

## VAST: Looking to Write, Writing to Look

### Lecture 1: Translating Text Into Imagery

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Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, ca. 1508

- Narrative – from text to painting
  - Biblical stories
  -
- Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci, A Memory of His Childhood*, 1910
  - Codex Atlanticus
    - *I recall as one of my very earliest memories that while I was in my cradle a vulture came down to me, and opened my mouth with its tail, and struck me many times with its tail against my lips.*
  - "passive homosexual" childhood fantasy

Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919

- *I had the idea that a painting cannot, must not be looked at too much. It becomes desecrated by the very act of being seen too much*
- Kitsch
  - Pokes fun at high-art idolatry
- Prioritized language over painting
  - As with "R. Mutt" conveying meaning in *Fountain*
- Erotic
  - "Elle a chaud au cul" -- "She has a hot ass"
  - Or, what Duchamp referred to as *there is fire down below*

Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1950 (replica of 1917 original)

- exhibition
  - original sent to the Society of Independent Artist exhibition 1917
    - at Grand Central Palace, New York
  - all entries accepted with \$6 entrance fee
  - Duchamp was a juror of exhibition
  - Was installed behind a partition (out of view)
    - Prompted Duchamp's resignation from the society
  - Walter Arensberg
    - Came to exhibition to buy the work
    - Attendants claimed they had never heard of it
    - Took out checkbook, bought it sight unseen
      - Said *Fill in the amount yourselves*
    - Ordered that the work be carried in plain view through the crowded galleries

- At the exit door, Arensberg resigned from the society
- Pseudonym
  - Mutt – from Mott Works
    - Sanitary equipment manufacturer in New Jersey
      - where Arensberg and Joseph Stella bought the urinal
  - Mutt and Jeff
    - Cartoon strip
  - R
    - Richard
    - French slang for *moneybags*
- Essay “The Richard Mutt Case”
  - Duchamp probably wrote
  - Published in *The Blind Man* (with a photo of the work)
  - Offers dense of the work
  - Points out hypocrisy of being rejected for un-rejectable exhibition

### Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907

- Apollinaire
  - *Free[d] art from its shackles [and] extend[ed] its frontiers*
- Many interpretations
  - Picasso’s friends (Salmon, Apollinaire, and Jacob)
    - Baffled; embarrassed silence when he first showed it to them
  - Fernand (and later critic William Rubin) – Picasso’s fear of venereal disease
    - 1902 treated for venereal disease in Barcelona
    - *his trepidation in regard to syphilis and gonorrhea had to play some role in the symbolism*
  - Leo Steinberg – reflects sexual trauma
- Inspiration(s)
  - African tribal art
    - Picasso had seen at the Ethnographic Museum at the Trocadero
    - *The masks weren’t just like any other pieces of sculpture. Not at all. They were magic things.*
  - Iberian sculpture
    - Picasso had two sculptures
      - Scandal -- “affair of the statues”
      - his friend Pieret stole two Iberian limestone heads (ca. 5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) from the Louvre
        - Apollinaire arrested and briefly jailed
        - Apollinaire and Picasso
          - Summoned before a magistrate
          - unknowingly incriminated each other
          - scandal led Apollinaire to the army and his eventual death

### **Albert Einstein (1879-1955)**

- Arthur Miller, *Space, Time, and the Beauty That Causes Havoc*, 2001
- 1905 published theory of special relativity

- "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies"
- Relativity of simultaneity
  - Two events, simultaneous for some observer, may not be simultaneous for another observer if the observers are in relative motion
- Einstein's ideas discussed in the "Band of Picasso" (his circle)
  - 1905 discovery of relativity and a new representation for light
- 4<sup>th</sup> dimension
  - Picasso discussed them with Maurice Princet, an insurance actuary (member of his circle)

#### Vassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation No. 29 (The Swan)*, 1912

- "Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammer, the soul is the piano with the strings."
- *Improvisation and composition*

#### **Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1911)**

- Munich
- harsh critique of Judaism and Christianity
  - promoting materialism
  - disavowal of organized religions which promote false spirituality
- Geometry
  - Theosophy
    - creation is a geometrical progression, beginning with a single point
    - The creative aspect of the forms is expressed by the descending series of circles, triangles, and squares.
  - Triangle
    - signifies the upward climb towards a higher spiritual awareness
    - foreshadows Abraham Maslow proposed in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943)
      - self-actualization at the apex of Maslow's system = spiritual awareness at the top of the triangle

#### Joseph Stella, *Bridge*, 1936

#### **Precisionism:**

- Emphasis on geometric form of object
- American subject matter
- Inspired by
  - Cubism
  - Art Deco (stylized, angular forms)
  - American industrialization (assembly line)
- Brooklyn Bridge
  - Completed 1883
  - engineering wonder
  - symbol of
    - reunification after Civil War

- modern city
  - icon of the industrial age
- new + old
  - Gothic references
  - Link between old and new
- Stella + Brooklyn
  - 1919 Stella settled in Brooklyn
  - began to paint the bridge
  - suggests movement through space
  - bridge a recurring theme
  - numerous studies; five major oils
- Bridge as symbol of the new world
- style
  - stained glass windows of Gothic architecture
  - [Described the Bridge as a] *shrine containing all the efforts of the new civilization of AMERICA*

#### Hart Crane, *The Bridge*, 1930

- Stella and Crane
  - Didn't know each other
  - Had mutual friends
- Closing of epic poem comprised of
  - 60 pages
  - 15 short poems
- Suicide
  - 27 April 1932
  - Jumped overboard steamship SS Orizaba en route to NYC from Mexico
  - just after he was beaten up for making sexual advances to a male crew member
  - body never recovered

#### Charles Demuth, *The Figure 5 in Gold*, 1928

- 'poster portraits' of his friends
  - Most famous
- William Carlos Williams
  - had seen and heard the firetruck from the window of Marsden Hartley's studio on Fifteenth Street

## Lecture 2: Language and Senses in Modern and Contemporary Art

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### Marc Chagall, *Homage to Gogol*, 1917

- commissioned as a backdrop or a curtain for theatre
  - sketch for two plays by Gogol – *The Gamblers* and *The Marriage*
- Nikolai Gogol
  - Ukranian-born Russian novelist and playwright
  - Father of modern Russian realism
  - Exiled because of his satires of political corruption in Russian Empire
- Lighthearted Iconography
  - Suited for theatrical curtain
  - holds a laurel wreath
  - balances tiny church on his foot (at right)
  - reflects experimental nature of Russian avant-garde theatre
- style
  - looks as if figure has been cut and pasted on background
    - reflects Picasso's invention of collage

### Marc Chagall, *A Wheatfield on a Summer's Afternoon*, 1942

- 1942 commission
  - By the Ballet Theatre of New York (now the American Ballet Theatre)
  - To make four backdrops, scenery and costumes, and direct the lighting for the ballet Aleko
  - Aleko
    - choreographed by Russian choreographer Léonide Massine
      - former star of the Ballet Russes
      - met Chagall briefly in Paris in 1920s
    - premiered in Mexico City (where Chagall completed the backdrops) on September 8, 1942
    - opened at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in October 1942
    - based on on Pushkin's romantic poem *The Gypsy* and Tchaikovsky's *Piano Trio*
    - the romantic and tragic story of Aleko
      - a Russian youth who abandons city life
      - joins a band of gypsies and falls in love with the gypsy girl Zemphira
      - lives with her in her old father's tent
      - she betrays him: has fallen in love with a young Gypsy
      - her father tries to reason with Aleko
      - Aleko kills her and her lover in a fit of jealous rage
      - He is then rejected by the Gypsies
- Scene 3 (of 4)
  - Rural theme
    - peasant's scythe surging from the grass below

- Left: field of ripe corn below a large sun
  - Right: Zemphira and her lover in a boat beneath a harvest moon
  - Yellow conveys their passion
- Design
  - Chagall's painterly motifs: lovers and animals, hovering figures, saturated grounds, village-scenes
  - inspired by Mexico City
    - Outside of the jurisdiction of the American stage-painters union
    - inspired in part by colors of Mexico City
    - violent color contrasts
    - harsh sun

Marc Chagall, *Aleko and Zemphira by Moonlight*, Study for backdrop for scene 1 of the ballet *Aleko*, 1942

Marc Chagall, *A Fantasy of St. Petersburg. Study for backdrop for Scene IV of the ballet Aleko*, 1942

- Left: scene 1
  - Figures of the two lovers
  - Shown as if in a dream
  - Float above Gypsy tents below
  - Left: full moon shining above a lake
  - Cockerel
    - Joins left and right sides
    - Flies toward the moon
    - Symbolic representation of love
- Right: scene 4
  - after Aleko's rejection by the Gypsies
  - he returns to the city (the dramatic cityscape of St. Petersburg)
  - Statue of a bronze horseman
    - Inspiration for Pushkin's most famous poem *The Bronze Horseman*
    - Its nose touches the light from a candelabra at top right
  - dark color – symbolic of three things
    - Pushkin's tragic death (in a duel in 1837)
    - Tragic fate of Aleko
    - Contextual events in Russia ca. 1942

Piero Manzoni, *Artist's Shit No. 014*, 1961

- Nearly 90 cans produced
  - With unknown contents
- Each labeled
  - as "100% pure artist's shit"
  - in Italian, English, French and German
  - Each was numbered on the lid 001 to 090
  - sold them for the price of their weight in gold
- Readymade
  - Art already there

- artists body as consumable product
  - breath, fingerprints
- commercialism and commodity
  - unknown how many sold in his lifetime
  - 2008 tin 83 sold for £70,000
  - tradition of the artist as alchemist
  - prefigured Warhol

#### Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit*, 1964

- a series of 'event scores' that replace the physical work of art
  - contains instructions that an individual may, or may not, wish to enact
- Grapefruit
  - first edition - over 150 'instruction works'
    - virtually all are in English
    - about a third translated into Japanese
    - divided into five sections; *Music, Painting, Event, Poetry and Object*
    - dedications to John Cage, Nam June Paik, Isamu Noguchi and Peggy Guggenheim
    - originally sold for \$3.00 before publication, \$6.00 after
  - Fluxus artwork
  - originally published in Tokyo in an edition of 500
  - assemblage of her event scores
    - as per her husband Anthony Cox's recommendation
  - title
    - Ono believed the fruit to be a hybrid of an orange and a lemon
    - reflection of herself as a *spiritual hybrid*

#### Joseph Kosuth, *Self-Defined*, 1965

#### Joseph Kosuth, *Five Words in Green Neon*, 1965

- explores relationship between language and art
  - language itself becomes medium
- linguistic
  - Duchamp declared art by his own words "this is art"
- Semantics
  - Study of meaning
  - Relationship between signifiers (words, phrases, signs, symbols) and what they stand for

#### Noam Chomsky (b. 1928)

- Still from famous debate with William F. Buckley 1969
- Linguistics
  - Noam Chomsky
    - Cognitive scientist
    - One of founders of modern linguistics

- Syntactic Structure (1957)
  - Theory of generative grammar
  - Language isn't conditioned, but innately grounded
  - We are all hard-wired to receive it
- Universal grammar
  - innate set of linguistic principles shared by all humans

Joseph Kosuth, *'Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) [Water]'*, 1966

- series
  - photostats of dictionary definitions of words
    - such as "water," "meaning," and "idea"
  - certificates of documentation and ownership
    - not meant for display
    - indicate that the works can be made and remade for exhibition purposes
- Meaning
  - explored the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts through which art is presented and defined
  - to undermine the preciousness of the unique art object
  - to question that object's privileged place in the museum
  - art is the idea not the form
- critique of the production of meaning more important than the communication of meaning
- Essay "Art after Philosophy" 1969
  - Argued that traditional art-historical discourse had reached its end

Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, November 26, 1965  
 Franz Marc, *The Yellow Cow*, 1911

- performance piece
  - in Düsseldorf (at Galerie Alfred Schmela)
    - gallery committed to Beuys
    - strongly promoted him
    - closed to the public
  - not open for viewers
    - witnessed only by a photographer (Ute Klophus) and a television crew
- stages of performance
  - Beuys sat on a chair in one corner of the gallery
    - next to the entrance
  - poured honey over his head
    - affixed fifty dollars worth of gold leaf to his head
    - god-like
      - gold head exaggerates his god-like status (as artist)
      - sacrificed animal (to art?)
  - *In putting honey on my head I am clearly doing something that has to do with thinking. Human ability is not to produce honey, but to think, to*



*produce ideas. In this way the deathlike character of thinking becomes lifelike again. For honey is undoubtedly a living substance.*

- *Gold and honey indicate a transformation of the head, and therefore, naturally and logically, the brain and our understanding of thought, consciousness and all the other levels necessary to explain pictures to a hare: the warm stool insulated with felt...and the iron sole with the magnet.*
- cradled a dead hare
  - stared at
- walked around the room holding the dead hare
  - talked to it
  - explaining his drawings
  - *everyone consciously or unconsciously recognizes the problem of explaining things, particularly where art and creative work are concerned... The idea of explaining to an animal conveys a sense of the secrecy of the world*
- theme of refusal
  - refusal of the audience
    - excluded from gallery
  - refusal of sound
    - can't hear what he's saying to the hare
    - lesson of the piece is withheld

Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)*, 1967

Joseph Kosuth, *Four Colors Four Words*, 1966

- one of Nauman's first neons
  - produced in an edition of three
- relationship to Nauman's studio
  - a disused grocery shop in San Francisco
  - designed for the large shop window at the front of the studio
  - mimicked neon signs that hung in nearby shop windows
- Nauman - meaning
  - role/responsibility of the artist
  - blurred distinction between playful/profound
- Spiral
  - Part-foolish
    - Questions whether it's a serious statement or a joke
  - part serious - symbolizes patterns in nature, time, and the universe

Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)*, 1967

Times Square, New York, 1960s

- interpretation of phrase
  - unclear whether it's...

- meant to be believed
  - is the artist's subjective opinion
  - objectively true
- neon
  - 1912 first used for advertising
  - 1923 first used in U.S. (in L.A. Packard dealership)
  - Kitsch - associated with cheap motels, shop windows, and bars
  - Ironically used for deeply personal message
  - emphasizes the object-like quality of letters and words
    - rather than their function
  - advertising
    - message for sale
    - neon as vehicle for communicating ideas
  - disappears in "sea" of advertising
    - *I had the idea that I could make art that would kind of disappear-an art that was supposed to not quite look like art. In that case, you wouldn't really notice it until you paid attention. Then, when you read it, you would have to think about it.*

Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)*, 1967

Roy Lichtenstein, *Girl with Ball*, 1961

- Reaction against Pop Art
  - Neon symbol of the mass-marketed/mass-produced
  - Commercialized/commoditized

Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)*, 1967

Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, 1647–1652

- Mysticism [definition]
  - Pursuit of communion with an ultimate spiritual truth
    - Through direct experience, intuition, insight, intellect, etc.
- St. Theresa
  - 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Mystic Carmelite nun
  - Autobiography -- *I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it.*

Hans Haacke, *MoMA Poll*, 1970

- Exhibition an overview of current younger artists
- Theme of Institutional Critique

- viewers met with question
  - "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon's Indochina Policy be a reason for you not voting for him in November?"
  - two ballot boxes (made of plexi-glass)
  - twice as many Yes ballots as No ballots
  - commented directly on the involvements of a board member at the museum of modern art
- Political
  - *it is uncomfortable for me to be a politicized artist [...] the work of an artist with such a label is in danger of being understood one dimensionally without exception [...] all artwork have a political component whether its intended or not*
- criticism of social and political systems
  - dominates most of his work after late 1960s
  - demystifying relationship in between museums and businesses

Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, 1971 (partial installation view, *Two Years*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2007–08)

- Made for 1971 solo exhibition at Guggenheim
- Contents
  - 146 photographic views of New York apartment buildings
  - six pictures of transactions
  - an explanatory wall panel
  - maps of Harlem and the Lower East Side
- Each photograph
  - accompanied by text
    - describes the location and the financial transactions involving the building
    - discloses the transactions of a real-estate firm between 1951 and 1971
- Harry Shapolsky
  - well protected by influential friends
  - guilty of an assortment of fraudulent practices
  - crimes have been overlooked by judicial system
- controversy
  - show canceled
    - by Guggenheim director
    - six weeks before the opening
  - artists occupied the premises in protest
    - Haacke offered to substitute fictitious names in the piece
    - Guggenheim trustees had financial ties to the real-estate firms
      - Actually wasn't true
    - curator Edward Fry never again worked in the United States
- Haacke's revenge
  - Project exhibited in Cologne
    - at Galerie Paul Maenz

- 1974 he documented the connections of Guggenheim trustees exploitative behavior in Chile

#### Jenny Holzer, *Truisms*, 1978-87

- one-line statements
  - 86 statements
  - *Abuse of power comes as no surprise*
  - *There is a fine line between information and propaganda*
  - *A lot of professionals are crackpots*
  - *Bad intentions can yield good results*
  - *Categorizing fear is calming*
- Meaning
  - to be provocative and elicit public debate
  - to arouse a wide range of responses
  - to show that truth is relative
  - to allow each viewer to participate in determining what is legitimate and what is not
- Public works
  - Sheets distributed at random
  - pasted as posters around the city
  - Exposure to more viewers
  - More people to question the meaning behind the phrases

#### Jenny Holzer, *For the Guggenheim*, 2008

- on the building's exterior every Friday evening through the run of the exhibition
- to commemorate the renovation
  - 2005-2008
  - Museum was enclosed in scaffolding
  - preparation for its 50th anniversary celebration in 2009
  - removal of eleven coats of paint, filling of exterior cracks, treatment of corroded steel structures, and repair and reinforcement of the concrete