biased mode of the masses perceives the "universal equality of things", Communism will respond with a like—universally equal--distribution of property. The individual's identity with film and the habits it propagates will be a complete and highly visible system, because, as Benjamin observes in Russian films, the actors are "people who portray *themselves*—and primarily in their own work process."[147] In doing this Communism will not only meet "modern man's legitimate claim to being reproduced,"[148] but where "self-alienation has reached such a degree"[149] Communist films will assure the masses of their very existence; they will provide "evidence" of the masses in the process of mundane life to assure the masses of their own presence. As we can see this alienated sense of one's own existence in the present is the ultimate spatialization of life's dimension in time.

Where Communism will function as a space-biased transparent state, Fascism will attempt to make this state aesthetic and non-transparent in an effort to pervert its ends. Benjamin argues that in a space-biased state that functions according to exhibition value, Fascism will generate an artificial "ritual value"—

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[146] Benjamin, "Art" 337.
[147] Benjamin, "Art" 331.
[148] Benjamin, "Art" 331.
[149] Benjamin, "Art" 337.

exhibition value given the identity of ritual value by the rationalized means of propaganda--by rationalizing concepts and images of value and deploying them in the shape of the *Führer* cult. Elements continuous with earlier forms of meaning like "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" will be imported from their rightful context, and applied in their de-contextualized state as alien concepts to the social conditions of the masses. Fascism will expropriate *concepts* of eternal value and mystery in order to preserve inequality in the property system[150]; and it will apply the *images* of creativity and genius to a fürhrer where the masses are unpracticed at objective contemplation. Further, Fascism will propose salvation in aesthetic expression where mankind's "self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order"![151]

Benjamin's argument for Communism is nothing less than terrifying, and even the word argument seems far too subdued a term for such a piece of writing--and it is fair to suggest that "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is more rightly a manifesto of sorts. But is it a Communist manifesto? Terry Eagleton appears willing to believe so, admitting, with evident defensiveness, in the Preface of his study, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* that

> I have written what I believe is the first book-length English-language study of Benjamin in order to get at him before the opposition does. All the signs are that Benjamin is in imminent danger of being appropriated by a

[150] Benjamin, "Art" 336.
[151] Benjamin, "Art" 337.

> critical establishment that regards his Marxism as a contingent peccadillo or tolerable eccentricity.[152]

Eagelton's intentness on the matter has all the signs of wish fulfillment, though he does remark later in his book that "[t]here is no way in which the apocalyptic aspects of Benjamin's historical imagination may be neatly harmonized with his Marxism."[153] If Benjamin's essay is a Marxist treaty, it is a Marxism not based on human ideals but the most cynical of outlooks. Benjamin may be advocating a radical politics, but the sense of urgency prompting such a political stance is founded in a yet more radical cynicism. It is a reductive rationalism—cynicism itself--which prompts Benjamin to find social gain in masses of individuals who are incapable of thought and contemplation, and a dehumanizing pragmatism that finds political convenience in a population made docile and totally receptive to propaganda by technologies of distraction. If this is communism it is a vision of a diffuse totalitarianism, as paradoxical as this may seem, governing a society of automatons.

Benjamin makes use of the descriptive mode to examine and analyze the relative nature and effects of mechanical reproduction technology, and on such matters it is clear that Benjamin is an astute observer—analytical observation is a skill which in itself is in no sense cynical. However, the space-bias of the descriptive mode also becomes the mode of Benjamin's convictions, and here we find the root of his cynicism. Benjamin compresses any sense of movement and development; hence the fluidity, flexibility and multiple and continuous

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[152] Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: NBL, 1981) Preface.
[153] Eagleton 81.

possibilities which time also permits are lost. Human life and society are styled as heavily determined, complete, and isolated states. The state of the individual is analogous to mechanical reproduction, and mechanical reproduction is analogous to the state of the larger society: the identity of these three distinct forces is made singular and total.

The effect of the space-biased approach is dehumanizing. In a state where the qualities of "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" are deemed "outmoded," life is reduced to mere functionalism and mechanical reproduction. Communism is the preferred politics because it will alleviate the pressure for war, but it has no value in its own right. In Benjamin's article, there is no reflection—for the very mode of his perception inhibits any such reflection--on the greater virtue of peace, because there is no vision of life's inherent meaning: Benjamin's position of extreme rationalism and pragmatism is not equipped to comprehend the value of peace and the meaning of human life. Communism is nothing more that a rational expedient. The danger of such cynicism is that in viewing Communism in relative terms, Benjamin presents Fascism with like relativism. In a state that recognizes "the universal equality of all things," Fascism cannot be appreciated as the moral outrage it most certainly is. Similarly, war, rather than being viewed as a social and political failure subject to human responsibility, is rendered nothing less than rational! Indeed, Benjamin describes war as a question of pure pragmatics: "If the natural utilization of productive forces is impeded by the property system, the increase in technical devices, in speed, and in the sources of energy will press for an

unnatural utilization, and this is found in war."[154] Has it not been the self-appointed task of the leaders of Modern nations to rationalize the move to war? Is it not the responsibility of critics to question and convey the human meaning of such a move? While Benjamin sets out a radical critique, he is actually generating and promoting conformism. Where fundamentalists interpret religious texts in literal terms, Benjamin interprets technology in a like manner: Benjamin sees technology as the literal conditions and total import of mundane life. While dehumanizing the populace as docile masses, Benjamin also sentimentalizes them by conveying them as having no dimension for responsibility. Just as it is a Romantic cliché to perceive primitive cultures as one with nature, it is equally sentimental to view a Modern populace as having a perverse innocence in a state of oneness with technology. With no ideals there can be no morality; with no morality there can be no human responsibility. While it is clear that moral vision requires the individual to perceive matters in *appropriate* relative terms, the word appropriate signifies that morality is not subject to total relativity. It is only in appreciating the continuity (in contrast to the relativity) of deep forms of meaning that any perspective over the relative may be gained. Benjamin's cynicism sets society and humanity in fatalistic terms, setting them beyond the reach of responsible action. In eliminating the dimension of time, humans are striped of the time for conscious reflection and moral vision. Without moral vision, acts of cruelty cannot be properly condemned and acts of humanity cannot be realized in the full depth and dignity of their meaning.

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[154] Benjamin, "Art" 337.

Where Benjamin's space-biased perception manifests as cynicism in "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," the sentimentalism of his essay, "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting" is only a shift in subject matter. In other words, both essays demonstrate the same mode of perception applied to two different subject matters. Benjamin argues that there exists no possibility for forms of collective and voluntary human meaning: there is only the masses state of total identity or the spectator's radical subjectivity. Benjamin reproduces this same extreme stance in "Unpacking My Library"-- though where in "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" he focuses on the conditions of the masses, in "Unpacking My Library" he focuses on the spectator's—now the collector's—radical subjectivity. Thus in shifting his attention to his own personal significance, the cynic enters the special domain of the sentimentalist. In "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin posits a radical and total state of identity, and in "Unpacking My Library" Benjamin takes the same extreme stance, shifting his attention from the political to the personal in the radical subjectivity of the individual—like the sentimentalist and the cynic, radical subjectivity and total identity are coextensive.

In "Unpacking My Library" Benjamin adopts the posture of an individual in the masses--one who is highly self-conscious, compulsive, and stubbornly myopic in his mundane pursuits. The radical subjectivity which Benjamin claims is eagerly admitted—in presenting himself as a "genuine collector" he writes, "For such a man is speaking to you, and on closer scrutiny he proves to be speaking only about

himself."[155] What follows then is not a conversation—he assures his reader that he will not deign to "appear convincingly objective"[156]—it is, rather, a matter of completely personal meaning and the reader has been warned that she must take it on these (his) terms. Sentimentality, as we see, is acutely individualistic—it exerts an individualism which negates the value of continuous forms of shared meaning. It is a state of personal meaning that accepts the total relativity of its position: it is, in other words, a state of perception without deeper human meaning.

As a collector of books, Benjamin tells the reader that his is a special kind of collecting, and it is true that we should not confuse Benjamin's collecting with other forms of collecting--for we may be certain that there are different kinds. For example, we can imagine forms of collecting inspired by an appreciation of continuity. There is the collecting of books and art for the quality of an individual work's expression and the manner in which a newly acquired work compliments and juxtaposes the expression of others. Such collecting happens in the perception of the work's depth. It reflects the collector's connection into an artist's vision and the collection itself suggests the scope and movements of the imaginative life of the independent collector. We can also think of a collector whose collection reflects a form of patronage, the patronage of a writer, or artist, or artisan or publisher. Such a collection may reflect elements of private interest, but also ideals concerning culture's larger social value. Such a collector supports art by collecting it, for in making art viable in the present, he ensures the possibility for expressive meaning in the future.

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[155] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 59.
[156] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 59.

Benjamin's collecting, as he is adamant to confirm, is not of these kinds. In the first place, Benjamin perceives the books he collects in strictly rational terms--he collects books as objects, material entities: "For him, not only books but also *copies* of books have their fates."[157] He has a relationship with his books, but this relationship does not come through the activity of reading.[158] It is not a relationship in time; there is no life, no development, and no renewal; there is no continuity of expression and experience between reader and writer. Rather the relationship is a complete state of ownership and the book's value is in the difficulty of obtaining it in the marketplace.[159] In other words, value is highly rationalized: it is itemized and quantifiable.

Where the value of a cultural work is located in the material condition of the object and rationalized concepts such as common and uncommon, available and rare, and not in the work's inherent quality or expressive value, culture itself ceases to be a substantial experience and ceases to have significant meaning. In "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin argues that the cultural heritage will be liquidated, because, in removing a work of art from its unique position in tradition, the work loses its "aura." Benjamin uses the term "aura" in a very different way from Focillon. Where for Focillon the aura exists in the depth of a work, in the transformations and expression which the forms of a work gesture to beyond its spatial definition, for Benjamin the "aura" is not an intuitive or expressive quality, but the rational and mundane condition of an object as its

[157] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 61.
[158] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 62.
[159] Benjmain, "Unpacking" 62.

material existence takes on different states with time. The "aura" according to Benjamin is

> the changes which it [the object] may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership. The traces of the first can be revealed only by chemical or physical analyses which it is impossible to perform on a reproduction; changes of ownership are subject to a tradition which must be traced from the situation of the original.[160]

The "aura" then, as defined by Benjamin, is a material phenomenon--not an expressive one--determined by rationalized analyses, and in this manner not only the aura, but the whole realm of art and tradition become the particular domain of specialists and experts. Thus, it is not only mechanical reproduction--as Benjamin describes in *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*—that liquidates a cultural tradition by removing a work of art from its unique condition in time and space, but equally the collector's rationalized view of a work of art as an entirely random and relative commodity with no depth of expressive meaning that is the cause of a culture's destruction.

Benjamin is a sentimental collector, and as such he practices cultural destruction. His sense of value is an entirely rationalized one. For him a book's value, its "quintessence," or its "aura," is "the period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership [...] the whole background of an item."[161] The book has a material condition but it is denied its expressive dimension and with no expressive dimension it is denied its belonging in a cultural tradition. Where there is no

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[160] Benjamin, "Art" 324.
[161] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 60.

understanding of the book's belonging in a tradition the collector can define a book's significance entirely to suit his own will. He can delight in the willful conceit that he has "saved" the book from oblivion, its alienated state of no belonging. "Saving" the book is an act of space-biased perception, for in claiming that the book's meaning is defined by its relative place in the rationalized pattern of his collection—a space-biased definition of meaning—he is rejecting the meaning of the book as it exists in the context of tradition—a more time-biased perception of meaning. Here we see the collector entering fully into sentimental perception, for here the book's "aura" is not only its material condition—evidence of a literal or descriptive mode of perception—but a rationalized act of wish-fulfillment: the "aura" is the collector's conceptualized, hence sentimental, enchantment with an object that is perceived as having no inherent meaning. Benjamin describes his own sentimentalism when he writes:

> The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of the individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of *his* ownership.[162]

The extreme individualism of the sentimentalist is striking, for it is the collector's very ownership that renders an object significant. The collector declares himself the interpreter of an object's "fate"[163] but what is more, the collector *is* the object's

[162] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 62.
[163] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 60-61.

fate. When he "studies and loves them as the scene, the stage of their fate,"[164] he is loving them because they are his. The collector has conceptualized himself as arbiter and image of the objects' fate, and the objects are the means of identifying this--the collector's--image.

As Benjamin's collector demonstrates, the sentimentalist has no centrifugal understanding of himself; he experiences no belonging; he perceives himself and the world as having no inherent meaning. He observes himself with a centripetal view, the critical stance. His self-consciousness is acute because the critical state in which he is always testing himself is not offset by a deeper human appreciation of inner meaning. The collector is enchanted by objects which he has conceptualized as an image of himself, and his sentimentality exists in his complete alienation from the very self he admires. The sentimental collector perceives himself in a spatialized system of objects, and in experiencing himself as an image, he denies his own contact with lived experience. The sentimentalist exists as a rationalized version of himself, a completely styled and discontinuous entity as relative in space and meaning as the very things he owns.

Benjamin establishes the state of his books in the descriptive mode. The books are mundane objects whose meaning is entirely relative, and this relativity prompts the need for external commentary. Benjamin moves into the sentimental mode where the commentary has no collective or shared meaning or value, where meaning and value are radically subjective. Sentimental meaning is a rationally and individualistically fabricated phenomenon, rather than a renewal or illumination of

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[164] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 60.

a deeper expressive and intuitive reality. Benjamin describes the collector's extreme individualism when he writes that

> one of the finest memories of a collector is the moment when he rescued a book to which he might never have given a thought, much less a wishful look, because he found it lonely and abandoned on the market place and bought it to give it its freedom.[165]

Here we witness the unchecked opportunism of the collector's will: objects perceived as entirely random and relative entities require the collector's external commentary and rationalized sentimental meaning, but more to the point, we see that the collector himself seeks random meaningless objects *in order* to exercise his radical subjectivity. The collector's self-centred definition of meaning has broader implications beyond his own alienation. The sentimentalist redefines the nature of meaning according to the space-biased mode and in doing so we see how forms of human meaning—freedom, love, fate—are reduced to images and concepts and identified with the relative and random state of an object. To apply the concept of freedom to an object is to reduce the meaning of freedom to absurdity. The effect of this identification undermines the term's value, and renders its use trivial and its meaning a cliché. Sentimentality is the conceptualization of meaning in the absence of meaningful experience and expression. It is the stylization of an image of feeling, where the experience of feeling is alienated and ambiguous.

The impact of sentimentality on the individual is significant: just as mankind's "self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure," we find that the collector is similarly willing

[165] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 64.

to participate in his self-destruction. "Unpacking my Library" flips to cynicism at its conclusion. Benjamin self-consciously acknowledges that the collector, in being consumed by the distraction of meaningless objects and the extremely subjective meaning which he rationalizes for them, brings on his own annihilation: the collector "lives" in his objects and his presence "disappear[s] inside" them[166]; and what survives of the collector, Benjamin perceives, is not human meaning, but the very same mute and random objects that existed before.

When we identify with Benjamin's collector we are identifying our own sentimental inclinations. Benjamin says that "everything said from the angle of a real collector is whimsical,"[167] and in Modern society we must be granted our own portion of whimsy. We must accept Benjamin's insight that the dehumanizing conditions of Modern society make distraction a virtual human necessity, but we must also ask: "When does our distraction become the conditions for reproducing and perpetuating dehumanizing conditions?" Whimsy must form some balance with its costs--an ethical dimension exists for our radical subjectivity. We must ask: What becomes of art and artists when the collectors of the world are intent on collecting mundane objects? In examples like the Chapmans and Rauschenberg we find art imitating and reproducing the mundane—art presenting itself as nothing more than a collectible. At the same time resources are always finite, and the sentimental expenditure of energy and money on insignificant commodities is an effective and diffuse way of silencing human expressions of meaning. Turning towards sentimentality is neglecting to cultivate the forms of our connection within

[166] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 67.
[167] Benjamin, "Unpacking" 62.

a culture, and in this we deny our very responsibility in shaping our culture. Culture under these conditions becomes the residual effect of sentimental subjectivity—a system of complete relativity and choice, and a vacuous state of conformism.

Conclusion

Benjamin's perception is a valuable example of the sentimental mode, and examining his writing allows us to better understand the range and character of the sentimental phenomenon. Where we might be apt to see sentimentality as simple or naïve and lacking in sophistication, Benjamin demonstrates for us that sentimentality is an extremely controlled and rationalized mode of perceiving the world and the individual, a mode which denies any intuitive experience of meaning and inherent expression. The impact of the space-biased mode of perception on the individual is significant: Benjamin illustrates that where experiences of meaning and expression are denied, a complex intelligence will have no respite from self-consciousness; and that where feeling is given no time to attain expressive form, the very existence of feeling becomes an alien and alienating presence. Feeling and meaning which were once expressive continuities belonging within a deeply shared context--and as such were experiences that formed a source of human connection—become in the sentimental mode fixed and rationalized states—images and concepts—that are used to define individualized and exclusive identities. To perceive in terms of exclusive identities is the very antithesis of renewal; thus the sentimentalist in styling his own image actively participates in the liquidation of the cultural tradition and the annihilation of the human individual's deepest experiences of self, value and purpose.

It is possible that some readers will object to my describing Benjamin's mode of perception as sentimental. Benjamin suffered with the great cost of his life

at the hands of the Nazis: he was refused a pass at the French-Spanish border and took his life, fearing capture by the Gestapo. But, surely, his experience reinforces the point I am making: the sentimental mode of perception is a mode of existential crisis—it is a mode in which nothing is perceived as having inherent expressive meaning, and everything is condemned to infinite relativity; it is a mode that negates the deeper forms of liberty which may only be cultivated through time. While one can never determine when an author's outlook ceases to be based on experience and is simply the way of an innate and peculiar sensibility, we should not deny that Benjamin's writing is a particular response to the inhuman conditions he and his generation faced. For who can deny Benjamin his cynicism when totalitarian forces sought his destruction alongside the destruction of millions more? Who can deny his defensive retreat into a world of restricted meaning where a culture's humanity had failed so palpably? Benjamin adopts an extreme and dehumanizing mode in social and political conditions which were themselves extreme and dehumanizing.

The space-biased sentimental mode manifests existential crisis, but it also perpetuates it, and this brings us to questions concerning a sentimental culture's sustainability. Benjamin is often described as preparing the ground for post-Modernism[168] which is to say that his influence as been considerable. In his article, "What Is an Author?" Michel Foucault adopts the spaced-biased mode, complete with its cynicism and sentimental reductions.[169] Like Benjamin's literalistic interpretations, Foucault's "typology of discourse" is an extreme rationalization of a

[168] Clive Cazeaux, ed. The Continental Aesthetics Reader (New York: Routledge, 2000) 300.
[169] I have written an unpublished essay, Reading Objects, which considers the cynicism of Foucault's vision in his article "What Is an Author?"

cultural tradition with its own liquefying effects. Benjamin is a critical model who, much like a concept subject to relativity and choice, has been embraced at will. In the academy, in the art world and beyond, we find that radical critiques and subjective testimonials have become the norm, but where Benjamin faced real circumstances that threatened him with annihilation, today in the West we enjoy rights, privileges, and material advantages of an unprecedented nature. Where Benjamin's radical critique has the dignity of real and immediate threat, ours has become merely a willful posture in a culture without dignity or restraint—to paraphrase Benjamin: our existential crisis and cultural alienation has become a personal and critical gratification. The individualism of our criticism makes a commonplace of existential crisis, a reduced state of meaning which does no more than trivialize both the history and experience of human suffering and the possibility of human redemption beyond such crises.

In her recent book *Dark Age Ahead*, Jane Jacobs addresses the question of our culture's sustainability. She writes:

> The purpose of this book is to help our culture avoid sliding into a dead end, by understanding how such a tragedy comes about, and thereby what can be done to ward it off and thus retain and further develop our living, functioning culture, which contains so much of value, so hard won by our forebears.[170]

Jacobs gives particular attention to the practical structures that make up a culture: the ways in which communities are planned, the legislative and economic conditions which encourage poverty rather than alleviate it, and the manner in

[170] Jane Jacobs, Dark Age Ahead (New York: Random House, 2004) 4-5.

which institutions are organized and monitored. Though she focuses on the practical, she sees that the practical must be grounded in deeper cultural values, and these values are found in living forms of meaning, and in renewing forms of human memory. Mass amnesia, Jacobs observes, is historically the fate of cultures which have entered a Dark Age, and she goes on to argue that mass amnesia is an existential crisis which directly affects the basic material conditions of life, and on these terms she is adamant that we should not give in to it.[171] For some cultures, mass amnesia comes of external pressures, most notably war and colonization, but as Jacobs notes there are cultures that have succumbed to mass amnesia "by assault from within"[172]—and I would argue that sentimentality is one such assault. To consider the question of mass amnesia and cultural sustainability, we can consider the relationship between sentimentality and two aspects of our culture we have previously touched on: criticism and tradition.

As my Grandmother was known to say—and she was an artist who knew well the import—"Everyone is a critic." Though we may assume that sentimentality proliferates by an uncritical acceptance, as we have seen, sentimentality functions by very rational, individualistic, self-conscious and, indeed, critical means. Sentimentality is *logos* given global application—*logos* applied even to expressive forms where its methods are fundamentally unsuitable. It is not the capacity for criticism which is lacking in our culture. We identify what we are, by identifying what we are against—and taking the phrase "nothing if not critical" to a new level of meaning, we seem to believe that we really are *nothing* if

[171] Jacobs 7-24.
[172] Jacobs 14

we are not critical. Sentimentality is not perpetuated by uncritical acceptance, but, rather, by an absence of a deeper appreciation of the forms of cultural expression.

Culture is meaning, but where criticism accepts a theory of total relativity meaning is undermined. Cultural meaning gives shape to the urgency of life, allowing us to define values and ideals. It is by values and ideals that we gain the perspective to condemn human cruelty and find dignity in our own lives. Jacobs writes, "a living culture is forever changing, without losing itself as a framework and context of change."[173] Humans create culture by cultivating their belonging in it, by understanding the connections which deepen their own position, and by articulating their independent perspective of meaning to others: culture is our participation in a context we share with others. Radical critiques put culture beyond human control, because the change they demand are total ends—in eliminating time, the critic eliminates the means by which humans may move from one state to another and the means by which they achieve the freedom to create and renew culture and seek ends within a continuity of development. As radical critiques theorizes human impotence and insignificance, subjective testimonials of personal meaning trivialize the very value of human participation. Where meaning is confined to the hyper-personal, it is alienated from human forms of connections and ceases to have the potential to be an experience of profound expression and deep value. In the sentimental mode connections are conceptual and radical, to be chosen at will, but deep forms of human connection exist in experience and as such intermingle with the very matter of life. Where criticism does not make it its task to understand such connections both for their limits *and* possibilities we lose our

[173] Jacobs 6.

framework and context for development, change, and the renewal of meaning: renewal is not only new and different insights, it is a context in which the new and different is perceived to *have* meaning. Where we don't cultivate cultural frameworks, we forget them; and where we have no reference for renewal we succumb to infinite varieties of being the same.

To move beyond sentimentality, criticism must relearn the craft of appreciation; and the critic must imagine her task within a whole gesture of renewal. Criticism is a statement of an individual position—and it is natural that we look for it to be pointed, astute, and incisive (we would not want it to be anything less); however, the responsibility and freedom of the critical individual is not in defining herself against forms of meaning, but in using independent insight to realize these meanings anew. Appreciation requires us to enter into a work and into connections beyond our own selves. To appreciate, we must give up some of our individualism and the aggressive stance of radical subjectivity—and in return we achieve the freedom to find meaning beyond our personal preoccupations, and we regain the dimension of meaning that gives our autonomy human substance. The radical critical stance indicates difference but offers nothing unique; it is the practice of appreciation, the experience of expression, which holds out to us the forms of transformation and in this the experience of unique meaning. Appreciation is fundamental to culture and must be allowed to lead criticism, and criticism in its turn can take us somewhere new by renewing our appreciation, for it is by these means that criticism permits the development of insight. I think it is significant that

writer academics like Toni Morrison and J.M. Coetzee,[174] have, on occasions where critical talks were expected, delivered stories instead. They are able to do this successfully, because they are exceptional writers, and what they demonstrate is that the power of story is in the *time* it creates for deeper human contemplation. We cannot all be artists—artistic talent abides by no rule of the universal equality of all things—but we can make use of this time. We can allow ourselves to appreciate the depth of meaning which comes to life through expressive forms and the experiences of deeper connections which they illuminate. On the other hand, where criticism creates no time for appreciation we become self-conscious in our cultural participation, and alienated from our culture. Sentimental alienation exists where time for cultivating appreciation is denied; it is a fate we produce by our own neglect, but it is also a fate we overcome by our own efforts.

As we assume that uncritical acceptance is the root of sentimentality, we often assume that tradition is sentimentality's particular domain. "That's traditional," often implies the sense of a commonplace which is sentimentally clung to. However, when we call something "traditional" we are reducing the meaning of tradition to relative concepts and images. Where tradition is a living continuity, images and concepts identify fixed states. In other words, the space-bias of the sentimental mode is the antithesis of tradition; the space-biased mode deconstructs the forms of meaning which create a tradition by perceiving them as alienated and discontinuous states. Sentimentality is our alienation from tradition and our alienation from the continuity of meaning in time.

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[174] Morrison's Nobel Prize lecture was delivered as a story, and Coetzee recent work Elizabeth Costello is a collection of stories many of which were originally delivered at speaking engagements.

Tradition is the dimension of culture in time, and as we create culture, we create tradition. When we reduce tradition to concepts it becomes dogma, and false authorities--entities to be cast off. Tradition, however, is a living practice, we transform and renew what comes to us in time through our very participation; and in our participation we pass a life of meaning into the future. Without tradition our lives and sense of purpose are confined to the present—we lose our vision and perspective, and are governed by a fear of being anything less than current. In such a state we become bound by a sentimental need to confirm our very existence by exerting our complete and subjectively exclusive significance in space.

In a sentimental culture we are overwhelmed by the dominance of our culture's presence in space, but its state of high visibility can obscure its deeper conditions. As Jacobs observes, "[w]riting, printing, and the Internet give a false sense of security about the permanence of culture,"[175] and where we give no time to deepen the meaning in the information they convey, meaning becomes merely conceptual. Where meaning is conceptual it is not experienced—it is quickly consumed and passed over, and as such it *is* the means by which to undermine memory. Tradition is our means for memory. Memory is meaning in the continuity of time; it is individual experience given expressive form and tradition gathers these forms. Experiences of the past are renewed in memory when individuals take time to experience forms of past expression. Our memory becomes more than trivial information, because the intuitive response to expression deepens our connection and renews its meaning by the very experience of meaning. When the past becomes a complex of data and a simultaneity of styles—systems without form—it is

[175] Jacobs 5.

determined by efficiency and choice, and we become vulnerable to mass forgetfulness. Forms create time. Their expression is the opportunity for contemplation. Where we rationalize expression, we eliminate time for memory, for ourselves, and for the future of a culture; and where we deny ourselves the time to cultivate more profound dimensions of experience we silence the very voice of human meaning.

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