

3 Identities, Formalism, Concepts, and Commitment

3.1 Identification

The popularity of portraits of Joyce and self-portraiture in relation to Joyce points to more than the wish to create a work parallel to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It speaks at times of a deep personal involvement, even a far-reaching identification with the writer. However understandable and straightforward this choice may be as a point of departure for artistic work, the strategy begs several questions. Is it in keeping with Joyce's practice? What may "identity" mean in this context and what problems in visual art may ensue from identification with Joyce or his characters in visual work?

When I interviewed William Anastasi, a second-generation Italian in Manhattan, the question about his work's inspiration by James Joyce prompted a rendition of his first experiences of reading *Ulysses* over fifty years earlier and his more recent "re-writings" of *Finnegans Wake* on canvas or on his own body. Anastasi's responses were a confession of his personal thoughts and concerned the purpose of his life and art. Readers identify with Joyce and his characters.

4.2 →

Tony Smith considered his wife's birthday, a day after Joyce's, as auspicious.¹ Raymond Pettibon was born on a Bloomsday, 16 June 1957, and has included Joyce among his sources for work using comic-related strategies. Joseph Beuys worked for a while in the late 1950s and early 1960s on a fusion of the initials "JJ" and "JB" (for example *Tör 19*). There are many indications that the rhyme Joyce/Beuys suggested a deeper connection to him. He signed a work that requests him to extend *Ulysses* – long after the *Ulysses Extension* was completed – with "J.J."⁴³

Many artists echo George Orwell's feelings that Joyce was akin to an uncannily omniscient "Big Brother".² Even Jacques Derrida, not normally prone to "fan" attitudes, states:

Everything that happened to me, including the narrative that I would attempt to make of it, was already pre-dicted and pre-narrated, in its dated singularity [...] within *Ulysses*, to say nothing of *Finnegans Wake*.³

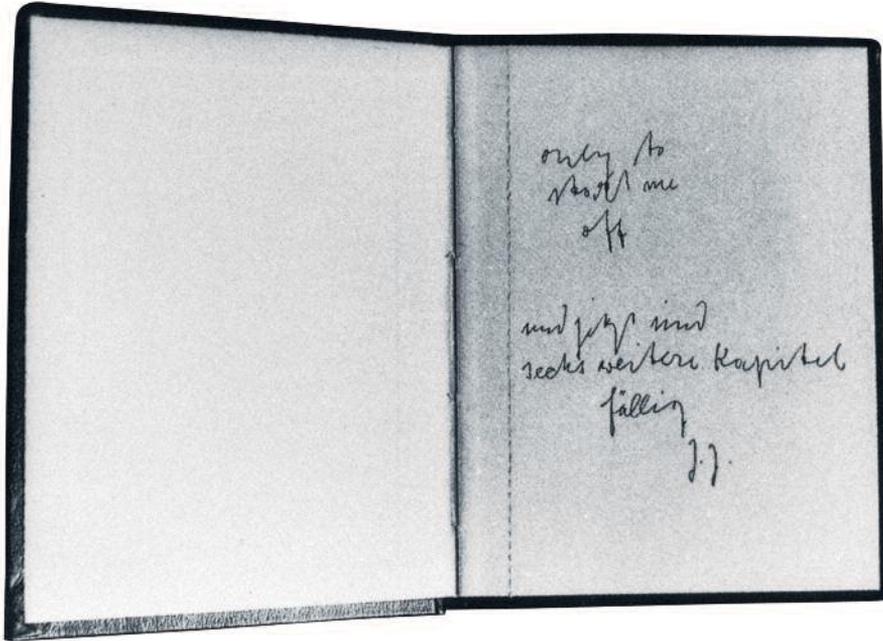
Is it then either permissible or inescapable to operate like Brian Breathnach? He writes:

In the case of Joyce, it is impossible to be comprehensive so I have attempted to evoke the spirit of Joyce by creating a mélange of autobiographical snaps and a retrospective of my own work. There are many

41 Joseph Beuys,
JOYCE
1961/62

42 Joseph Beuys,
Joyce with Sled
1985

43 **Joseph Beuys, James Joyce:**
and now six
further chapters
are needed, 1977



personal photographs in there of my wife Caroline and our children Sarah and Séamus. I like the personal in art.⁴

Frank Budgen certainly thought that this kind of approach was in keeping with Joyce's and even found "proof" for this in Joyce's attitude to painting: "Joyce is in reality a good judge of painting, and he looks, as good critics do, for the personal qualities behind the material expression."⁵ But is this really Joyce's view? Considering that he not only depicted a day of ordinary citizens in Dublin, the point is crucial, where the personal becomes universal – and thus receptive to readers' or viewers' personal projections.⁶

→ 4.2

Identification with literary figures is as old an issue as literature itself, a tendency that is primary in relation to with whom or with what one identifies. Wolfgang Iser and Umberto Eco have developed their concepts of viewer-centred works and their reception with the central aid of Joyce's texts: the implied reader and the open work of art.⁷ But what makes Joyce so special in this regard – and what is it that is particularly visually stimulating about a personal approach to Joyce? Which modes of identification, which kinds of identity, does he offer to artists? If a relatively unmediated presentation of an artist's personal photographs is a little too simple-minded an approach to art on Joyce, how have artists



44 **Joan Snyder,**
She is the Earth
2000

read Joyce in such a way that he seemed relevant to their identities and the art that resulted from them? Some general remarks about reading and identification will provide a foundation for possible answers and the introduction of examples.

Joyce presents a great wealth of materials (at times and especially in his later works) without providing clues to their connection. He leaves gaps or blanks; the readers' activity and imagination are thus particularly required and activated.⁸ In the so-called artist novel (like *A Portrait*), a sub-category of the *Bildungsroman*, the quest for the self is central and makes any reader feel special and creative.⁹ Artists "extending Joyce" have thus already much to fall back upon. In *Ulysses*, Shakespeare is for Stephen a profoundly personal writer. This approach thus finds approval and reflection in Joyce's work itself, where a dependence on the subjective engagement of the recipient is not only a basic literary condition, but also its theme. For example, Joyce addresses the topic of mirrors, which Martha Rosler interpreted as early as 1964.¹⁰ Other artists have also taken up that theme: Nitrin Shroff placed the lines "AND NO MORE TURN ASIDE AND BROOD" on the mirror in the nearest bathroom to Derry's Context Gallery.¹¹

5.3 →

However, "even clearly autobiographical works can be powerfully

influenced [... by] what we may call selection principles".¹² Joyce also applied sources when he wished to organize his own experience. This would mean two things: that the autobiographical nature of Joyce's work does not turn him into a mirror of "reality" or "the truth". It therefore does not constitute a purely mimetic approach, and artists inspired by him would do him an injustice to presume this. What artists have gained in the process, however, is a source for organizing their autobiographies. Joan Snyder has clearly found a passage from *Exiles* applicable to her role as (earth)mother. She thus entitled a painting *She is the Earth*.^{13 44}

Artists can in this way use Joyce as a model, but if one wished to extend this approach to the characters, is Stephen Dedalus a model for (visual) artists to aspire to? Morris Beja has put it bluntly: "Not only does he not do much, not only has he not done much: we do not see him planning much. Actually, it is not even not much: it is nothing at all."¹⁴ It may surprise those who think of artists' work on Joyce as mainly inspired by the writer's canonical status that the lack that Beja describes is in fact far more suggestive. This may have to do with the correspondence that exists between Joyce's content (particularly the development of Stephen in *A Portrait*), his formal means (like the structuring element of the epiphanies) and what reading in general can give to a reader.

Reading Joyce: Art as Therapy Literary psychology claims that reading amounts to living by proxy. Wilhelm Salber describes the process in similar terms to rites of passage. Arnold van Gennep identified in 1908 three stages in such rites surrounding life crises: isolation, transition and integration.¹⁵ Joyce's dictum that not only the *Odyssey*, but *The Count of Monte Cristo*, had the same structure as *Ulysses* testifies to the writer's sensitivity to "personal odysseys", readers' needs to identify and to live "in" literature.¹⁶ Similarly, visual artists have also, of course, tackled the underlying myths and archetypes – in new guises. Part of rite of passage-like experiences, whether in literature or not, is the required hard work, which can amount to a symbolic death.¹⁷ Joyce certainly does not make it easy for the reader. Riddles and tasks are part of the reader's work. If reading alone, the time spent in isolation is considerable. (Re-)integration sees the initiate enter life as a new, healed, matured being. A rite of passage can thus have therapeutic functions. This aspect is important – if a reader brings with her or him that wish to find oneself, to make a new start: in both life and art.¹⁸

→ 5.1

→ 3.2

Richard Hamilton and Jess first read Joyce when they were in the army (the British and US armies respectively) – within an isolating



46 **Joseph Beuys,**
Arena
 (work in progress)
 1947/73, 1973

The final sentence is a reference to Beuys' deep depressive crisis in the second half of the 1950s, where one can assume with some degree of certainty that reading Joyce provided him with therapeutic help²² – and along the way, he developed the conviction that art is therapy. Beuys ends the text not with another “Yes”, but with a yin and yang signature, which deviates from the eastern symbol of wholeness by means of three gaps. In fact, this yin and yang sign consists of two intertwined “J”s, alluding to Bloom's and Molly's positions in their marital bed at the end of *Ulysses* – and to how “JJ”, according to Beuys, bridged the gap between East and West, rationality and spirituality, presumably rendering his personality whole, healthy and creative. Many references to Joyce in Beuys' work, although he was not entirely uncritical, amount to gestures of gratitude for therapeutic and inspirational services rendered in the process of becoming “Beuys”.²³

Beuys's work *Arena* (*work in progress*) 1947/73, Rome 1973 (also shown in Edinburgh in a preliminary form in 1970), is a professional *curriculum vitae* or portrait of the artist in photographs, mounted in grey metal frames.⁴⁶ Beuys wished to inform foreign audiences of his past productions and provide replacements for non-existent Italian or English-language publications. The original title²⁴ clearly refers to Joyce's *Work*

in Progress. Furthermore, a frame with a work from 1962 takes pride of place, because it contains the only clearly decipherable writing: the large capital letters “JOYCE”.⁴¹ It is a cardboard sign with attached wire that echoes Brancusi’s cardboard and wire *Portrait of Joyce*,⁷ which Beuys undoubtedly knew.²⁵

Since Beuys had in 1973 just read Ellmann’s Joyce biography, the references are also specific. In the installation, Beuys performed an “action” and read with exaggerated gestures a biography of his local hero of the French Revolution, Anarchis Cloots. In Ellmann, he had read about Joyce’s epiphany, based on the writer’s own impoverished existence in Rome and entitled “The Anarchist”. As if the intertwined biographies of Beuys, Joyce and Anarchis Cloots were not sufficient to treat the topic of artists’ personal and work-related trials, the *Arena* of the title also refers to Christ’s life, as Giotto outlined it in large “frames” around the walls of the *Arena Chapel*.²⁶ Beuys’ 100 frames, which are meant to be displayed in a circle, signal hope: together with a 101st element, a stack of copper plates at the centre. The arrangement follows a Viconian or Joycean change from one age to the next, a cyclical worldview, represented in *Finnegans Wake* by the “thunderwords”, comprising 100 and 101 letters.²⁷ Beuys, in Joyce’s footsteps, elaborates on the universal quality of life’s courses. This is quite a different way of using Joyce for “the personal” in art from the way Brian Breathnach did so, noted earlier.

4.2 →

Artists’ crises on their way to becoming accomplished artists are not just a frequent pattern into which Joyce’s times in Paris in 1902/03 and later in Rome fit well. It is a topos, an interaction and superimposition of the biographical and the archetypal, which Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz have revealed in their study on artists’ legends.²⁸ Another related topos is self-invention and the un-fathered creation of an author’s name by driving an art form to extremes. This is the pattern Jacques Lacan scrutinized in Joyce.²⁹ It appeals to many a budding artist, indeed several of those already mentioned as Joyce “illustrators” and “portraitists”. Maybe paradoxically, the fatherless author has become a father and analyst of self-inventing artists. Griselda Pollock has applied Lacan’s term *synthôme* to the artist Yayoi Kusama, who had a difficult, abusive childhood.³⁰ *Synthôme* – and Pollock’s corresponding *synt-femme* – refer to Joyce’s creativity-enticing, knotting symptom, which Lacan views as a trace of *jouissance*, a contributing factor in Joyce’s becoming “Joyce”, but beyond analysis.

5.3 →

Adolf Muschg finds that art is not therapy, but it provides encouragement to proceed on a chosen path, because the two share one aim:

capability to live one's own life.³¹ However, he also claims that in art one finds "manuals" for living.³² This is clearly problematical in reference to Joyce.

→ 4.2 **Distance** Having found that Joyce activates readers, it remains unclear which actions, views or moral stances his texts activate. This lack of prescription has implications for the term identification that one must consider. Readers cannot find an unchanging, unfaltering hero.³³ Communicative aspects of the term identification, however, should be retained,³⁴ since there are other forms of identification which do not suggest harmony and confirmation of one's position.³⁵

Mieke Bal identifies two moments of touching. The first is identification in the traditional sense; the second is a connection in which no identification takes place, but where the recipient "allows this subject to touch him or her: to disconcert, confuse, undermine the [sense of self]. This [...] is neither gratifying nor pleasurable. It resides in the sense of difference, of nonidentity, which in turn affects our stable identity",³⁶ levelling a blow to our sense of security. As regards Joyce, the issue is less the fact that Joyce "faked" what he put forward as either his or his alter ego's autobiographies or even the mutually exclusive selves presented with equal empathy (for example Stephen and Bloom). It is more a case of Joyce's formal means having an impact on this issue. They are foregrounded and indeed suggest the distortion and difference noted in Bal's second way a reader can be touched.³⁷

Joyce, it could be established, involves readers' personal thoughts, histories and psychological make-up. It may come as a surprise to note that – apart from providing occasions for that disruptive touching as well as identification – his strategies can also be described as emotional distancing.³⁸ This he achieves through embellishment, impersonal narration and all that constitutes the *arrangeur's* stance, as well as through an open work. What seems to be a wholly contradictory array of strategies and effects appears to require an artist to clarify and contain.

John Cage A deep interest in Joyce pervaded John Cage's work, particularly from the 1970s to his death in 1992. The composer and visual artist departs from the hypothesis of personal involvement, namely that Joyce inscribed his own name into all his texts.³⁹ Cage then "resurrects" (the words) "James Joyce" in his several instalments of *Writing Through Finnegans Wake* by means of mesostics. This, however, becomes part of an oeuvre that developed more and more strategies to rid itself of

→ 4.1

the author (chance operations, collaborations and interactive work. Cage used Joyce's text as a ready-made and arrives not entirely at Duchamp's emotional detachment, but at an apparition of Joyce('s name) akin to a divine presence, or, in Joyce's words, epiphany. One is reminded of Stephen Dedalus' central remark on the nature of the artist, who situates himself above the work, "invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (P 195).

5.3 →

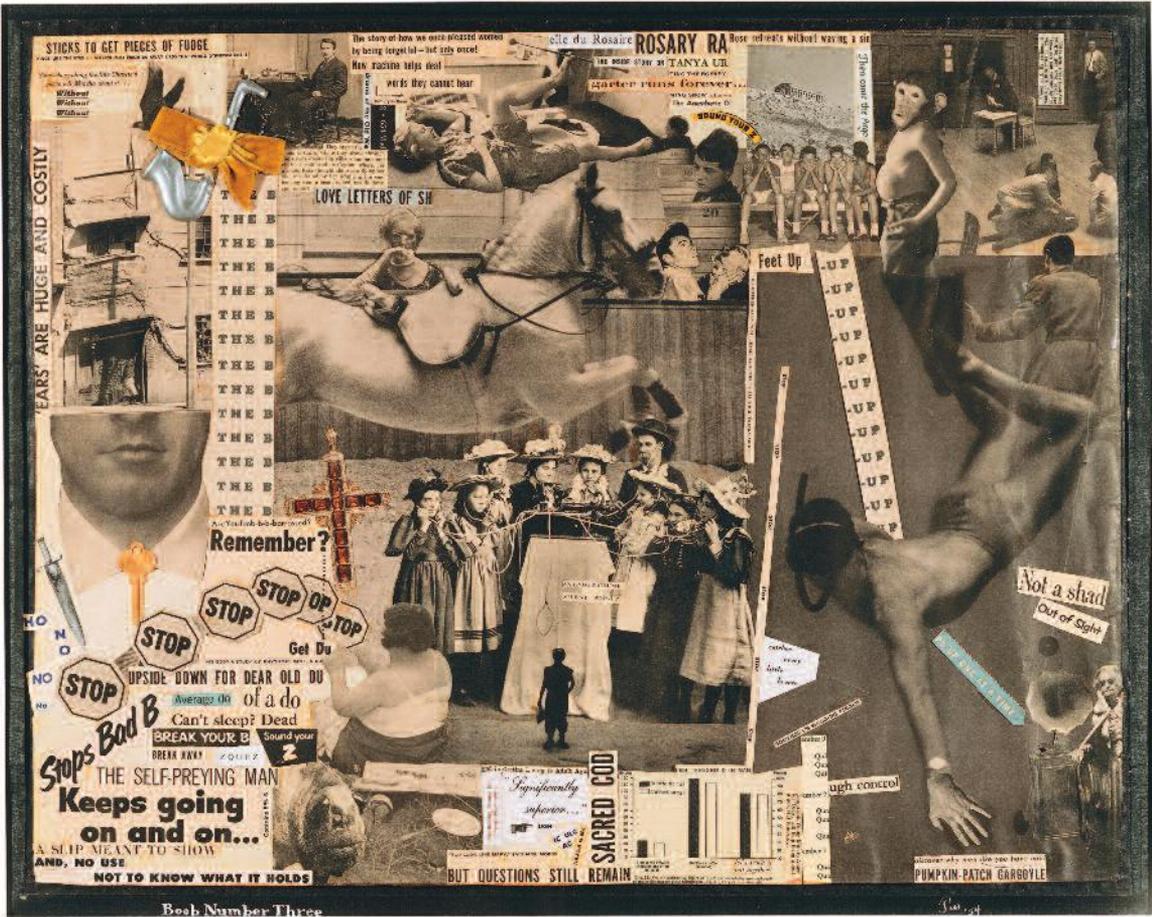
4.2 →

Joyce also once said that he was interested only in style, not in politics.⁴⁰ If the detached artist engages with nothing but form, Joyce maintains implicitly that he or she is nevertheless at the centre of belief systems, providing enough ammunition for them (in fact fuelling them for immortality's sake).

Another way of approaching the issue of identity and detachment (and other crucial ones in the process) is through an investigation of American art following World War II. In visual art, the binary opposition of emotional involvement and detachment evokes a related pair of terms: formalist (analytical) approaches, focusing on art's engagement with its own means and (personal) content. But binary oppositions cannot be sustained. Each term carries some traces of the other within itself, whether a dialectic synthesis is reached or not. Joyce is, as it turns out, at the very core of the debate involving the relationship between formalism and content;⁴¹ a hub, where demarcations break down, not least the ones between Modernism and postmodernism in the visual arts.



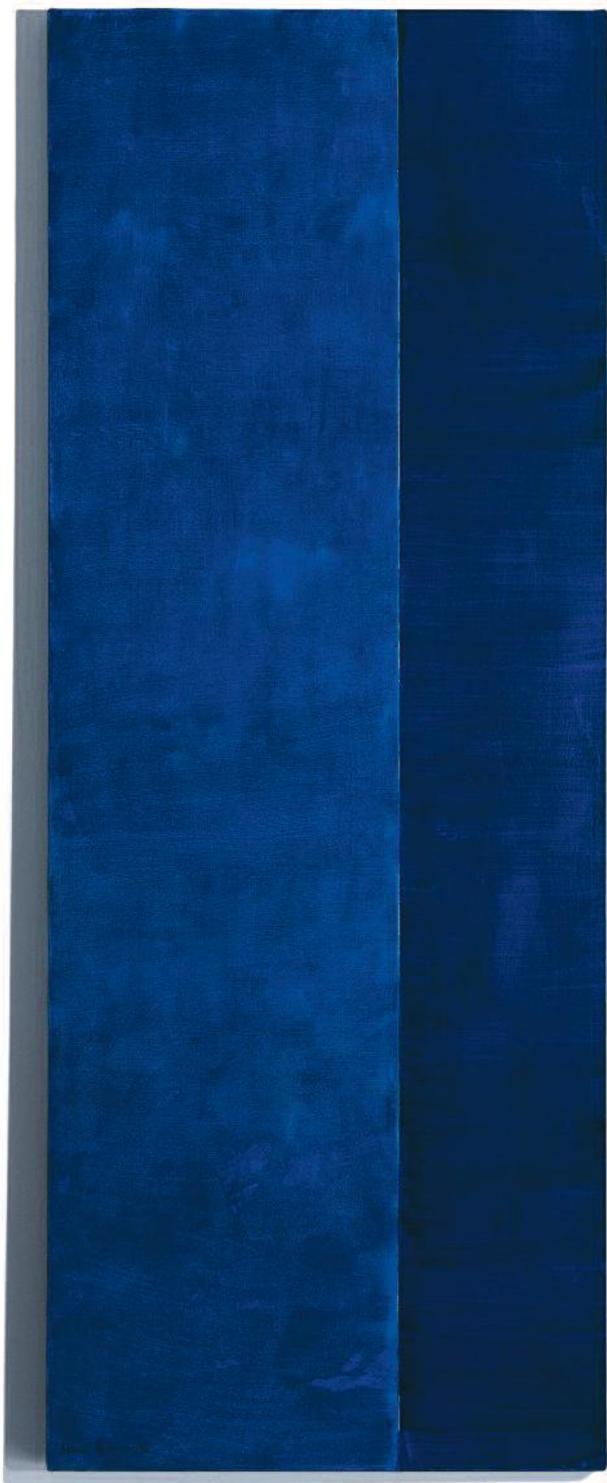




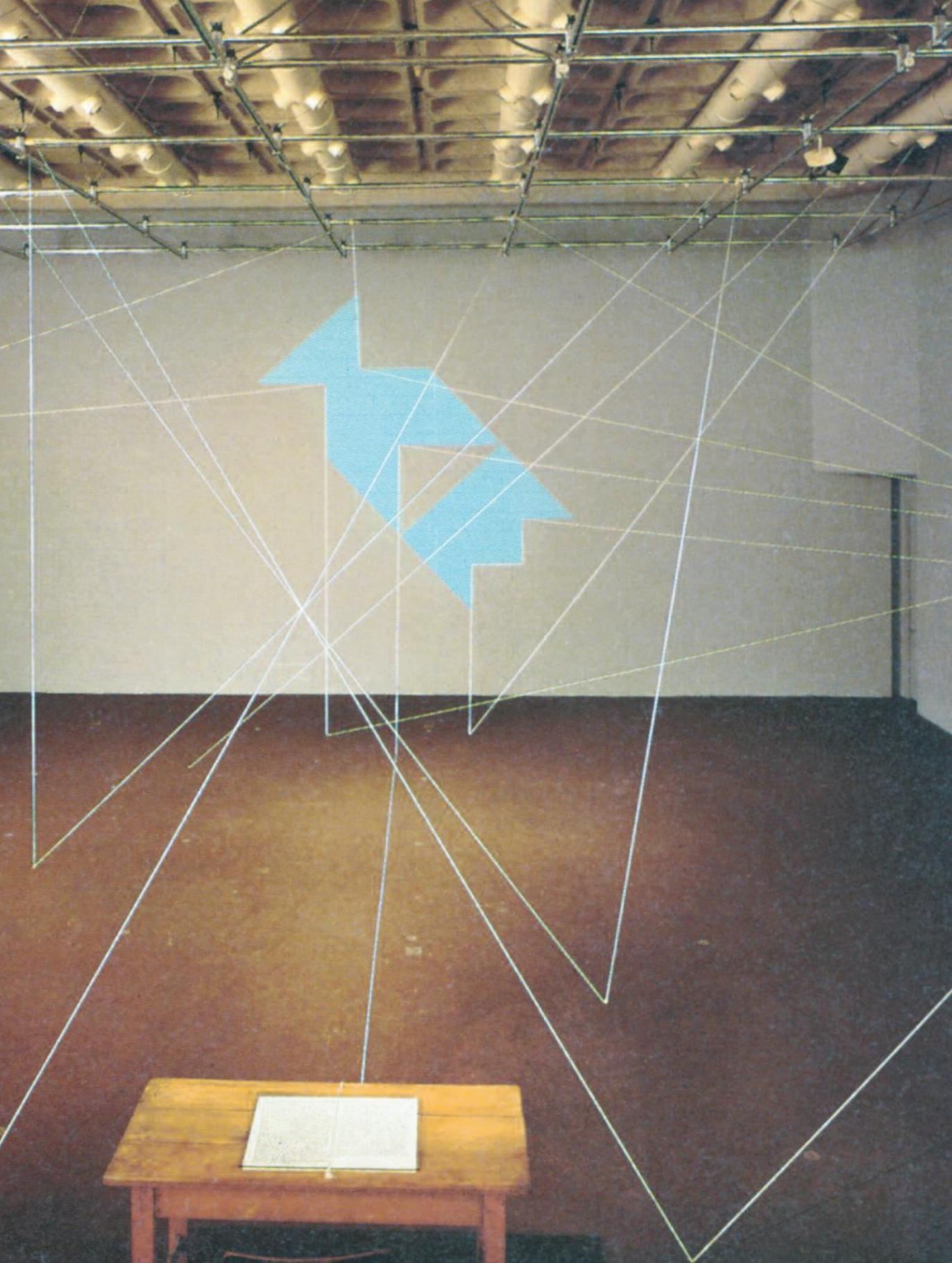
Bob Number Three

Bob

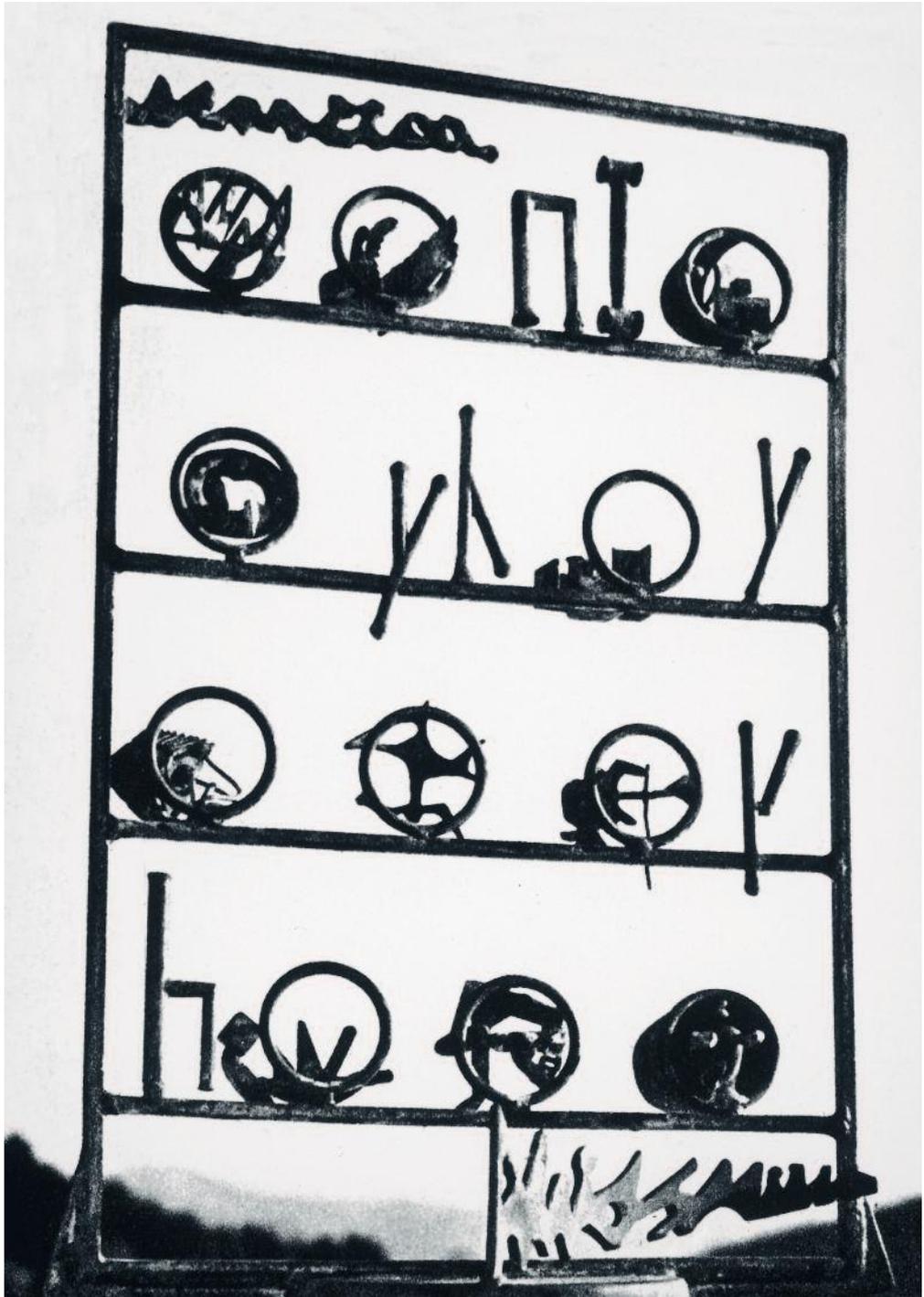












3.2 Formalism and Content: Sigla, Oscillation, Dislocation

In this section of the current study, while further investigating Joycean artwork in relation to identities – of the shifting and displaced kind – and Joyce in relation to a formalism/content debate in art history, I will now take up the chronological strand again. This I had interrupted after introducing early artistic responses to Joyce, so I could remark on illustration, portraiture and artwork engaged with questions of identity. Most of the examples I shall use come initially from Abstract Expressionism.

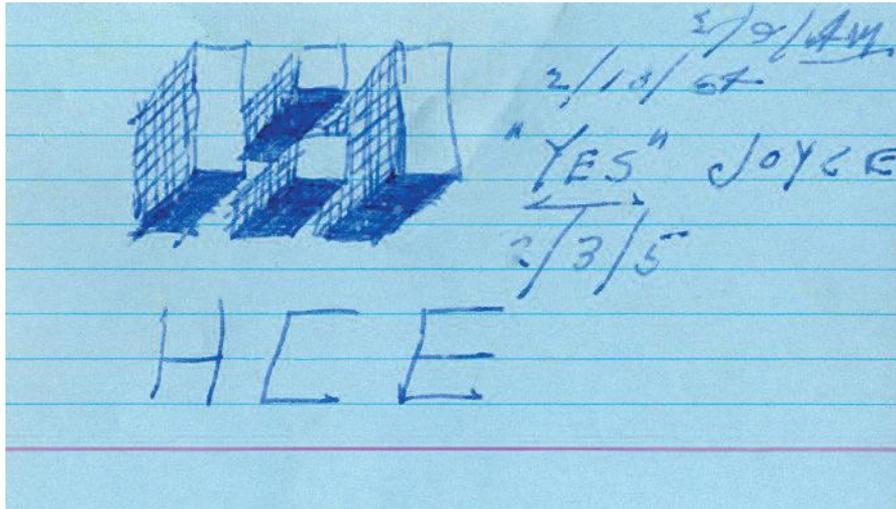
Shifting Identities: Sigla To begin with, I should attempt to answer the question of how the later Joyce denotes shifting identities in a visually stimulating way and how artists have responded to this.¹

While working on *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce used distinctly recognizable and simultaneously multivalent ciphers for the *dramatis personae*, whose characters and identities shift and change. These signs are geometric figures (sometimes doubling as capital letters). They can be turned around their axes and thus denote change. Joyce therefore resorts to the visual aspect of language in order to express a central aspect of his book's intentions. This could be viewed as an extension of Joyce's early interest in Odysseus' multiform identity (*polytropos*), as well as in synaesthesia, in that he lets the word in *Finnegans Wake* appear on two levels: that of the grapheme and the phoneme. This concrete aspect of the text thus refers simultaneously to the semantic, visual and phonetic contexts. Joyce called these ciphers "fluid composites"² and Joyce studies have referred to them as sigla.³ Usually, they appear only on manuscript pages, but, in a few instances, they have entered the published text: on pages 18 and 299, Footnote 4.⁴

The sigla are an ideal point of departure for any visual artists' works on the Joyce of the *Wake* and on his characters' chosen, ever-changing identities.

Tony Smith In 1932, when Tony Smith was twenty years old, he operated a second-hand bookshop in Newark, New Jersey – allegedly because he could in that way get hold of a copy of *Ulysses*, still banned in the United States. Subsequently he accumulated a scholarly Joyce library of some fifty titles. His prized possession was a first edition of *Ulysses*, which he had boxed in cloth and tan leather, looking rather similar to his sculptural models.⁵

- 47 **Tony Smith, Wandering Rocks**
1967
- 48 **Jess, Boob #3**
1954
- 49 **Robert Motherwell, The Homely Protestant (bust)**
1947/48
- 50 **Barnett Newman, Ulysses**
1952
- 51 **Jackson Pollock, Full Fathom Five**
1947
- 52 **Patrick Ireland, The Purgatory of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker Homunculus**
1985
- 53 **Mark Orange, A Little Oracle**
2004
- 54 **David Smith, The Letter**
1950

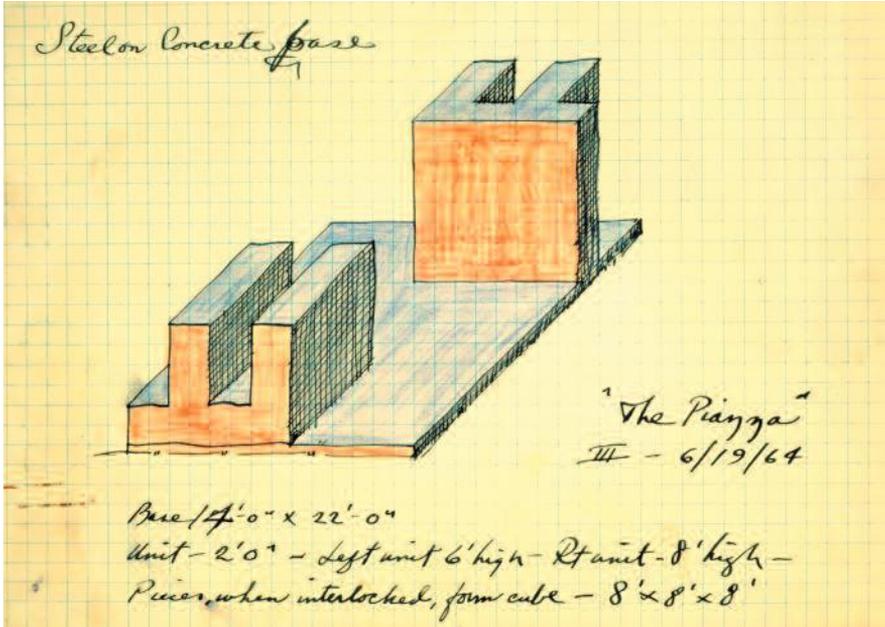


55 **Tony Smith,**
Yes
 1964

Tony Smith's engagement with *Finnegans Wake's* sigla is manifest in drawings, which he created in 1964. A week after Joyce's birthday, he devised in a drawing a negative "H"-shaped space and entitled it *Yes*⁵⁵ – a conflation of Joyce's major works. On Bloomsday in the same year (the sixtieth anniversary) he very likely attended (as usual) the New York Joyce readings at Symphony Space on Broadway. Executed three days later, Smith's drawing *The Piazza*⁵⁶ clearly departs from the *Wake*, where it says "↱ace to ↲ace" (FW 18.36). Smith devised in the drawings a sculpture with two turned-around "F"s, but never executed it. He also on the same day drew three letters "C" in different positions and eventually, in 1980, created from these sketches a sculpture, *Untitled (5 Cs)*, representing all possibilities of turning an angular letter "C" in various directions – echoing the sigla.⁷

A similar case can be made concerning two further American artists of Tony Smith's generation: a sculptor, David Smith, and a painter, Adolph Gottlieb.

David Smith In conversation with his friend Robert Motherwell in the 1940s, David Smith had already espoused the merits of Joyce's work, saying that he did not need to read any Symbolist or Surrealist writers,



56 **Tony Smith,**
The Piazza
 19 June 1964

because he had read Joyce.⁸ In 1949, David Smith received a Guggenheim Fellowship and could thus work for the first time in his career without having to take on other jobs.⁹ He immediately, it seems, turned to Joyce's time-consuming last work and created *The Letter*, 1950.¹⁰ **54** The artist explains: "The letter: the universal letter/any letter/Biddy Doran's (the little hen[s]) letter she scratched/up (*Finnegans Wake*)/[...] the letter by vision/and not by word".¹¹ In *Finnegans Wake*, the most pressing philosophical questions are answered in a letter scratched up by a hen on a dungheap – echoing the fate of the Book of Kells. By virtue of spanning the *Wake* and treating most themes in it, the letter stands for the book.¹²

Smith – apart from echoing Joyce's letter/litter link through his collage technique¹³ – also reflects on the other meaning of the word letter, calling Joyce's sigla "letter by vision and not by word". Similarly, he rendered Greek epsilons in a related work from the same year, *17 h's and 24 Greek y's*, as hens' feet. And he comments that he did not really mean Greek letters as such, but used them (both actual Greek letters and non-existent ones alongside them), because they were something that one could supposedly not understand.¹⁴ Asked then whether or not he thought of drawing in terms of writing, Smith replied that, having read



57 Adolph Gottlieb,
Night
1950

the letter section of *Finnegans Wake*, he no longer differentiated between the two.¹⁵

David Smith is apparently not interested in further content or readability, but in the formal characteristics of letters that Joyce had foregrounded with his sigla and in evoking the notion of reading. Joyce as his literary precedent enabled Smith to develop his own sculptural language, thus making it easier for formalist critics to read his work in purely abstract terms.¹⁶ Simultaneously, he allowed access to meaning and identity. This is how he achieved his goal of remaining innovatively outside the rules of his art form.¹⁷

Adolph Gottlieb was a friend of David Smith's and shows related interests.¹⁸ He painted so-called pictographs in the 1940s and early 1950s, which similarly evoke the act of reading without being legible. It appears therefore as more than just coincidence that some of Gottlieb's paintings from 1950 – the year Smith welded *The Letter* – show some sigla-like signs.¹⁹ I am particularly thinking of the appropriately entitled *Night*,⁵⁷ of *T* and *Met*, where there are the open squares (or square brackets) associated with Shem, T-shapes that Joyce used as signs for Issy, as well as open deltas (the sign for ALP).

This is not to say, of course, that parallels found with American Indians' mythic signs or Sumerian tablets²⁰ cannot also be upheld. More crucial than formal correspondences is the attitude to sign-making, writing and reading. And in this regard, the wish of the authors or scribes of other possible sources would have been to denote precise if mythical meaning. Gottlieb (and David Smith to a lesser extent), on the other hand, achieve an effect of writing that is at least on the surface hermetic, while also hinting – apart from the Joycean reference – at multi-faceted signification through some universally understandable signs like eyes, spirals, crosses and arrows. This corresponds to a first (or even second) impression of reading *Finnegans Wake*. There is no doubt that Gottlieb was well read and frequently discussed literature with writer friends – and art with David Smith and others. It seems that Joyce was crucial for them when discussing – if not already when developing – their works' strategies.

Formalism and Content Joyce occupied an increasingly prominent place in the avant-garde during the development of abstract visual strategies, but none of the artists so far mentioned (as those contemporaries who created pieces on him) worked in fully abstract ways. Does the question then become superfluous of how artists and critics in the formalist tradition may have viewed Joyce? Is the Modernist *writer* par excellence unrelated to high Modernist *painting*? The answer is: no.

Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood", 1967,²¹ was most vocal in wishing to purge (Modernist) visual art of any kind of literal, literary or theatrical elements that would blur the genre boundaries, let a time element enter the work and/or examine the viewers' relationship with it. I am by no means the first who has located some of the above aspects in Modernist work.²² What may be possible here, however – beyond the fact that quite a considerable amount of that dreaded content in Modernist art now appears to be Joyce-related²³ – is to locate Joyce at the centre of the argument, as well as attempts at mediation. The ensuing paradox – artists looking at a "forbidden" literary source in order to find confirmation of formalist approaches – will need to be examined, once the case is clearly in view.

It is predictably Joyce's status as formal(ist) innovator that led the apologists of high Modernism, Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, to praise Joyce in their own way. Fried chose a Joyce quotation as a motto for his book *Art and Objecthood*.²⁴ The lines from *Stephen Hero* focus on the merits of certitude. This, however, cannot be seen as an unequivocal portrayal of the views of a writer who in fact single-

mindedly cultivated incertitude and multiple layers of meaning.²⁵ Clement Greenberg in *Art and Culture* uses Joyce as an example to support his views on visual art: that it at best engages with its own means. He locates formalist endeavours, too, in Modernist literature: “Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* seem to be, above all [...] the reduction of experience to expression for the sake of expression: the expression mattering more than what is expressed.”²⁶ The later Joyce is thus clearly established as a formalist Modernist,²⁷ whose techniques make sense also within a visual context. The first and highly publicized American edition of *Ulysses*, published by Random House in 1934, shows that allegiance on its cover. Its design is Mondrian-like, featuring large, stylized letters.²⁸ To me, however, it seems to be more the early Joyce, particularly Stephen’s theory of art as stasis, where the “whatness” of a thing is something objective, non-spiritual, that is particularly applicable to high Modernist views.

→ 4.2

Herbert Read in *Art Now*, 1933, similarly regards Joyce’s *Work in Progress* as approaching abstraction in literature. But his verdict is that Joyce misuses his medium, since literature could not “dispense with the image”.²⁹ For him, apparently, the genres’ media render a translation of formalist principles problematical.³⁰ Joyce’s (late) work is associated with the seemingly mutually exclusive terms abstraction, image and content. These terms were central to debates within visual arts circles at the time.³¹ Joyce straddles – if not draws – the firing line.

Mediation In some way, however, Samuel Beckett in 1929 had already provided a way in which the debate could be settled. In the anthology on *Work in Progress*, which Joyce himself instigated and oversaw, Beckett writes: “Here form is content, content is form [...] It is [...] not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.”³² Reflecting on Joyce’s procedure in *Finnegans Wake*, he thus marries form and content in a distinct way, referring expressly to the visual (“to be looked at”). Similarly, Sergei Eisenstein had already found that in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce created a complex rhythmic pattern, which could be appreciated quite apart from the content, adding that content “nevertheless is enriched, rather than subordinated or ignored.”³³ With reference to Joyce, the two really cannot be prised apart.

→ 4.3

What then did the artists make of this? David Smith’s strategy to enable both formalist and content-focused readings has been mentioned. Robert Motherwell’s *Homely Protestant* “self-portrait”⁴⁸ also seems to

mediate between the categories. “In 1935 [he bought] *Ulysses*: I began to see what modernism was.”³⁴ Later, in 1948, he links Joyce – consciously or not – with his own “digression” into figuration and he feels that he requires inverted commas: “I could not find a title for possibly my most important ‘figure’ painting”,³⁵ and looked for it in *Finnegans Wake*.

Ad Reinhardt’s strategy was to withdraw more completely from a personal involvement in painting than the others and he painted black paintings from 1953 onwards. But as an art historian and an “art caricaturist” (*A Portend of the Artist as a Yhung Mandala* ³⁰ has been mentioned), he used each genre for what it could offer him. He allowed Joyce to enter only sporadically and tentatively. This indicates that there will probably never be proof of whether or not the notion of epiphany inspired the black paintings.³⁶

4.2 →

Barnett Newman similarly was a well-read artist, who wrote himself. He entitled a 1952 painting *Ulysses*.⁵⁰ If he had wished to refer to Homer alone, he could have called it *Odysseus*, but he did not – and the Joyce books in his estate testify to his interest.³⁷ The blue tones echo the seafarer’s realm. To formalist critics, to put it simply, Newman’s paintings were of interest, but his mythological and literary titles could be embarrassing. In his writings, Newman mentions Joyce when seeking formulations mediating between form and content.³⁸ He compares him to abstract artists, who have “destroyed subject matter”, having just praised him for his ambition to create a modern epic. “The fact that he called it *Ulysses* is an index to his motives”.³⁹ The same must be true of Newman himself.

Despite this interest – one can even suspect that because of it – Joyce was put to use not only to criticize but also to attack the artist. Hubert Crehan reviewed Newman’s third New York one-man show unfavourably in *Art News*. To the ensuing exchange, he adds a letter to the editor commending his review and using as a pseudonym H. Rumbold, the hangman from the “Circe” episode of *Ulysses*.⁴⁰ In the following number, Newman walked into the trap and Crehan predictably revelled in his one-upmanship, disclosing H. Rumbold’s identity and stating “H. Rumbold should be drawn and quartered for giving Mr. Newman such ideas.”⁴¹

Jackson Pollock On an intuitive level, David Norris states that his early encounter with Jackson Pollock’s work made him gasp at the audacity of his paintings. Joyce came to his mind automatically as a point of refer-

ence, corresponding in the degree to which a medium has been taken to its limits.⁴² Suggesting the same correspondence, the caricaturist Henry J. Sharpe shows an elderly, pensive Joyce walking past a painting that resembles Pollock's drip paintings, reciting the beginning of *Finnegans Wake*.⁴³ There may indeed be a justification for this link.

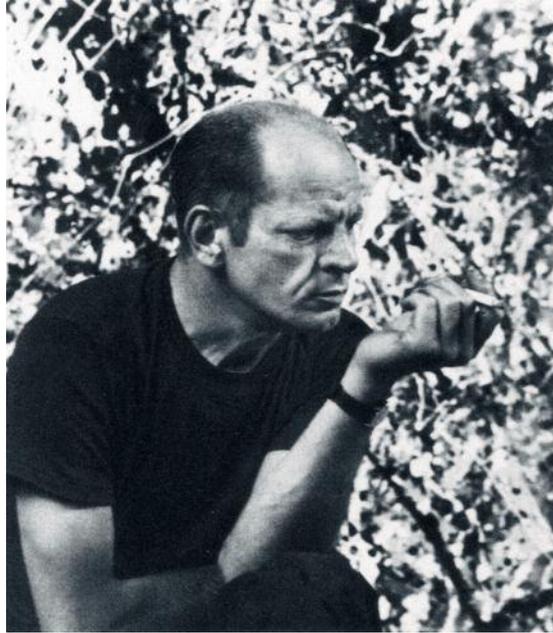
Jackson Pollock, the quintessential Abstract Expressionist and prime example for Greenberg's brand of high Modernist formalism, was inspired by Tony Smith to read Joyce's works.⁴⁴ Pollock frequently seems to have spoken of the writer.⁴⁵ His works are still in Pollock's library,⁴⁶ unannotated, but accompanied by a vinyl record of Joyce's own reading of parts of the "Anna Livia" episode of the *Wake*.⁴⁷ This episode incorporates hundreds of river names and rhythmically reads like a river, the Liffey herself. There is a possibility that Pollock considered this inspirational for his drip-paintings, 1947-1950.⁴⁸

The procedure of dripping paint onto a horizontally laid-out canvas from above was criticized by many contemporaries for being non-painterly. Pollock could defend himself by referring to Stephen Dedalus' remarks on the personality of the artist:

[...] at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. [...] The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails. (P 194-95)

Here, one can ascertain a movement from mood and narrative to (formalist) artistic detachment. Furthermore, Pollock seems to have taken the description of the artist's position (detached, above the work) literally and identified with the maze-maker. In a portrait photograph from 1950, ⁵⁸ Pollock sits in front of a drip-painting and poses in such a way that he is seen to focus on his fingernails. Choosing that photograph to accompany her argument, Ellen G. Landau comments on a "new hero of the fifties [...] whose outer demeanor bespoke not of the confidence of standard hero figures in the past, but an inner life of anguish and torment."⁴⁹ Stephen Dedalus is a likely model.⁵⁰

Pollock did not choose all the titles of his paintings himself. He was, however, most likely aware of his sources when he accepted a Shakespearean quote, which features in *Ulysses* to be further recycled as the title for *Full Fathom Five*, 1947.⁵¹ ⁴⁹ Firestone suggests that the description of the tide, weeds and water preceding the words "full fathom five"⁵² in *Ulysses* sounds like a description of Pollock's painting.⁵³ While it was most likely not on the artist's mind when he was working,



58 Hans Namuth,
Jackson Pollock
1950

the fluidity of Joyce's prose, as well as the painter's medium and technique can easily provide a generally applicable correspondence. The corpse rising from under the water's surface in that passage of *Ulysses* can moreover allude to how Pollock used to describe the relationship between motif and the overlaying web of dripped paint: "I choose to veil the imagery".⁵⁴ This does not only concern figurative aspects of his painting (and the way in which his oeuvre coheres), but also *objet trouvé* collages. *Full Fathom Five* contains matches, buttons, cigarette butts and other objects. Pollock also added sand (another marine reference) to at least one 1949 painting,⁵⁵ and *Number 29*, 1950, is again collaged and also painted on glass, which adds the translucent quality of water.

4.2 →

Interior Monologue Does Joyce's interior monologue or stream of consciousness technique constitute a correspondence with Abstract Expressionist art? Can it even help to explain (away) "inner" content that may then not be in the way of pure form? E.R. Firestone has commented on the visual impact of Joyce's technique:

The equation between automatism and aquatic imagery, which in Surrealism pertains to the preconscious or subconscious mind, is characteristic of Joyce's thinking as well. Several of the most extended 'stream

of conscious' [passages of *Ulysses* occur] in settings at the seashore [... Indeed,] A number of characteristics of his writing appealed to American artists of the 1940s and '50s, but initially, it was Joyce's 'stream of consciousness' technique [... That] provided another literary equivalent of the visual automatism they were struggling to develop.⁵⁶

This echoes indirectly Barnett Newman's already quoted view concerning Joyce's importance for Surrealists. It was widely shared at the time: Barnett Newman "started to write fiction, influenced by James Joyce's *Ulysses*, automatic writing, getting it down as fast as he could".⁵⁷ This understanding disregards Joyce's method of careful construction.

A creative misrepresentation of Joyce's procedures is, however, not alone among problems that may exist when associating the interior monologue with visual art that is viewed in a formalist way. Peter Bürger has commented on a formalist prerequisite. Owing to the interior monologue's pretence of immediacy (Joyce adheres to an illusion of reality), the form is blocked and cannot reflect on itself.⁵⁸ Joyce's interior monologue – while being a formal innovation – thus points away from formalist ways of looking at art and towards psychological aspects: it can inspire recipients to identify. In Modernist visual art, because of a diminished illusion of reality, this blocking does not equally apply. Concerning visual art, one should thus probably refer to automatism and gestural all-over, rather than using the term interior monologue, which has nevertheless been literally applied to visual art – in the form of interior views.

→ 4.2

All-over Strategies The all-over that Pollock employs in his drip-paintings is a better candidate for formalist comparisons.⁵⁹ Clement Greenberg identified this early:

The very notion of uniformity is antiaesthetic. Yet many 'all-over' pictures seem to succeed precisely by virtue of their uniformity, their sheer monotony. The dissolution of the pictorial into sheer texture, [...] seems to speak for and answer something profound in contemporary sensibility. Literature provides parallels in Joyce.⁶⁰

Pollock's all-over, however, is not as uniform as Greenberg makes it out to be – accommodating instead highly versatile lines and at times clearly decipherable content.⁶¹ These features inspire the viewers to adopt different viewing positions. This possibility is incidentally something that cannot be transferred only to the reception of literature. It is the very context in which Horace coined his phrase "ut pictura poesis". Joyce particularly invites two-speed reading (two-plane as he would have

said), which cannot be performed simultaneously.⁶²

Rosalind Krauss has passionately defended art (that was previously interpreted according to the formalist agenda) from having to conform to its one-sidedness:

[...] the problem, of course, is that the either/or is a misrepresentation of what an abstract painter is up to. His greatest fear is that he may be making mere abstraction, abstraction uninformed by a subject, contentless abstraction, [... i.e.] *decoration*. [The] failure to grasp Pollock's subject, or even to see that his work *had* a subject, is reported as having been extremely upsetting to the artist.⁶³

The Pollock of the drip paintings and the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake* had to contend with similar misunderstandings: that their work was chaotic and meaningless. Joyce countered allegations that he created nothing but chaos by referring to his subject matter⁶⁴ and by means of the *Our Exagmination* anthology. And Pollock is reported as exclaiming: "No chaos, damn it."⁶⁵ Viewing their works as chaotic disregards the fact that even the all-over surface structure is in itself a valid commentary on or evocation of a democratic, ideally hierarchy-free and complex world. Both Joyce and Pollock had early socialist leanings.⁶⁶

Margot Norris' "decentred universe"⁶⁷ alludes to this world view concerning Joyce's work; and E.R. Firestone explains Norris' title in visual terms, those of Pollock's paintings: "Simply put, this is what modern painters call allover composition".⁶⁸ Without thinking of Joyce, Krauss furthermore calls this the "Experience of our age in painting – not an illustration of – (but the equivalent)".⁶⁹ Equivalent appears to be an appropriate term for artists viewing Joyce as a prime proponent of contemporary thought. However, it does not imply that Joyce's last work should be viewed as a "cause" of Pollock's technique or even subject matter. The writer is a valuable precedent in terms of including both, formal(ist) sensibilities and content: one turns out to be the other – at second glance.

5.3 →

Oscillation It is indeed another glance that is required, as far as Georges Didi-Huberman is concerned. He has eloquently reassessed the anti-literalist stance that Michael Fried had put forward in his "Art and Objecthood" essay, 1967, as a critique of nascent minimalism.⁷⁰ It became clear that the same dichotomies also already applied to Abstract Expressionism. Didi-Huberman departs in his argument from none other than James Joyce.⁷¹ And he proposes a middle ground or rather a point

of oscillation between both perspectives: that which says a work is what it is (or that we see just what we see) – and that which argues that a work is only completed in the viewer, who is being touched by it, i.e. when content and interpretation enter.⁷²

Joyce is indeed a perfect point of departure for this argument, since both camps (that of high Modernist formalism and postmodernist, content-focused perspectives) have claimed his work. Joyce can represent that point of oscillation, because of his unique combination of the autobiographical material's heightened realism and ever-present formal innovations.⁷³ My argument here is that Didi-Huberman could have literally (if the pun on Fried's literalism can be excused) departed from Joyce. This is the case, because artists did so in their practice, which – consciously or not – generates (with the aid of Joyce) that tension between the possibilities for formalist and content-driven interpretations.

→ 5.1

Joyce comes so well recommended for high Modernist and early postmodernist visual artists, because he paradoxically provided a tradition that was defiant of tradition. Artists viewed him as a quintessence of Modernism and an artist seeking to overcome it.⁷⁴ He was a fellow formalist innovator *and* a two-fold taboo. Joyce was out of bounds, owing to the formalist dogma forbidding literary techniques and content. He was also until recently a censored artist. His location between the categories turned him not only into a prime example and locus for theorists developing postmodernist thought, but also for artists engaged with the same issues in their practice. In the current context, it turns that high Modernist and early postmodernist phase into a prime era when it comes to producing work concerning Joyce. He became “a sort of patron saint”.⁷⁵

Alternative Modernisms, Multiplicities Joyce can be said to have inspired further artistic strategies that operate between the categories of Modernism. This is where some of the multiplicities already noted can enter: Matisse's multi-stylistic response to *Ulysses* comes to mind. Certainly, the Modernist avant-garde moves and changes, but simultaneous stylistic multiplicities did not increase an artist's chances of entering the canon. Matisse no longer needed to worry about this.

Colin Middleton, the only Irish Surrealist, has, it can be argued, escaped greater attention and recognition because of the frequent changes in his style throughout his career. He was not insecure, searching for “his voice”, but appears to have cultivated that multiplicity (both syn-



59 **F.E. McWilliam,**
Figure
1938

chronic and diachronic) that goes far beyond de Chirico-like Surrealism to embrace Expressionism, realist and Cézannian landscape painting, Picasso- and Klee-inspired works and various abstract and semi-abstract approaches. As one reason for seeing such multiplicity as permissible within his oeuvre, I am tempted to propose his deep interest in Joyce. He appears to have frequently read *Finnegans Wake* aloud and kept “his bible” by his bedside.⁷⁶ It would require much speculation, however, to guess which of Middleton’s motifs or styles have been inspired by the *Wake* or *Ulysses*’ multi-stylistic kaleidoscope.

Figurative approaches share with concurrent multiplicity the status of being outside of high Modernist practices, where abstraction was nearly compulsory for artists. Francis Bacon should be mentioned in this context. He was born in Dublin and may have had an added interest in Joyce because of this. *Dubliners* was in his studio at the time he died.⁷⁷ Bacon is also known to have appreciated *Ulysses*: he maintained that “Joyce [...] reinvented naturalism”.⁷⁸ One does not need to strain to argue that this is likely to be related to how Bacon himself viewed his practice within a climate of abstraction. As with Bruce Nauman, Beckett is a more likely candidate for the works’ mood and content, but the other Irish writer also clearly has a role to play.



60 **Werner Schmidt,**
Oranges have
been laid to rust
upon the green
 1994

Viewing *Figure*, 1937, by F.E. McWilliam ⁵⁹ it is apparent why Henry Moore admired the sculptor. But that reference does not entirely do justice to the work with its rounded shape and voids. The Irish artist was greatly interested in Joyce, having bought a copy of *Ulysses* at Shakespeare & Company in Paris.⁷⁹ This interest renders that particular sculpture as a depiction not just of any female, but of Molly Bloom in the shape of her “siglum”, the figure eight. Moreover, the voids and the organic material wood grain, with the reference to Joyce, another level of theoretical depth and interpretative potential.

The issues raised in this chapter and exemplified with art from Modernism and early postmodernism continue to be relevant, because “The co-existence of ‘realist’ and ‘avant-gardist’ art is today a fact”.⁸⁰ This will be investigated briefly in an excursion on recent abstraction.

Recent Abstraction Today, abstract artists working on Joyce seek to capture a colour or mood evoked by a quotation, as in Werner Schmidt’s *Oranges have been laid to rust upon the green* from 1994.⁸¹ ⁶⁰ The artist has researched occurrences of colours in *Ulysses* and found inappropriate existing interpretations that focus on liturgical colours.⁸² He subsequently investigated and precisely copied tonalities occurring in nature –



61 Ciarán Lennon,
CAMAC XII
detail, 2003

in the case of *Oranges*, those of decomposing fruit. And Schmidt goes even further: he makes up his own water-based pigment with the multi-coloured dust of such fruit, mainly apples: another way of arriving at a Joycean identity of form and content.

While Schmidt's colour research has taken the shape of charts on canvas or paper that display the frequency of mentioned colours in relation to where they occur in the book, Erkki Soininen coloured the edges of his copy of the novel, and Mari-Aymone Djeribi is planning a *Ulysses* project that is to adopt the form of colour samples for domestic paint. Hannes Vogel, with his freer interpretations, has already been introduced. All these artists have shown the schemata to be (predictably) reductive. They found a way of illustrating Joyce, while remaining abstract in doing so.

Abstract painting can have *Wakean* titles and may – or may not – relate to Joyce. *Anna Portobello No. 1*, 1971 by Rolf-Gunter Dienst is an example, where an interior structure of an infinitely repeated calligraphed sign seems to create a double-bind of pseudo-abstraction combined with pseudo-writing, as encountered earlier. Abstract artists can also connect their practice with Joycean aspects close to their heart (for example Dublin sites or Joyce scholarship). Ciarán Lennon can serve as an example of the latter approach.

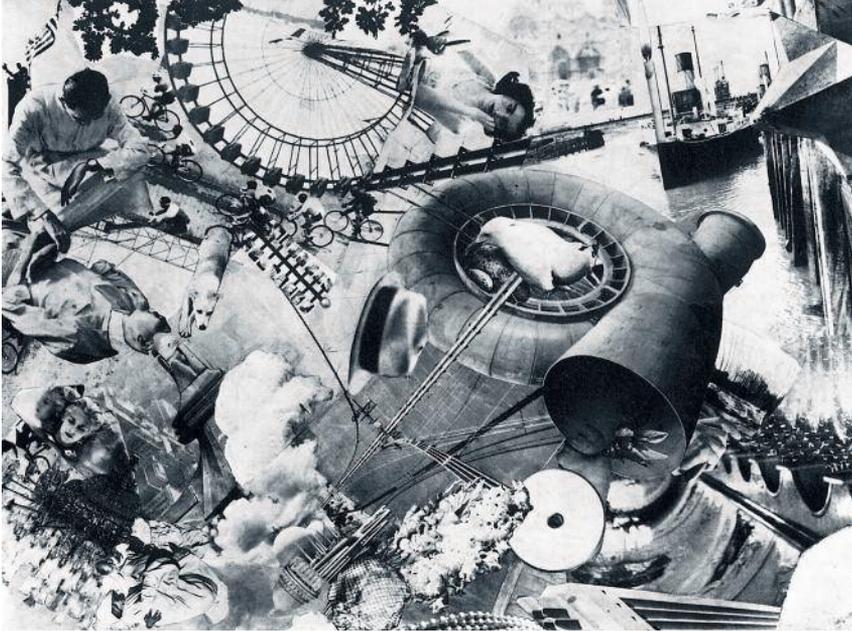
' 4.5

This Dublin artist, living and working in what used to be Monto or Joyce's "nighttown", chose the title *Hapax* for a series of abstract, almost monochromatic, paintings (or rather one work in four canvases). He asked Vicki Mahaffey, whose work on Joyce he had read, to write a short essay.⁸³

The association invited by the title may appear arbitrary, because it is hard to imagine a painting that is not a unique coinage. More recently, however, Lennon's abstract, colour-focused painterly technique has led him to a river, the Camac tributary of the Liffey, across which he used to walk to school. ⁶¹ Local paper works frequently dyed the water. Lennon applies his fluid medium paint in a very few broad strokes, but repeats and reworks again and again, so that differently coloured edges appear on the small, slightly irregular panels, cut from stone, wood or composite debris from skips around Dublin. Recycling, reshaping, applying fluid paint in reminiscence of a colourful river, over-painting, creating book objects dedicated to several series of *CAMAC* paintings with the anagrammatic title on the cover – all that amounts to more than a formalist approach.

→ 4.5 While Lennon states that meaning usually comes after the work's creation for him and is accidental, it nevertheless has to be central, since "the new work is no longer about painting".⁸⁴ Joyce (*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*) seems to provide – as previously observed concerning Motherwell's work – a predetermined and simultaneously accidental store from which to pick matching (local) references. The paintings show a personal involvement with Joyce's Dublin scenery, translated into multifaceted works that seek to follow Joyce in being Irish, while (formally) not looking Irish.

← 2.1 While I already alluded to a space between abstraction and figuration concerning Sean Scully's *Pomes Penyeach* prints ²⁷ and some Joyce(an) portraits, it may have become clearer in the intervening discussion that such a space is indeed rightly and forcefully linked with Joyce. It can also be established as a characteristic of Irish art, from Celtic coins that abstract Roman motifs, through the Book of Kells, and eventually to Joyce and much Irish visual art in the wake of Modernist styles. Often (as in Mainie Jellett's Cubist paintings, with their religious subject matter) international, canonical styles were used to express meaning. This deeply felt meaning could not be purged from a peripherally Modernist practice. Irish artists – and I am putting this in a rather oversimplified way, since it is only marginally relevant in the context – had to engage with such meaning to define themselves and



62 **Jess,**
When My Ship
Come Sin
1955

their identities around the time when Ireland gained partial political independence.

Irish-American Identities It has been established that Joyce reflected on notions of identity and that his works may also impact on readers' identities. This is particularly the case concerning the shifting, composite identities of his fellow "exiles". Joyce offers them appropriate and interesting artistic approaches (for example the sigla). It is now possible to revisit briefly some of the American artists who were the subjects of the earlier form/content debate and introduce other figures from that generation and from around the world to ask how they view Joyce's role within that process of finding Irish-American or post-colonial identities. The term "dislocation" will be particularly helpful.

Jess answered my questions concerning Joyce's inspiration of his work over many decades. The Californian artist did not use his surname Collins, which easily gives away his Irish ancestry. Jess began reading Joyce in 1939 and says that the writer "helped to escape being in the army [by] being in Oz". I do not think that he meant either Kansas or Australia. It is an imaginary place that turns out to have Irish links.



63 Jess,
Echo's Wake I
 1960/66

Jess has always been a recluse, a literary one at that, because he met only writers on a regular basis, those whom his partner, a poet, used to bring into their house. Some of Jess' titles could indeed have been taken from *Finnegans Wake: When my Ship Come Sin* ⁶² plays with language in a similar way to Joyce. The title *Echo's Wake I* ⁶³ relates to *Finnegans Wake* directly. So does the repeated word "the" in *Boob #3*, ⁵¹ referring to the last word of the *Wake*. "Sacred cod" (bottom centre), echoes Joyce's favourite wordplays around god, dog and cod.

Jess states, however, that his Joyce inspiration was not in the first instance one of motifs, but "It is a matter of spirit [...]. Joyce was [...] I felt, *the* kindred spirit".⁸⁵ Judging by the definite article and Jess' careful use of language, this suggests a "relationship by blood [, a] similarity in character [, a] person's relatives collectively".⁸⁶ One must then conclude that Joyce's works in some way relate to the Irish background of the artist, who hardly ventured outside his Californian home.

The technique of collage corresponds closely to Joyce's own procedures, which have been described as bricolage.⁸⁷ *Deranged Stereopticon*, 1974, ⁶⁴ is a collage using two puzzles, one to be read vertically, the other horizontally. This is a way of providing a visual equivalent for Joyce's *portmanteau* word technique (and Jess confirms his Joycean intentions).⁸⁸



64 **Jess,**
Deranged
Stereopticon
1974

The writer apparently led Jess to developing new ways of working visually. Joyce was more than a representative of genealogical roots.

David Smith placed great emphasis on art's relationship with identity: "It is identity, and not that overrated quality called ability, which determines the artist's finished work. The most important thing to know is who you are and what you stand for".⁸⁹ He also reflected on this identity being connected with Joyce: "David Smith liked to speak of his kinship with Joyce."⁹⁰ In this context, *The Letter* ⁵⁴ had a very personal import for him: "There is a part of Joyce in me all my life".⁹¹ He also stresses that the source for this work, Bidy Doran's, the little red hen's letter from *Finnegans Wake*, "said you sent for me".⁹² Such notions of having been called by Joyce to create certain work speak of a high degree of identification – and a will to extend the writer's oeuvre. The title *Song of an Irish Blacksmith*, 1949-50, may then refer to a self-portrait of the metal working sculptor, an indication that his Irish identity is bound up with his work (on Joyce). Smith, however, grew up as a Calvinist American and therefore needed to balance several aspects of his identity. Joyce probably served as both counterweight and precedent, through his own life and the sigla: multiplicity is possible.

5.3 →



65 **Tony Smith,**
The Keys to
Given!
 1965

Tony Smith No matter that Tony Smith was third-generation Irish (born in New Jersey in 1912 and educated by the Jesuits), concerning him, stereotypes come to mind more easily. The hard-living and at times hard-drinking Smith was a missionary in matters Joycean. His scholarly Joyce library and sigla works have been mentioned earlier. A 1965 sculpture's title is *The Keys to Given!*,⁶⁵ taken from the last lines of *Finnegans Wake*. Smith is known to have (glass in hand) recited by heart long passages of the *Wake* with an Irish accent to his Irish setter, who responded by howling.

Lines from *Finnegans Wake*, which appear on Smith's drawings and display variant spellings or altered sequences, were committed to paper directly from Smith's internalized store of *Wakean* quotations: an ever-present source of inspiration. In 1962 he wrote on a drawing "A Roof for Hugh, and a reef for May, butt under his bridge suits Tony".⁹³ The same drawing shows on its verso another quotation ("Pharhaps you think your the King of Aeships with that beardwig in your Cloaksome bag")⁹⁴ alongside a drawing for a sculpture, which he then entitled *Beardwig*. It must be considered a self-portrait of the bearded artist.⁶⁶ "Personal" references, i.e. occurrences of "Tony" or "beardwig", were a means of relating or appropriating the text to himself, to the make-up of his culture and identity.



66 **Tony Smith,**
Beardwig
1962

Tony Smith's "F"-sigla drawings and New York Joyce readings as celebrations of Irishness and art have already been noted. Smith also worked on *Ulysses*. "Wandering Rocks" is the working title of the episode where the main and many subsidiary characters from the novel traverse Dublin, meeting – or just missing – each other. *Wandering Rocks* is also the title of a sculpture by Tony Smith from 1967.⁴⁷ Viewers are invited to walk among its elements. Thus, time and a kind of self-conscious choreography are as central here as they are in *Ulysses*. Interestingly, the individual parts of *Wandering Rocks* are anthropomorphic (individually named *Smohawk*, *Crocus*, *Slide*, *Shaft* and *Dud*, while sharing a familial relationship as six-sided prisms). They thus approach the condition of the "F" sigla in the 1964 drawing.⁵⁶ Both *Ulysses* as a novel and *Wandering Rocks* as a sculpture are designed for the recipients' self-awareness and they expand their genres to such a degree that they approach each other's art form as far as possible. *Nebeneinander* (visual art's traditional preserve) and *Nacheinander* (literature's "natural" field) all but merge, following Stephen Dedalus' criticism of Lessing's *Laocoon*, in which these categories are defined as mutually exclusive, in the "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses*.

"Wandering Rocks" is, of course, about space in Dublin. If *Ulysses* is such a close portrayal of the city that it could be rebuilt by using just

Joyce's book as a guideline – according to the writer's slightly too enthusiastic claim⁹⁵ – then Tony Smith's *Wandering Rocks* goes some way towards being a notional recreation of that imaginary space, Dublin. This is true wherever the two copies of the work are.⁹⁶

Tony Smith displayed two portrait photographs on his studio walls: one of Joyce and one of Barnett Newman. On 5 September 1950, Newman wrote to Tony Smith that he had met a second-generation Irishman in a hotel in Newport, Rhode Island, who had recently been to Ireland: "I'm saving the stories for our return. How we missed you!"⁹⁷ Tony Smith's interest and indeed his Irishness are very much taken for granted. Later, when the Irish artist and writer Brian O'Doherty tried to convince Newman to come to Dublin, the artist responded: "Yes, the city of Joyce..."⁹⁸ When Newman finally arrived on 14 November 1967, his Joycean pilgrimage needed to be reported immediately to the Smiths, who had been in Trieste in 1953 and in Dublin⁹⁹ in 1955: "Dear Jane and Tony/Just came from/Joyce's tower".¹⁰⁰ The two artists' conversations since 1945 must often have returned to the writer. Joyce and Irishness largely seem to be equated.

This does not, however, render Smith's identity monolithic or unable to accommodate his American socialization. In the works on Joyce's sigla "F" and "C" and in *Wandering Rocks* it became apparent that it is in fact the shifting nature of identity that finds appropriate expression in Joyce and that is therefore attractive to "exiled" Irish artists.

Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland The word exile requires inverted commas in the cases of second or subsequent generation Irish people in the United States. With Brian O'Doherty there is no such need. Writing about Noel Sheridan's *HCE* triptych,⁶⁷ created in the USA in 1966/67, Brian O'Doherty views it as a matter of course that his compatriot was interested in Joyce, since the *Wake* was built into the DNA of every Irish man or woman.¹⁰¹ I would like to add Irish man or woman *abroad*. In a letter on his 1985 Douglas Hyde Gallery installation *The Purgatory of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker Homunculus* [i.e. *HCE*],⁵² Brian O'Doherty writes: "Joyce was [...] the quintessential emigrant with geography and guilt flowing in his veins. He made the emigrant status a kind of decoration to be worn on your lapel, when it wasn't an ulcer in your stomach".¹⁰² It is evident, particularly in the *Purgatory* installation and the studies for it,¹⁴¹ that Patrick Ireland reflects in his works on his Irish (and Catholic) background and identity. His residence on Manhattan's Upper West Side since 1957 highlights



67 Noel Sheridan,
HCE,
H and E panels
1966/67

rather than diminishes this. Joyce apparently serves as surrogate homeland and as a text to turn to when he was making artistic contact again with Ireland.

Theodor Adorno's dictum – If man has no home, writing becomes a place to live – applies in the first instance to Joyce himself: Asked if he would not like to return to Ireland, he answered: “Have I ever left”?¹⁰³ No matter how much Ireland has changed, the cosmos of Joyce's work, reflecting so strongly on itself, art, Ireland, identities and change, has served many an American artist with Irish roots to claim a special kind of Irish citizenship, that of Joyce's work.¹⁰⁴

Dislocation In the post-colonial perspective, artwork without meaning – personal and psychological meaning, as well as its implications for identity – does not exist. Dislocation is a term that can easily be understood as exile's impact on language and how one's identity is bound up with this. Dislocation as a term was coined – how could it be otherwise? – in Joyce's wake. Fritz Senn has used it to pinpoint innovations in Joyce's practice, which encompass far more than post-colonial aspects.

There are first dis- or translocations of *dramatis personae* in “Wandering Rocks”, the painful one of the Blooms' sofa and that of the book's contents in “Circe”. These already disturb normal proceedings,

akin to Surrealist practice.¹⁰⁵ When applied to the linguistic field, “Eccentric items like ‘Chrysostomos’ [... and a]ll of the numerous quotations function as – in fact most of them literally are – dislocations”.¹⁰⁶ Nowhere but in *Finnegans Wake* are we constantly reminded of the cultural and etymological amalgamations of (the English) language.¹⁰⁷ To make it worse – or more “realistic” – “Conventional guidance for erratic displacements and abrupt jolts is lacking”.¹⁰⁸ Senn calls this “the author’s jujiutsu strategy to exploit original semantic energy for deflected intrinsic ends.”¹⁰⁹ He summarizes:

[...] dislocation is an expediently blurred trope, a catalytic aid for discerning [...] the variants of that Protean energy that, while no single one of its symptoms may be entirely new, in its pluralistic, mercurial impact does set Joyce’s later work off from its many predecessors and from most of the works that have followed in its wake.¹¹⁰

This notion can be “translated” also into visual forms of communication.¹¹¹ Dislocation has entered art-historical discourse in the work of Sarat Maharaj. Maharaj’s own position as an outsider in the British art establishment prompted him to look for artistic manifestations of that outsider feeling. Not surprisingly, his scholarly attention has turned to Joyce (and Richard Hamilton’s well-known work on the writer).

→ 5.3 In the 1950s and 60s, Irish-American artists’ identities in their shifting multiplicity were by several artists clearly related to Joyce’s work. Following the advent of post-structuralism, the matter became at once more complex and clearer in staking out Joyce-related pursuits of non-binary thinking. Questions of identity were reassessed in Jacques Lacan’s *Seminar* – through Joyce. A French theorist like H el ene Cixous has, in what began as her doctoral research, grappled with exile and related themes – through Joyce.¹¹² Joyce and his characters appear as clear models and points of identification for displaced, post-colonial readers: “Bloom fascinates Joyce because he belongs to those who are unjustly punished [...] He is a ‘displaced’ person unable to take refuge either in the pub or in art, having no real faith or home.”¹¹³ Joyce’s writing in English, rather than having a national function within the colonizers’ scheme to “civilize” Irish natives, has questioned such traditions and meanings.

Vincent Cheng summarizes Joyce’s centrality in current post-colonial thought:

As narratives of resistance to repressive ideologies, Joyce’s texts – especially *Finnegans Wake* – do seem both utopian and hopelessly esoteric agents for a pluralistic vision of a polylogic, universal discourse

which can replace the monologic discourse of both nationalism and imperialism. [... Joyce] can seldom reach the readers he is trying to empower [... Nevertheless,] Joyce's fiction [...] answers to Homi Bhabha's call for 'counter-narratives – both actual and conceptual' and thus 'disturb' those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities [and concludes] Joyce's texts both illustrate and advocate [...] anti-essentialist and anti-imperialist politics.¹¹⁴

Thus the relevance of the term dislocation in Sarat Maharaj's work on post-colonial aspects of visual art practice does not surprise. It is Joyce-inspired post-structuralist and post-colonialist thought that in turn inspired artists working on such themes – whether consciously or not. Only seldom is this expressed with a clear reference to Joyce. More often, artists seem to take indirect approaches, perhaps echoing Cheng's view that "the ideological power of internationally widespread and influential works like Joyce's is perhaps just as effectively spread indirectly – by the influence they have on various other sources".¹¹⁵ Visual art is one of these. I can now suggest that Joyce is an underlying force in visual art created by exiled or immigrant artists around the world, despite the indisputable fact that he is a "dead white male".

Laurence Betham is one of the few non-Western artists whom I know to have referred directly to Joyce. The (outsider) artist spent his early years in Uganda and Kenya and later settled in New Zealand. Betham painted Joyce's portrait in a naïve style: *James Joyce near Warkworth*, 1988. In the foreground of a local landscape, featuring a long, straight, muddy road, lined by telegraph poles and trees that are cut down to half their size. In a speech bubble, Joyce speaks cryptically of the classic modes of love. A whole series of works showing Joyce in New Zealand landscapes is "speculating [...] on how Joyce would have felt if he'd actually been transported into the here-and-now – how he would have felt misunderstood, even a threat to the locals in his pink suit and yellow tie."¹¹⁶

With reference to some of the points just explored, Mark Orange, a Northern Irish artist resident in New York, has read, rewritten, updated and placed into a visual art context Joyce's "A Little Cloud".⁵³ In his *A Little Oracle*, set in modern-day Belfast, Gallagher and Little Chandler (wee Tommy), meet at the Europa Hotel's bar. Postcolonial, political and psychological issues are the backdrop of what is a somewhat more upbeat rendition of the adherence of Tommy, who stayed behind, to creative writing, as well as of his parenting abilities. "I was interested in

68 William Anastasi,
Without Title
1987



69 Mirosław Balka,
Remembrance
of the First Holy
Communion
1985



showing the modernist position occupied by Gallagher as exhausted, crumbling”,¹¹⁷ Orange states. The main means of raising Tommy in the listeners’ esteem is that he finds a *mot juste*, later recognizes it to have come from Joyce and then manages to incorporate it aptly into his text. The artist views this as a postmodernist adherence to the pre-Modernist in a spirit of resistance.¹¹⁸

Orange has chosen the medium of a broadcast within a gallery setting (complemented by an old, enlarged radio and simple transmission equipment) “to question the center-periphery relationship at the core of the notion of broadcast: the idea of authoritative information being radiated outward from a center”.¹¹⁹ Orange will install this work as part (or rather as a “satellite”) of the *Joyce in Art* exhibition at the Royal Hibernian Academy, June–August 2004, which this volume accompanies, in a setting that speaks of colonial and postcolonial connotations: a Georgian house in Dublin’s Merrion Square, now the Goethe Institute.

Jewish and Catholic Identities Considering the correspondences Joyce himself made between the Jews and the Irish, as well as Bloom’s and his own fate as “diasporaic” artists, it is no surprise that some Jewish (and “jewish”) artists have been inspired by Joyce to create work on their

identities. William Anastasi has repeatedly used the three letters “jew” in their exact typeface from *Finnegans Wake*. The works’ backgrounds are either uniformly grey or consist of a photograph of the artist. ⁶⁸ Anastasi uses the reference to *Finnegans Wake* to undermine the essentialist identity that is portrayed on a surface level. The artist displays Jewish and Joycean identification – that with Leopold Bloom, of whom Joyce conceived as not being a Jew according to Jewish customs – and creates a multi-layered, far more complex, work than it seems to be at the outset.¹²⁰

R.B. Kitaj, while showing similar interests, refers to Joyce’s *A Portrait*, rather than to a later work, and thus appears to be more essentialist: “What I’d like to do before I die is to create a new Jewish art [...] in the spirit of James Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus”.¹²¹ The diasporic artist, whose identities were forged on both sides of the Atlantic, clearly views Joyce as someone who has given a voice to the diaspora – and even perhaps to exile in general.

When asked about possible reasons for Joyce’s importance to their works, artists as diverse as William Anastasi, Martha Rosler and Esther Shalev-Gerz have mentioned their Jewish identities as elements that resonate in Joyce’s treatment of Judaism, the diaspora and exile. The feeling apparently is that Joyce managed to let matters of (Jewish) identity go beyond the level of motifs or essentialism. In this way he invited more complex identification.

5.3 →

A similar observation can be made concerning Catholics who have emigrated to Protestant countries or who have “internally” turned away from Catholicism – especially in a rebellious way that can be compared to Joyce or Stephen Dedalus. The latter case applies to Miroslaw Balka, the former to Darek Ostrowski, the Polish artist living in Denmark, whose “illustrations” of the Epiphanies have been discussed earlier.

Miroslaw Balka’s point of departure is a clear identification with Stephen Dedalus in *Remembrance of the First Holy Communion*, 1985. ⁶⁹ This figurative, autobiographical and overtly emotional work features a red heart. It was first shown at the artist’s studio, which is his grandmother’s house in Otwock near Warsaw, and later presented at an exhibition on rites of passage.¹²² Catholicism’s life-structuring rites and personal memory obviously play a role. The artist states that, when reading Joyce’s *A Portrait* while growing up in Catholic Poland, he felt that Joyce personally addressed and understood him.¹²³

A further work based on lines in *A Portrait of the Artist* from 1987 bears the title *When You Wet the Bed*.⁷⁰ It consists of a simple bed



70 Mirosław Balka,
When You Wet
the Bed
 1987

structure with some padding and a small hose, which protrudes from the centre and spouts water into a rectangular hollow in the floor beside the bed. Other elements are a kneeling chair and a T-shaped cross (a reference to “Proteus”), also with a jet of water, meeting and mixing with the other stream.

This is the first of Balka’s work where a physical presence is evoked through absence. Bodily fluids mingle with holy substances (in *Jocye in Art* it is brandy). The scene is at once highly religious and profane. In *164 x 64 x 94*, 1990,⁷¹ this secularizing, purging and simplifying is taken a step further: a more Spartan bed construction features not water but a heated pillow. The emphasis is now on perception, the synaesthetic strength of Joyce’s text, where the young Stephen feels the wet bed first warm and then cold.

Balka’s identity is that of a rebelliously Catholic artist, very much imbued with rites and substances of the faith. In the 1990s, he measured the height, for example, of “spoons” filled with ashes to coincide with the level of his own mouth. If “in Joyce’s analogy the artist gives himself in his ink to his hearers and seers”,¹²⁴ Balka gives himself in his sculptures’ materials. The missing presence is that of the artist – like Joyce’s detached God of the creation.



71 Miroslaw Balka,
164 x 64 x 94
1990

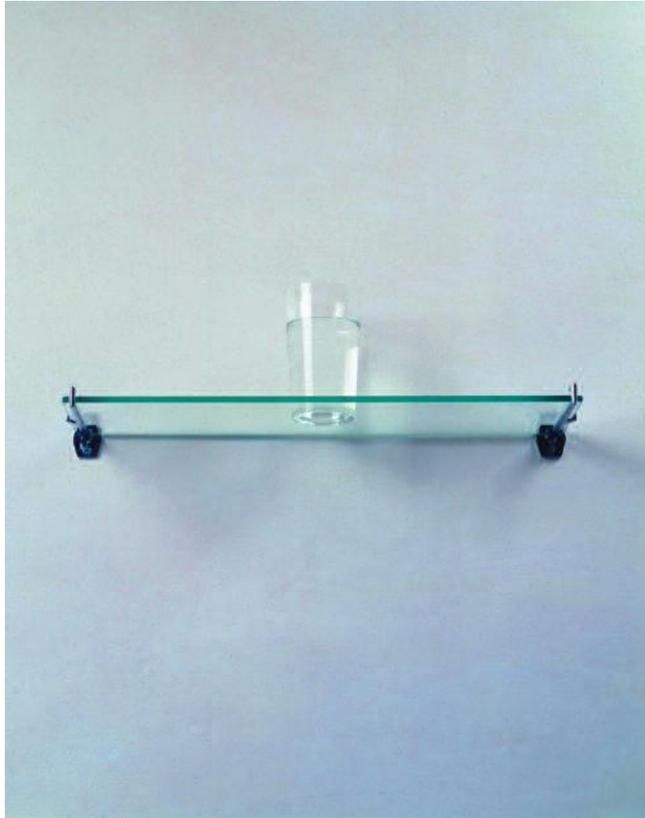
Balka's work can easily be placed in the context of Didi-Huberman's insistence on (religious) meaning in (post-) minimalist work, where the figure is missing – just as on Easter morning when the empty grave constituted belief through seeing – seeing nothing: a void.¹²⁵ Balka provides another instance of work on Joyce that is both figurative and abstract. Deeply personal references, emotionality and simultaneous detachment echo what has been found earlier.¹²⁶

Joyce is not securely located anywhere or is everywhere simultaneously when art-historical definitions of form/content, Modernism/postmodernism are applied. “[...] dislocations are not so much isolable qualities as they are entangled processes that defy administrative classification”.¹²⁷ This is a quality Joyce's work shares with the avant-garde.¹²⁸ It can be viewed as such a powerful force, because it apparently managed the impossible: it remained on the move, reinventing itself (as a source of inspiration for artists) at every turn (of the history of art). While this quality is something that every artist intent on innovation seeks in a source of inspiration, it is particularly attractive to those who themselves in their identities and backgrounds straddle several camps. What plays a part in this was captured early by Stuart Gilbert: “the Irish writer's vocabulary is world-wide – *Work in Progress* may well be easier reading

for a polyglot foreigner than for an Englishman with but his mother tongue".¹²⁹ Joyce in the most productive and inspiring way "tampers with persons, places, and times: identities are optional"¹³⁰ and shifting. There are as many Joyces as (artist) readers' multi-faceted identities.

Concerning several artists born between 1910 and 1930, it became evident that the question of whether or not any one work is Joyce-inspired is meaningless. David Smith, Robert Motherwell, Tony Smith, John Cage, Richard Hamilton and Joseph Beuys come to mind. This was the first generation of artists who grew up with Joyce's complete work available to them at the time when they were formulating their artistic concerns. He pervades their creations to such an extent that one can describe the situation as a chicken-or-egg question.¹³¹





Q: To begin with, could you describe this work?

A: Yes, of course. What I've done is change a glass of water into a full-grown oak tree without altering the accidents of the glass of water.

Q: The accidents?

A: Yes. The colour, feel, weight, size....

Q: Do you mean that the glass of water is a symbol of an oak tree?

A: No. It's not a symbol. I've changed the physical substance of the glass of water into that of an oak tree.

Q: It looks like a glass of water....

A: Of course it does. I didn't change its appearance. But it's not a glass of water. It's an oak tree.

Q: Can you prove what you claim to have done?

A: Well, yes and no. I claim to have maintained the physical form of the glass of water and, as you can see, I have. However, as one normally looks for evidence of physical change in terms of altered form, no such proof exists.

Q: Haven't you simply called this glass of water an oak tree?

A: Absolutely not. It's not a glass of water any more. I have changed its actual substance. It would no longer be accurate to call it a glass of water. One could call it anything one wished but that would not alter the fact that it is an oak tree.

Q: Isn't this just a case of the emperor's new clothes?

A: No. With the emperor's new clothes people claimed to see something which wasn't there because they felt they should. I would be very surprised if anyone told me they saw an oak tree.

Q: Was it difficult to effect the change?

A: No effort at all. But it took me years of work before I realized I could do it.

Q: When precisely did the glass of water become an oak tree?

A: When I put water in the glass.

Q: Does this happen every time you fill a glass with water?

A: No, of course not. Only when I intend to change it into an oak tree.

Q: Then intention causes the change?

A: I would say it precipitates the change.

Q: You don't know how you do it?

A: It contradicts what I feel I know about cause and effect.

Q: It seems to me that you're claiming to have worked a miracle. Isn't that the case?

A: I'm flattered that you think so.

Q: But aren't you the only person who can do something like this?

A: How could I know?

Q: Could you teach others to do it?

A: No. It's not something one can teach.

Q: Do you consider changing the glass of water into an oak tree constitutes an artwork?

A: Yes.

Q: What precisely is the artwork? The glass of water?

A: There is no glass of water any more.

Q: The process of change?

A: There is no process involved in the change.

Q: The oak tree?

A: Yes. The oak tree.

Q: But the oak tree only exists in the mind.

A: No. The actual oak tree is physically present but in the form of the glass of water. As the glass of water was a particular glass of water, the oak tree is also particular. To conceive the category "oak tree" or to picture a particular oak tree is not to understand and experience what appears to be a glass of water as an oak tree. Just as it is imperceptible, it is also inconceivable.

Q: Did the particular oak tree exist somewhere else before it took the form of a glass of water?

A: No. This particular oak tree did not exist previously. I should also point out that it does not and will not ever have any other form but that of a glass of water.

Q: How long will it continue to be an oak tree?

A: Until I change it.



plastered stuccoed

rosined shellacked

vulcanized

inebriated

polluted

3.3 Lingualization, Concepts, Openness, Commitment

In the previous chapter, the last that retains the chronological framework, I have foregrounded conceptual and politically committed practices in the 1960s and their Joycean links. While examining politics and the Irish “troubles”, I have already used Joyce-related themes in art from that time to look ahead. Subsequently, I will be in a position to focus on Joyce, as well as on Joycean issues and strategies as he and they feature in contemporary art from the 1960s onwards.

Concept Art: Lingualization, Internalization Visual art in the mid-1960s displayed a strong interest in the foundations of art, a rule-governed, often playful anti-aesthetic. In the late 1960s and 70s a dematerialization of the art object ensued with ephemeral, immaterial, Conceptual artworks, which often exist in and through language alone.¹ What Wolfgang-Max Faust has called the lingualization of art² was amenable to literary sources of inspiration. Joyce appears to have become the principal writer to whom artists have turned who came into their own during that time. What then in this context singles him out?

One answer could lie in Joyce’s conscious bridging of the visual and the linguistic which was now the locus of much art practice. As Wendy Steiner puts it: “Stephen’s correction[.] of Lessing [...] stresses mental process as the locus of the temporal-spatial interchange”.³ This bridge-building effort between the genres is related to that other border-crossing endeavour that Joyce had pioneered in a distinct manner, for instance with his epiphanies: the integration of life into art.⁴ Now artists wished to integrate art with life, and committed artists viewed both these efforts as intertwined (see below).

However, the primary reason for Joyce’s prominent position in the minds of Conceptual artists appears to be that the writer provides important precedence for the internalization of criticism and theory – or poetics – within the work.

Joseph Kosuth singles out this trait as constituting the basis of new and intellectual practice. In his own work, he “aims to grasp and unravel the conceptual web of art as a whole”.⁵ It is again Joyce’s conceptual thinking that singles him out as a worthy antecedent, rather than the presence of any visual objects beyond a shared typographic sensitivity. The *Fluviana* remained unknown. Implicit in these intentional strategies is

72 Joseph Kosuth, Ulysses: 18 Scenes
1998

73 Michael Craig-Martin, An oak tree
1970 (double page)

74 Martha Rosler, The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems
1974

an emphasis on the act itself. Furthermore, the focus of the work shifts to the viewer. Artists now regard their studios (if they still have any) as laboratories for their experiments. The white-coated Joyce, who devised “simple”⁶ but highly innovative concepts and held that another writer (James Stephens) could conclude his work on *Finnegans Wake*, was an arranger or *arrangeur* (of quotations) to their liking.⁷

Kosuth has since the late 1960s quoted (other) authors in his installations and writings. These include Joyce – alongside dictionary texts, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Freud and several others. The Irish writer was most prominent in his mind during the 1990s, when he was working in Dublin and Zurich.⁸ ⁷² Viewer engagement is paramount when establishing connections and filling the gaps between the unconnected quotations. Furthermore, one also often needs to strain to make out the words, particularly when the lines are crossed out. It is usually the conceptual aspect of Joyce that makes readers work. Kosuth’s palimpsest-like layering of “dislocated” quotations in work that anticipates and seemingly integrates further commentary is akin to our experience of reading Joyce. It is in keeping with this then that the artist welcomes his inclusion in the current investigation and exhibition.⁹

That Joyce was central to the development of Conceptual Art and committed strategies does not come as a surprise when remembering his presence in the formalism/content debate. Joseph Kosuth has been vocal about the preferences of content over what he calls a “mindless” formalist art.¹⁰ He writes:

The issue about Joyce and formalism goes to the heart of what I, along with others [...] addressed in our re-evaluation of artistic practice in the 1960s. The version of Modernism we inherited [...] was still-born. It [...] had reduced the work of art to being a necktie [...].¹¹ Yet Joyce was quite the opposite. His work was about meaning [...] the social impact of the culture he formed around his work was anything but [in]offensive.¹²

Broadly speaking – while seeking to avoid the impression that I wish to “destroy” Greenberg or Fried¹³ – I can pinpoint the anti-formalist stance, especially following Fried’s publication of “Art and Objecthood”, as the factor that mobilized in a positive way the forces that would guide the development of visual art in the late 1960s, particularly in the USA. Several artists named by Fried as negative examples turn out to have Joycean links. Among these are most notably Tony Smith and John Cage.¹⁴

Kosuth, Martha Rosler and John Latham can loosely be classified as Conceptual, anti-formalist Joycean artists. Latham gave expression to this conviction in his 1965 work *Still and Chew*, where he critically displays a

copy of Greenberg's *Art and Culture* in a briefcase that itself speaks of the opposing Duchamp- and Joyce-inspired perspective. Some pages from this library book are presented in a jar alongside its remains: chewed, half-digested and fermented with added acid. Latham's irreverent work with book objects, Joycean research and his world-view inspired by the author will be dealt with under those topics. But his Artists' Placement Schemes since the 1960s in industry and science, i.e. his wish to position artists in the decision-making roles in, makes it important to mention him here under Joyce-inspired, committed strategies.¹⁵

5.3 →

Martha Rosler reacted to Fried's essay in the following way:

I read Michael Fried's essay ['Art and Objecthood'] ... which was a sort of terribly starchy defence of high Modernism, and he spoke of the problem of art that did not follow these Modernist precepts as being 'theatre'. And I said 'bingo, that's it, that's right'. The art that is important now is a form of theatre, and one thing that means is that it has to be in the same space as the viewer.¹⁶

Rosler, who initially pursued a writing career, published during her college years, in 1964, a scholarly essay on "Mirrors and Photographs in James Joyce's *Ulysses*".¹⁷ She argues that Joyce "used them as symbols, carriers of themes, and as a means of expressing character in the person-ages of the works."¹⁸ She finds that both function for women as "stabilizers, means for setting to rights their appearances as sexual beings",¹⁹ while they reveal the not always flattering inner selves of men. Despite these potentially or partially damning conclusions that the student, who subsequently became a feminist and socially committed artist, was bound to reach, (Joyce's) language continues to figure strongly in her work. It is even possible that her studies of Joyce made her aware of what she was then to focus on in her art: the "importance of representation in determining and reinforcing one's position in culture".²⁰

While not much work bears the traces of a direct inspiration by Joyce, her prominent and sensitive use of language may show signs of her earlier research. Rosler's 1974 photo-and-text work *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*⁷⁴ features many synonyms for "drunk", while the photographs show empty street corners and entrances where homeless alcoholics live. The inadequacy of images or language on their own – and within language one term on its own – can be traced to Joyce's lists, repetitions and augmentations. The work also speaks of a richness of everyday language, including slang, as well as the possibility of such material to bring about an epiphany.

4.2 →

Michael Craig-Martin In Conceptual fashion, Michael Craig-Martin has created what he calls a “model for all work of art”.²¹ It is *An Oak Tree* which takes the shape of a glass of water on a glass shelf, mounted high on a gallery wall, 1970.⁷³ Craig-Martin is interested in practical, everyday objects and what they can do in the minds of the artist himself, as well as the viewers. His wall drawings show a similar preoccupation, where one thing is simultaneously another. *An Oak Tree* requires further explanation – and the artist gives it: cryptically. His further interest is in laying “as many false leads as I can”.²² When he then says that he is “trying to have a hold on [his] Irish heritage through Joyce and Beckett”,²³ can he be believed?

→ 4.1

The work certainly gains when interpreted with Joyce in mind. A washerwoman by the water in the “Anna Livia” chapter in *Finnegans Wake* metamorphoses into a tree. But the question remains undecided whether that tree was always there or whether it never existed, and all that we have was and continues to be the watery, fluid language of the *Wake*. More generally, much in Joyce’s works pretend to be quotidian, while it is simultaneously something larger that grows in the readers’ minds. The Socratic questions-and-answers format of the accompanying text is nothing strange to the readers of *Ulysses* (“Ithaca”) either. Craig-Martin not only states that Joyce and Duchamp are for him closely related,²⁴ his Irish background mediates Duchamp’s ready-made strategy in ways that are indeed comparable to Joyce.²⁵

→ 5.2

Patrick Ireland deserves to be mentioned here as the foremost Irish artist who made an impact on the development of Conceptual art in the United States and who befriended and “portrayed” Duchamp. In 1963/64, he created *In the Wake (of)*,⁷⁵ a box similar to trays of type, in whose voids he inserted cubes with differently coloured sides that are inscribed. Pointing to the similarities between Joycean (*Wakean*) procedures and Conceptual art’s interests in (dis-)assembling words and playing games, the viewer is asked to turn the cubes. She or he thus reveals colour-coded *Wake*-passages, including HCE sequences and the thunderwords. One can also randomly (and thus openly in Eco’s sense) create a new text in the wake of “the master”.²⁶

O’Doherty, also a writer and critic, has not only returned to Joyce with regularity over the last half-century, he has also expressed his annoyance at Joyce’s unreachable standards.

It [*In the Wake (of)*] is appropriately complex conceptually and had he seen it, it might have puzzled and bothered the wee bugger (not a



75 Patrick Ireland,
In the Wake (of)
1963/64

very pleasant man I gather) by turning his own strategies against him. I think if you play with the great man, you have to have a chance of winning. Since I'm not in the tribute business, this is much more fun.²⁷

Similar sentiments had been noted with regard to Dieter Roth, who also pursued a simultaneous career in writing or used that medium as a further creative outlet. When considering another Conceptual artist who began by writing concrete poetry, Carl Andre – who describes himself as a great admirer of Joyce's work²⁸ – something like a pattern emerges. Many Conceptual artists are exceedingly knowledgeable about writing and literature and practice(d) several disciplines. This closeness to language and Joyce's field render them more aware of the writer's achievements and simultaneously more prone to feelings of competition.

Duchamp's Legacy Another kind of competition comes into play with regard to the roots of Conceptual art. Duchamp's rediscovery is central to these developments, and, as Sarat Maharaj has shown, Richard Hamilton's "typotranslation" of Duchamp's *Green Box* notes, published in 1960 in consultation with Duchamp, is instrumental for this in the English-speaking world. I would like to follow Maharaj's assessment and attribute to Hamilton's Joyce-trained mind his sensitive work with

Duchamp's notes, i.e. his reading of the fellow artist's texts with a translanguing and typographical fine-tooth comb – that on the cover of *transition*,¹³ with which Joyce had jokingly wished to comb out *Work in Progress*.²⁹

It is possible at this point to expand Maharaj's argument. Hamilton may have been central for making Duchamp's notes available in English, but the impact of his interpretations of the artist through his own work have largely been confined to the English or European stage. In the United States, a reassessment of Duchamp was underway which rendered him as a more postmodernist artist and that lay the foundations of Conceptual art as we know it. Joseph Kosuth, who perceives Duchamp as being mediated through Rauschenberg, Johns and Warhol, rather than Hamilton, led this American "reframing" in his text *Art after Philosophy*, 1969, as well as in his texts and works since then.

Kosuth is, as has been stated, another Joyce-schooled artist, who acknowledges Joyce's seminal role in developing a culture for Conceptual art: "For me, Joyce [coined] that language within [which] artistic practice could establish itself and function on other levels [... He] participate[d] in forming an entirely other cultural location for such work."³⁰ Thus, the issue is not so much whether Duchamp influenced Joyce or vice versa. But, wherever one turns,³¹ the conclusion is unavoidable that Duchamp's impact, that watershed of postmodernist art, would not have been the same without Joyce-trained artists' minds and their particular conceptualized way of reading art. Kosuth, with whom a "post-modernist" Duchamp is associated,³² joins others in the United States, who divided their attention between Joyce and Duchamp, namely John Cage, Robert Barnes, William Anastasi³³ and Brian O'Doherty.³⁴

It is now possible to argue that much of what one is accustomed to attributing to Duchamp in contemporary art may not have struck a chord if it had not been for Joyce. The previous assertion that artists chose to credit Joyce partly in order to bypass Duchamp and sources of inspiration within their own genre now acquires a different degree of complexity. The Conceptual mindset itself may equally be a Joycean as well as a Duchampian one.³⁵

Openness A related way of explaining Joyce's centrality for artists in the 1960s is that the acceptability, indeed inevitability and embeddedness in art (and life) of multiplicity is not only prominently established in Joyce's works: Umberto Eco's *Opera Aperta* from 1962 establishes a concrete link between this seminal cultural concept of the time and the

← 1.1

writer. The second half of this book is devoted to a treatise on Joyce's poetics. This juxtaposition or development of thought was influential in Europe but has not been replicated in the English-speaking world, where the first translation dates from 1989. It even separates the two parts into two volumes and adds different essays to the first. In the original version, *Finnegans Wake* emerges as the prime example of this first description of a new, positive cultural status quo. "Where [Greenberg and Fried] are largely pessimistic and defensive, Eco is unfailingly optimistic and progressive [owing to the fact that he is] accepting 'complexity' as a precondition of any 'contemporary' cultural endeavour".³⁶

Already in *Our Exagmination*, Robert McAlmon had stressed that Joyce's language was "a medium capable of suggestion, implication, and evocation".³⁷ These qualities now became valued assets in all art forms. Openness or the blank or void (*Leerstelle*), which Wolfgang Iser insists activates Joyce's readers to a degree not previously known in literature,³⁸ can quite easily be transferred to the realm of visual art. This has been shown in an exhibition entitled *Das offene Bild*.³⁹ Several artists included there also feature in the present context: Joseph Beuys, Robert Filliou, Gerhard Hoehme and Zbigniew Gostomski. Others could be added, especially the painters of (almost) white paintings introduced here later under the heading of Epiphany. Robert Motherwell is another candidate for "Joycean openness", since he created in 1968 a series of *Open* paintings, which Marcelin Pleyne understands in terms "of an encounter on equal terms with *Riverrun*".⁴⁰ I am tempted to see these in connection with his later studies for *Shem the Penman*, 1972 (for instance *No. 8*, where a similar square hovers at the top end of the work): a clearly Joycean context.

4.2 →

Even Jackson Pollock's "veiling" of subject matter is likely intended as a viewer-focused curtailment of a one-dimensional interpretative effort, so as to make one aware of that effort.⁴¹ Indeed, Eco stresses that his theory is "applicable to both an informal [Pollock-inspired, abstract] painting and a play by Brecht".⁴² The simultaneous existence of realistic and abstract painting in postmodernist times could furthermore be seen to correspond to Joyce's multiplicity of styles. The simultaneous invitations to focus on subject matter and art's means leave it up to the recipient to choose or to "oscillate".⁴³

Politics Openness is by no means an apolitical stance. Umberto Eco himself writes of acts of conscious freedom⁴⁴ that such works encourage and promote among recipients. He also insists that no other writer has

let the characters speak as much about politics and aesthetics as Joyce.⁴⁵ It endeared Joyce to many artists of a generation that was active in or sympathized with the student protests that Bloom's politics had very early been described as "dangerous",⁴⁶ and that Joyce's work takes responsibility through the durable nature of the written (and printed) word.

Notably, these political implications are non-didactic and non-prescriptive in nature.⁴⁷ It is through the notion of openness and reader involvement that they manifest themselves (for example in the fact that all Joyce's novels follow a path from third- to first-person narration). Helmut Bonheim in 1964 underlined socially committed aspects of Joyce's work: metempsychosis has its political side, as every government appears as an interim solution against this background; iconoclasm is eternally nourishing and those who fight against the status quo develop civilizations. *Finnegans Wake* denounces misuses of power in a human, non-political way.⁴⁸ Many literary critics and activists of the time, however, did not agree.

The Conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, when asked if Joyce was a writer of choice for "rebellious" artists in the late 1960s, concurred to a certain extent, but stated that there were others – and Ho Chi Minh was certainly more appealing to some than Stephen Dedalus.⁴⁹ Martha Rosler has also reflected and debated the issue whether Joyce was too apolitical to qualify as a source of inspiration for committed work. She concludes: "I could not read Joyce in such a way".⁵⁰

The reason for this may lie partly in the (residual) difference between the media: a visual artist can probably never be quite as clearly denotative, prescriptive and one-dimensional as a writer can. Visual artists would therefore usually already have made the choice to use art (as for example Rosler says)⁵¹ as a means to enable viewers to come to their own conclusions. This implies using art as the "better tool"⁵² to change the world – and thus artists concur with Joyce's preferences. They are more likely to do so than writers.

Thus, they also place themselves within a theoretical framework that critically reassesses Modernism. The socio-political intentions of avant-garde movements have failed, as Peter Bürger concedes, but this failure has not been without consequences in that it has destroyed the possibility for any art movement to claim absolute validity.⁵³ Thus, paradoxically, Joyce's superficially apolitical stance⁵⁴ – realizing the futility of direct political engagement at his time – signals that (inevitable) failure in the Modernist context, while already providing a clearly developed,

positive theory of multiplicity that was elsewhere available only *ex negativo*.⁵⁵ Is it a coincidence that the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, founded in 1968 to host a “peace” exhibition of Minimalist artists that benefited the Student Mobilization Committee to end the war in Vietnam soon commenced annual Joyce readings?⁵⁶

Considering committed visual art in the 1960s, it is furthermore necessary to take into account what Terry Eagleton has stressed: Joyce is almost the only Modernist writer whose political allegiances were not right wing.⁵⁷ It should have become evident, however, that such a choice by elimination is not the only way in which committed artists singled out Joyce.

The Irish “Troubles” In the context of Joyce-inspired and politically engaged art, the Irish “Troubles” need to be mentioned. Joyce’s disenchantment with earlier Irish politics, namely nationalism and his insistence on using a British passport, may or may not predestine him to be the point of departure for art that tackles such a divisive topic.

Robert Motherwell included in his *Tribute to James Joyce* exhibition, 1983, a work entitled *The Irish Troubles*, 1981. I would interpret it less as a political statement than as the American artist’s wish to refer in a Joycean exhibition to the then topical Irish context, without insinuating that Joyce’s work may carry a particular message in this regard. The clearest connection is Motherwell’s statement that in his works with Joyce-connections he deliberately chose green to signify Ireland. Joyce becomes an ambassador for the country he avoided for all his adult life.

Richard Hamilton as an English artist has been criticized for portraying the Irish Republican hunger striker Raymond (Pious) McCartney as a Christ-like figure, while linking him to Joyce’s far from positive or heroic *Citizen*.⁷⁶ The companion piece is the sympathetic portrait of an Orangeman in full regalia. Much has been written about this particular case,⁵⁸ and the work needs to be mentioned again. Suffice it to say at this point that, to me, it seems to be quite a Joycean conundrum: everybody will criticize work that is topical but does not contain a clearly developed political message – or at most one that favours withdrawal⁵⁹ – in order to show how contradictory and fraught the situation is.

Patrick Ireland changed his name in 1972 – or better: he took on a pseudonym for the purposes of his visual art practice only – at the height of the so-called “Troubles” and in response to the British presence in Northern Ireland. Considering how knowledgeable O’Doherty is about Joyce (his friend and mentor Thomas MacGreevy was one of the authors

4.2 →



76 **Richard Hamilton,**
The Citizen
 1982/83

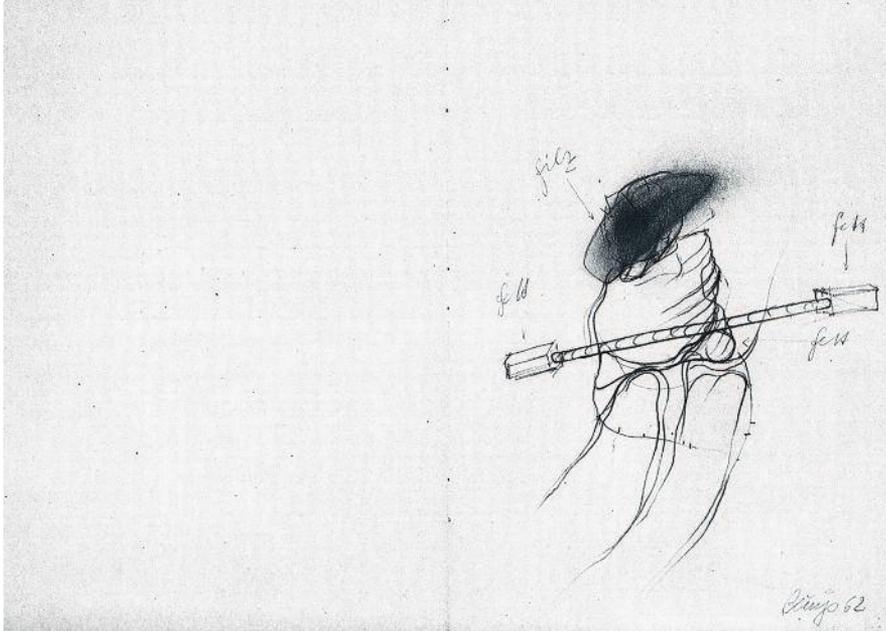
of *Our Exagmination*), a name change could have *Wakean* undertones, despite its much more prominent political meaning. “[...] the liberatory potential in reading the *Wake*”⁶⁰ may not have been lost on Ireland/O’Doherty.

The clearest employment of Joyce within the context of the “Troubles” is in a small bronze sculpture by F.E. McWilliam. As part of a series of banner-carrying Peace Marchers from 1976, two figures display a slightly idiosyncratic credo: “16 June, Bloom’s Day”. Joyce is clearly perceived as politically committed, a proponent of peace.

Joseph Beuys Joseph Beuys came to prominence with student protest-inspired performances. In Europe, he quickly became the foremost politically and socially committed artist. Like other foreigners, he considered Joyce to be a representative of his home country – including its political situation in the 1970s.

→ 4.2

Beuys can serve here as an example of how Joycean play with words – in a context that clearly refers to the writer (the *Ulysses* Extension) – can lead to both a new consideration of sculptural materiality and its connection with the theory of social warmth already encountered. Thus, Joycean word play, which is simultaneously underpinned conceptually



77 Joseph Beuys,
_____?,
 (originally from
Ulysses-Extension)
 ca. 1957-61,
 dated 1962

and linguistically, helps to develop an artist's strategy of political implications.

The genesis of Beuys' use of his signature materials, fat and felt, points to Joycean roots and motivations. His *Ulysses-Extension*, 1957-61, contains the break-through ideas with regard to fat and felt.^{61 77} In it, he referred to the similarity of these substances in a Joycean way by using both German and English and by breaking the spelling conventions. He thus rendered similar the words for the substances "fett/felt" in order to hint at the fact that they are both chaotically structured, organic substances that insulate well. Joycean wordplay – which was only later seen as pertaining to conceptual strategies – stands at the beginning of the creation of much of Beuys' work. He rightly claimed that his artistic path had passed through language.⁶²

The use that Beuys made of fat and felt has clear social and even political implications. While the Golem of the Jewish tradition is of course also a giant lying in the landscape, Joyce's way of using that tradition in Tim Finnegan's placement in the cityscape of Dublin at the beginning of *Finnegans Wake* is primary for the artists who used Joyce's own anthropomorphic "F"s in their works. Joseph Beuys very likely did not know of Tony Smith's drawings from 1964, when in 1977 he decided



78 **Joseph Beuys,**
Unschlitt Tallow
1977

to fill the voids of a concrete pedestrian underpass in Münster with tallow.⁷⁸ He cut the cast, which took weeks to cool, into shapes that echo Joyce's and Smith's anthropomorphic, prostrate "F"s (FW 18.36) – although there are more than two and they seem to be growing. Beuys highlighted the underpass spaces as being anthropomorphic⁶³ and thus pointed to the homeless people who live there. He turned their plight figuratively from something cold and negative into something (socially) warm and positive.

The socially committed aspects that Beuys saw in Joyce extend to the artist's visits to Ireland in 1974. This connection is suggested by Beuys' reading of Ellmann's biography of Joyce in 1972,⁶⁴ the year when he was dismissed from his professorship at Düsseldorf Art Academy following sit-ins. Beuys selected some partisan-like scenes from Ellmann's biography to annotate, interpreting Joyce in an overly political way, where he emerges as a representative of Ireland. "Volksabstimmung" (referendum) is a prominent annotation in the book. That democratic tool, available in Ireland but not in Germany, can serve as an example for Beuys' view of the island as a country inhabited primarily by lovers of freedom and independence like Joyce.⁶⁵ That the writer had felt compelled to leave his home country appears secondary. Ireland, represented by Joyce,

is for Beuys a *locus amoenus* in the wake of his friend Heinrich Böll's *Irish Diaries*.

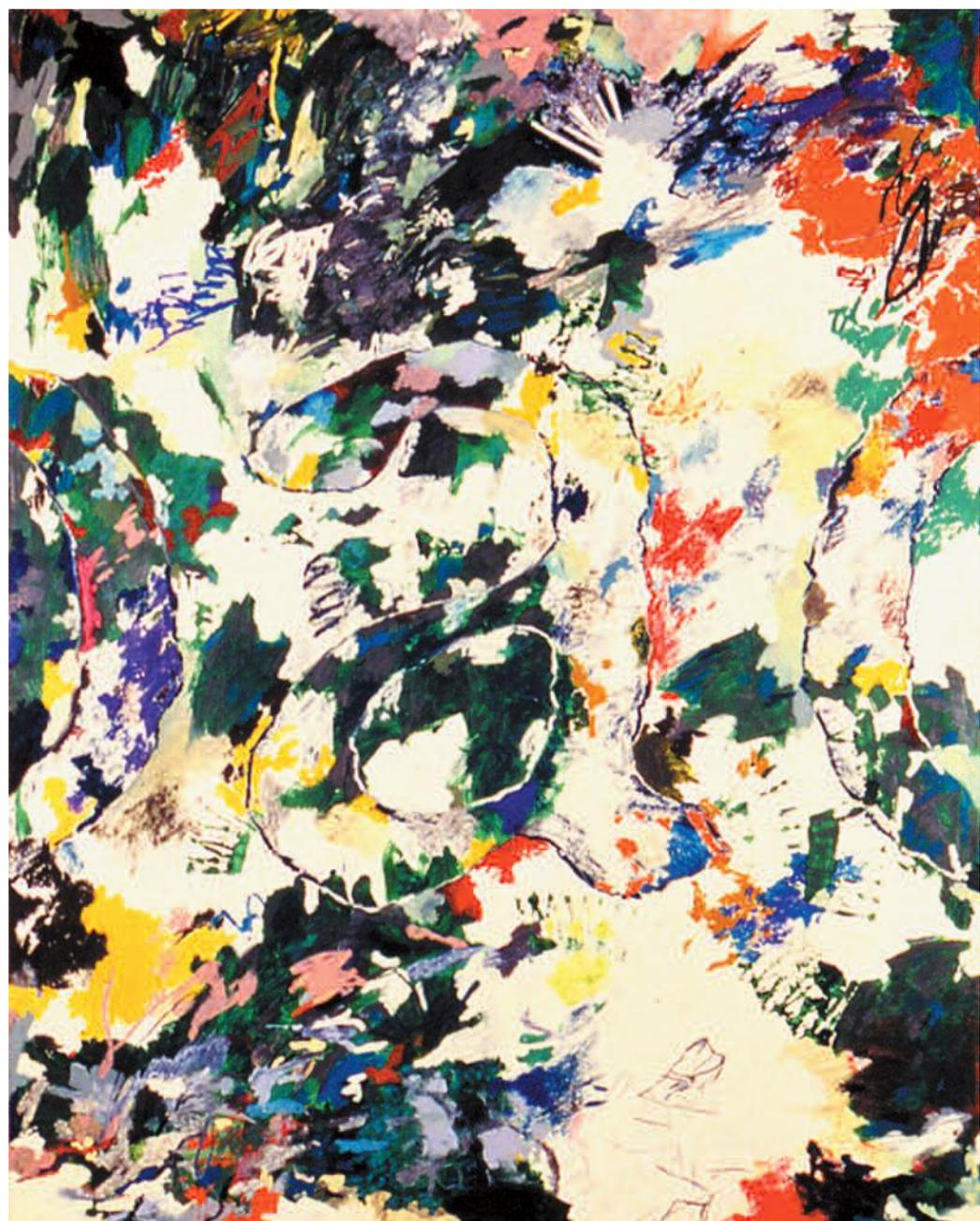
At least briefly, Beuys must have considered moving to Ireland. Dorothy Walker, the Irish art critic, had written to him following his dismissal and encouraged him to apply for the position of director of the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. Instead, he established a branch of the Free International University for Interdisciplinary Research (co-founded by Böll), travelled in Joyce's footsteps¹³⁷ and went on a lecturing tour through the island, recommending negotiations, i.e. language, as a mode of overcoming the "Troubles". Joyce and Ireland's political situation are intertwined in the works that he created at this time.⁶⁶

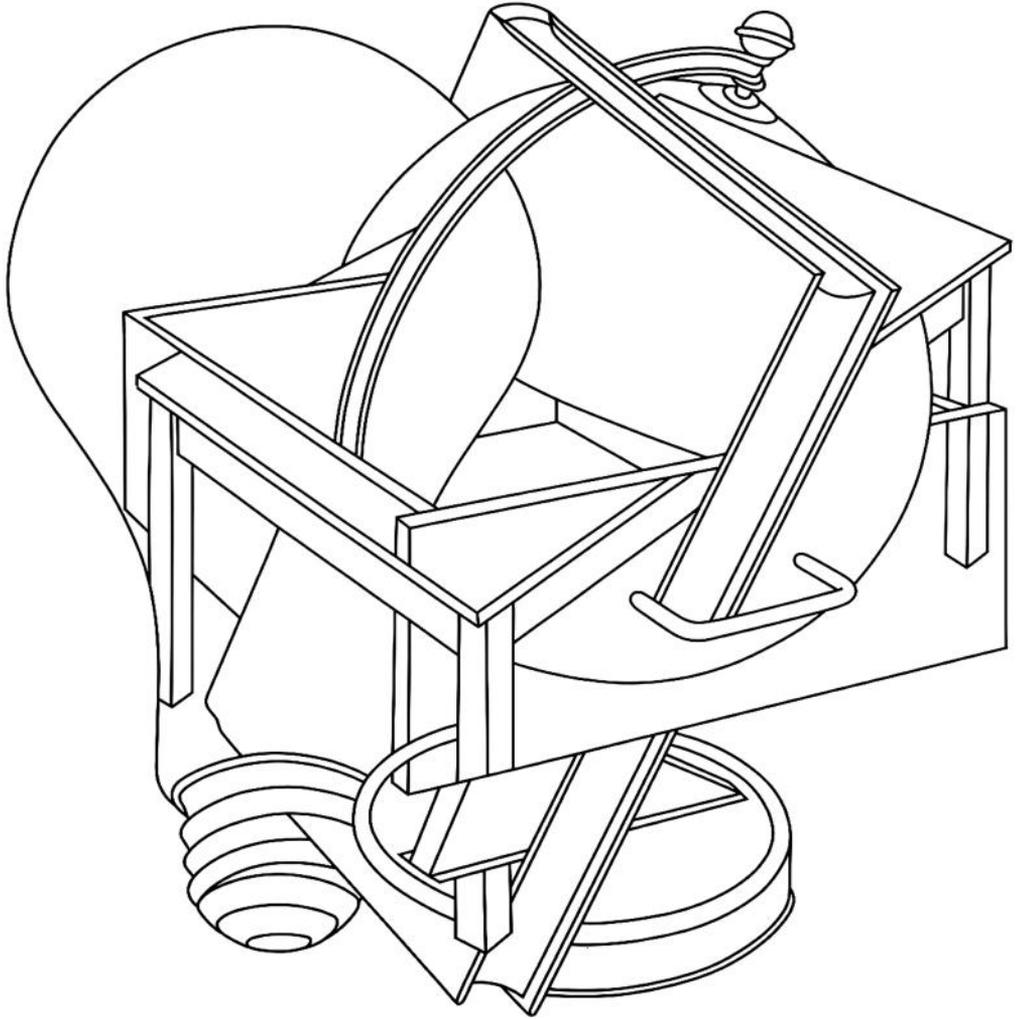
4.5 →

Conceptual works from the mid-1960s onwards – and the interviews carried out with their creators – certainly give the impression that artists, as opposed to literary scholars, view Joyce as a socially and even politically committed writer. He inspired such artwork. Ultimately, the choice and canonicity of these Conceptual works also betrays a more recent emphasis,⁶⁷ albeit reflecting concerns of the 1960s. Whether committed work can rightfully be linked to Joyce in every case is doubtful. The topical Irish political developments have inspired some (foreigners in the main) to establish at times tenuous links with the writer.

If the artistic strategies of the 1960s evolved out of disenchantment with canonical Modernism, as they did, Joyce appears again at the forefront of these new tendencies. Finding Joyce as a source of inspiration in three successive generations of artists at times of such change may strike one as odd.⁶⁸ Each generation would usually be expected to distance itself from the previous one. Joyce's multiplicities, his reputation as a "shape-shifter" and what has been established concerning dislocation can go some way towards explaining his staying power. As a tendency, it is possible to observe that – despite his increasingly secure position within the canon – artists were eventually to view Joyce less heroically. While he contributed to the exclusivity and high art elitism of the New York School generation's self-image, artists later came to value (in Joyce) openness and (political) inclusivity.

3.2 ←







with their noxens and they kem in so hatsjocky (only a
 Duppelgop; the donker by the toumeyold of the watarfalls
 Downbellow Kaempersally; listening in as hard as they could in
 the faces the wardorse moved; by courtesy of Mr Dauphlean
 caps was circling; as slow their ship; the winds aslight upborne
 And there they were too; when it was dark; whilst the wilde
 when they smacked the big keas of Tristan with U solde
 and capercallye. All the birds of the sea they trolled out rightbold
 The winging ones; Seahawk; seagull; cutlew and plover; kestrel
 Overhoved shall leescraining. That song sang searwans
 And had a howl that chaw; a roing to mid; e the money and mid
 Without ever witing the tail of a feather
 It had a head for and; ed us and bed hat and red list
 Four; upl; that; shie; you; om; speat
 And you think you're coos of the lake
 You're the rumber of the rooster ever; fopped out of a Noak's air
 Holoboto; mow; l; Amel
 Some Park
 And he hunting round; for the speckled; plover; round; by; Palace
 It sees that old; haw; and; looking; about; for; the; skin; in; the; bags
 And; O; Nereid;e; Am; l; y; wouldn't; be; a; pig; off; a; ark
 And; she; and; he; has; it; all; beside; the; milk
 Some; he; was; not; much; off; a; cake
 Three; times; of; the; water; lark

TRU-FORVE #