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ABSTRACT

Ever since Lessing’s 1776 “Laocoön: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting” aestheticians have been debating the essential differences between the temporal and the visual arts. *Pace* Lessing and his twentieth-century philosophical descendants, this essay explores the idea that the musical style cultivated by the American composer Elliott Carter in the years following World War II and the “action paintings” produced ca. 1947–53 by his compatriot Jackson Pollock in fact have quite a bit in common. The commonality, the essay argues, is not so much anything contained in the works themselves as something perceived – perhaps even viscerally felt – by persons who experience the paintings and the musical compositions. Although their musical and painterly efforts are in most ways as different as night and day, both Carter and Pollock managed in their postwar works – perhaps uniquely – to create the potent illusion of *multiple times that seem to pass at the same time*.

KEYWORDS

Elliott Carter, G. E. Lessing, Jackson Pollock, music, painting, time

Laocoön Again?:

Simultaneous “Present Moments” in the Music of Elliott Carter and the Paintings of Jackson Pollock

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One of the clearest articulations of why Elliott Carter counts as an arguably “great” composer comes, perhaps surprisingly, from a fellow composer whose music is as different from Carter’s as night is from day. Referring to the wide disparity in their approaches to such basic musical elements as rhythmic pulse and tonality, the ultra-conservative Ned Rorem in 1980 granted that, of all his contemporaries, the ultra-modernist Carter “seems the farthest pole from me,” yet Rorem was convinced that what both he and Carter strived for most was a “simplicity” of expression.¹ Six years earlier, alluding to a concept even more fundamental, Rorem had offered that what Carter’s music projects, above all, is “necessity.” By this he did not mean “the necessity of intellect” that purportedly governed so much of America’s university-based music in the postwar years but, rather, “the clean-cut necessity of a child’s fit.”

"Nothing great is ever left to chance," Rorem wrote, "and great Carter surely is in his ability to notate insanity with a precision that, after the fifth or twelfth hearing, renders the notes as logical as the placement of beasts in the Peaceable Kingdom." Colorfully and astutely, he continued: "Like never-resting souls tangled in hell proceed [Carter's] bowed counterpoints, and always in performance after performance they are *tangled in the same way*, like those viscous strands on a Pollock canvas that, actually still, seem to move through time."²

Noteworthy in this assessment is the likening of a typical Carter musical composition to a typical painting by Jackson Pollock. Rorem's mention in the same breath of Carter's music and painting of any sort warrants attention at least in part because, in the voluminous literature not just on Carter but by Carter himself, it is for all intents and purposes the only such comparison.³ Quite apart from its uniqueness, however, Rorem's comment is remarkable for what, to this writer, seems its aptness.

Evidence of links between Carter (1908–2012) and Pollock (1912–1956) is at best circumstantial: both artists were supported, beginning ca. 1946, by grants from the Guggenheim Foundation or by the private patronage of Peggy Guggenheim, and in the early 1950s the international statures of both of them were surreptitiously bolstered, it has lately been revealed, by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).⁴ Although in the 1940s Carter and Pollock were indeed for a while neighbors in New York's Greenwich Village, there is no evidence that suggests they ever crossed paths; one suspects that if they in fact did meet the social dynamics would have been stressful, for it seems unlikely that the well-bred, Harvard-educated Carter could have been comfortable for long in the presence of the hard-drinking and sometimes outrageously antisocial Pollock.⁵ Not even the arcs of their careers matched: as early as 1949 *Life* magazine famously suggested that Pollock was quite possibly America's "greatest living painter," but in the late 1940s Carter was just starting to become known, and it was not until more than two decades later, in articles that anticipated his seventieth birthday, that influential music critics such as Andrew Porter would openly declare that Carter "is now America's most famous living composer."⁶

Aside from their comparable status in the pantheon of American art, and their shared interest in the later writings of James Joyce, Pollock and Carter seem to have as little in common as do the art forms with which they worked.⁷ Yet I suspect I am not the first to notice similarities between the experience of viewing the so-called "action paintings" that

Pollock produced between 1947 and ca. 1953 and hearing various of the musical compositions that Carter, after tentative starts that date back to 1946, turned out regularly beginning in the 1950s.⁸ To my knowledge, these similarities of perceptual experience are addressed nowhere in the extensive art–history literature on postwar Abstract Expressionism or in the equally vast and now burgeoning musicological literature on the “progressive” American music of the postwar years. That the similarities go unaddressed, of course, hardly means that they are nonexistent; it means only that, for those who might share my sense of them, they are maddeningly ineffable. In any case, it seems to me – because it so powerfully *feels* to me – that Carter’s and Pollock’s efforts share rather more than the formalistic parallel implied in Rorem’s comparison.

Taking its cue from Rorem’s comment, this essay springs not from the opinion that the apparently chaotic strands of Carter’s music and Pollock’s paintings are tangled in ways that reveal themselves, upon contemplation and analysis, to be in fact sensible but, rather, from the simile that Rorem, almost as an afterthought, appended to his mention of Pollock’s paintings; indeed, it springs from Rorem’s casual observation that the “viscous strands on a Pollock canvas,” while “actually still,” nevertheless “seem to move through time.”

After rehearsing the primary literature that seems to prove logically enough that time–based music and space–based painting almost by definition are as incomparable as the proverbial apples and oranges, the essay summarizes first Carter’s time–oriented thinking in the context of standard concepts of musical time and then Pollock’s “action–painting” style in the context of temporality in the visual arts; it then explores in detail a pair of representative pieces (Carter’s 1951 *String Quartet No. 1* and Pollock’s 1952 *Number 32*) for the sake of demonstrating an aesthetic quality shared by those works and, indeed, by all of Carter’s and Pollock’s characteristic output; finally, the essay concludes with the suggestion that what the postwar works of Carter and Pollock have most in common – and what makes them stand apart from modernist art in general – is their manifestation of a very particular phenomenon that plays on perceptions of time.

Time, to recycle a phrase deeply embedded in English common law, in this essay is of the essence. But the time–based phenomenon under consideration here has little to do either with the mundane passage of clock–measured time or with philosophical concepts of temporality that mix a simple awareness of chronometric time with psychologically rich

perceptions of both a remembered past and an imagined future. The phenomenon – apparent as much in Pollock’s paintings as in Carter’s music – has to do, rather, with representations of the “passing” of time. Whether their medium be painterly or musical, or literary or cinematic, artists in general have long focused on just single moments in time or single stretches of passing time; in marked contrast, Carter and Pollock typically offer their audiences simultaneous images of a number of often quite different “times” passing.

• Laocoön Again? •

In a 1938 article titled “A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film,” the German-born film theorist Rudolf Arnheim observed that a visual art object such as a painting can have something in common with an aural art object such as music not on the fundamental level of sensory phenomena but only “at the level of the so-called expressive qualities.” Arnheim stressed that there cannot possibly be a formal connection between such stimuli as a color and a musical tone, but he granted that “a dark red wine,” for example, might indeed “have the same expression as the dark sound of a violoncello.”⁹ He never articulated what he meant by “the same expression,” apparently thinking that the phrase was self-explanatory; indeed, Arnheim seems to have felt – and rightly so – that it was common knowledge that specimens of two (or more) very different media could at least somehow stir a perceiver in more or less the same way.

That *this* perceiver is stirred in more or less the same way by Carter’s music and Pollock’s paintings has already been suggested. It is tempting to let it go at that, to simply confess that these two very different manifestations of postwar American art have similar effects on *my* personal response mechanism. But to claim only that Carter’s scores convey “the same expression” as do Pollock’s canvases would be tantamount to saying that a hearing of “La Marsaillaise” and a viewing of Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* similarly trigger feelings of defiant patriotism, or that exposures to the turbulent third movement of Debussy’s *La Mer* and Hokusai’s woodcut *The Wave* call to mind similar romantic ideas about the ocean’s potent force. No matter how eloquently they might be expressed, such statements would amount to bromides. And

they would have been recognized as such as early as 1766, when the German playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing published the famous essay that gave rise to Arnheim's title.

Inspired by accounts of the discovery, early in the sixteenth century, of an apparently ancient Roman statue depicting the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons being crushed to death by a gigantic python, Lessing's "Laocoön: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting" was a detailed philosophical articulation of an idea that likely had long been obvious to sensible persons. In essence, Lessing noted that there were fundamental differences between art forms that consisted of just a single image and those that consisted of images presented in succession. Art forms of the first sort were typified by representative painting and sculpture, media whose examples existed only as immobile physical objects and whose subject matter, by definition, involved just "frozen moments" of time; art forms of the second type were typified by various literary genres, but they might easily have included music and – had Lessing been gifted with foresight – cinema.

Lessing noted that the telling of the Laocoön story in Virgil's *Aeneid* involves a sequence of poetic "images" that progress from calm depictions of the priest's high status among the Trojans to conflict-filled depictions of his on-the-mark but ill-received warnings about "Greeks bearing gifts" to, finally, the horrific punishment wreaked upon him by the Troy-hating god Poseidon. The poetry's succession of images, Lessing observed, is very purposefully dramatic, little by little taking the reader from one emotional plane to another and eventually climaxing with a graphic description of Laocoön's snake-induced agonies; in marked contrast, the Laocoön statue depicts only the very instant in which the priest and his two innocent sons fall victim to the serpent. Acknowledging that some readers familiar with the Virgilian story might have expected a sculpted image somehow depictive of Laocoön's desperate struggles and screams, Lessing emphasized that the anonymous maker of the statue was quite right to fit the character with a facial expression of relative calm.

Sculpture and painting, and by implication architecture as well, Lessing wrote, are obviously spatial art forms in which the various elements exist *alongside* one another; in marked contrast, poetry and other types of literature, and by implication music, are just as obviously temporal art forms in which the elements come one *after* the other. Concepts that are in essence temporal tend not to fare well when "captured" by a static medium, Lessing suggested, and likewise for essentially static concepts

when “animated” by line after line of literary description. Referring to the subtitle of his essay, Lessing concluded that the wise artist is the one who, whatever his chosen medium, recognizes and respects his medium’s limits.

The idea of limitations on various art forms — supported by a logically formulated distinction between media whose elements are juxtaposed (in Lessing’s original German, *nebeneinander*) and those whose elements are presented in succession (*nacheinander*) — was well received at the dawn of the period now commonly known as The Enlightenment and The Age of Reason. But soon enough, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the conventions of design and content that since ca. 1750 had served as rational guidelines became targets at which a whole new generation of artists took aim. The most significant developments in music during the so-called Romantic era arguably had to do not so much with the expansion of harmonic language as with composers’ desire to invent, or explore, new musical structures; the shift in literature (spearheaded by Goethe and E.T.A. Hoffmann) was toward narratives that focused long and hard on what often were mere instants in a protagonist’s state of mind, and in painting the shift was toward images that even though fixed on canvas nevertheless attempted to “tell” fairly complex stories.

Whereas the goal of most Enlightenment-period artists was to demonstrate their skills by producing technically “perfect” works in more or less standard formats, the goal of most post-Enlightenment artists was to demonstrate their individuality at least in part by breaking free of the earlier formats. With creativity and self-expression rapidly taking precedence over mere craftsmanship, artists in the nineteenth century were driven ever more toward experimentation. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the roots of so-called Modernism — a movement distinguished as much by its efforts to depict both the positive and negative aspects of “modern” life as by its defiant rejection of all that seemed “old-fashioned” — were already firmly in place.

After surveying what had more or less recently transpired in various art forms, the American philosopher Irving Babbitt in 1910 penned a short book in which he suggested that perhaps things had gotten out of hand. Attempting to pick up where Lessing had left off, Babbitt’s *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* argued that much modern art — not just with its subject matter but also with its often grand synaesthetic efforts to straddle media boundaries — was guilty of terrible excess. The monograph is “erudite” but “disappointing,” writes Daniel

Albright in his 2000 *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts*; it is "weak on the philosophy and physiology of cross-sensory appeals, and, though ostensibly broad-minded, actually far fussier and more philistine than Lessing."¹⁰

Albright's book, which bases its title on the Laocoön image, does not mention the 1938 essay by Rudolf Arnheim. After dispensing with Babbitt, however, it gets quickly to Clement Greenberg's 1940 "Towards a Newer Laocoon," an essay that was first published in *Partisan Review* and which draws a much firmer line than did either Lessing's or Babbitt's between spatial and temporal art forms.

Even Lessing conceded that all physical objects in fact exist not only in space but also in time, because they continue to exist after their moment of creation and because "at any moment of their continuance [they] may assume a different appearance and stand in different relations" to the things around them.¹¹ Babbitt, for his part, granted that certain modernist multi-media works at least had the potential to combine temporal and spatial elements in meaningful ways.¹² But Greenberg adamantly insisted that temporal and spatial art forms in essence have nothing in common, and he warned that attempts to mix them would only dilute the strength of both types.

Not out of keeping with his growing reputation as a "purist" critic of modern art, Greenberg in 1940 celebrated the formalist music of the Enlightenment and fairly mourned its decline, during the Romantic era, into storytelling. In defense of nineteenth-century music, Greenberg offered that the shift toward descriptive and narrative forms resulted largely from a "flight from the undisciplined, bottomless sentimentality of the Romantics." Lest this spoil his fundamental thesis that music *per se* is invariably abstract, Greenberg noted that "music imitates painting as much as it does poetry when it becomes representational," and he added that a composer such as Debussy, in setting up the narrative framework of a work like *La Mer*, likely "used the program more as a pretext for experiment than as an end in itself." The spatial arts of painting and sculpture, Greenberg suggested, would do well to look to music's example, "not to ape its effects, but to borrow its principles as a 'pure' art, ... an art which is abstract because it is almost nothing else except sensuous."¹³

Midway through the introduction to his book Albright writes that all three of the thinkers he has dealt with thus far were vigilant "seekers after clarity and truth." "Lessing hated the pretense that time could be like

space, or space like time," he writes; "Babbitt mocked those who saw musical notes as colors, or took the concept of *taste* too literally; Greenberg sought solidity at the unyielding core of the medium itself."¹⁴ And then he notes that there was "another critic, still more firmly set against artistic lies, still more gifted at despising." This was Theodor Adorno, whose 1948 *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Albright claims, "is the finest of all modern sequels to *Laocoön*."¹⁵

In fact, Adorno never really addresses the limits of painting *per se*; his references to painting come mostly near the end of the book, and they serve primarily as a reinforcement for the final salvo in his sustained attack on the music of Stravinsky. Clearly a champion of Schoenberg and an arch-foe of Stravinsky, Adorno argues throughout his *Philosophy of Modern Music* that the former's work is true art because its materials consist of "absolute" and logically developing forms that not only demonstrate uncompromising intellectual integrity but also express genuine human feelings; the latter's work, Adorno argues, is mere kitsch because it consists only of stitched-together caricatures of human feeling. In its piecemeal quality, Stravinsky's music seeks to imitate Cubist painting; this ineffective attempt at "the development of a spatial perspective in music ... at its innermost core [represents] the abdication of music." But all painting "has its pathos in that which is," just as "all [genuine] music purports a becoming." And this organic sense of "becoming," Adorno claims, "is exactly what, in Stravinsky, music attempts to evade through the fiction of its mere existence."¹⁶

Albright notes that Adorno believed wholeheartedly that "music can best emphasize its temporality" – its essence of always "becoming," its constant "thrusting-forward" – by means of the syntactically purposeful use of dissonance. For Adorno, music that uses dissonance only for coloristic effect, or for shock value, was comparable to music that consists of chopped-up pieces of a pre-existing score put back together in "the wrong order." In either case, Albright writes, the result is "an affront to the audience and a crime against art," for in effect "it asks the eye to do the work of hearing."¹⁷

Provocatively titled "Laocoön Revisited," the introduction to Albright's book on twentieth-century artists' sometimes misguided yet often fruitful transgressions of formal "limits" goes on for fifteen more pages. But the section on Adorno ends with a neat summary of "the message of Adorno and Lessing and Greenberg [and Babbitt] alike," a

message that states adamantly that “the arts of time *must* remain pure, distinct from the arts of space.”¹⁸

• Time for Carter •

As a composer, Elliott Carter right from the start of his career surely regarded music as one of the “arts of time.” Yet it was not until the postwar years – simultaneous with his first experiments in what is now considered his trademark style, and by coincidence simultaneous with Pollock’s characteristic “action paintings” – that Carter began to think seriously about matters of temporality.

In a 1995 essay titled “Elliott Carter and the Modern Meaning of Time,” Jonathan W. Bernard mentions Carter’s “great epiphany about time,” after which Carter “began to work, somewhat tentatively at first and then with increasing confidence, with various ‘simultaneous streams of different things going on together’ as well as closely interleaved, mutually interruptive continuities.”¹⁹ Bernard’s essay is a lucid account not just of the various ways in which Carter dealt with time in all his mature music but also of how Carter’s ideas evolved and, especially, how they related to early influences from the fields of film, dance, and modernist literature. But the reference remains cryptic, for Bernard never explains when or where – or under what circumstances – this “great epiphany” took place.

As can be gleaned from his 1971 book-length interview with Allen Edwards and from his various writings that have specifically to do with time, Carter’s “great epiphany” was hardly so dramatic as what Saul experienced on the road to Damascus.²⁰ Nevertheless, as Carter told Edwards, his re-assessment of time vis-à-vis music seems to have happened rather quickly. Presumably referring to the period during which he half-heartedly worked on a rather conventional orchestral piece titled *Holiday Overture*, Carter said that the role of time in music

began to seem important to me around 1944, when I suddenly realized that, at least in my own education, people had always been consciously concerned only with this or that peculiar local rhythmic combination or sound-texture or novel harmony and had forgotten that the really interesting thing about music is the time of it – the way it goes along.²¹

In most traditional Western art music, the way music “goes along” involves one “thing” coming more or less straightforwardly after another. This is self-evident when the statement is applied to music featuring just a single line, but the idea of traditional Western music being, by and large, a real-time flow of successive ideas applies as well to more complexly textured music. Music’s components typically are quite deliberately put together; however numerous are the components at any given moment, they tend to be heard not individually but collectively. Just as in poetry letters form words that form phrases, so in music the tiniest elements eventually coalesce into comprehensible sonic units that occur, like the verbal images of poetry, in succession. No matter how rich these units might be in content or implication, and no matter how intricate might be the units’ inter-relationships, the result is most often just a single stream of musical information. In marked contrast to Western music’s standard model, the distinctive style that Elliott Carter began to develop ca. 1945, and which he continued to cultivate for more than sixty years, involves *multiple* streams of musical information.

Commentators still quibble over which of Carter’s postwar compositions was the seminal work. Some would say that the 1951 *String Quartet No. 1* represents only “the first steps” that Carter took “toward his mature style” that was not manifest until such works as the 1952 *Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello and Harpsichord*, the 1953–55 *Variations for Orchestra*, and the 1959 *String Quartet No. 2*;²² others would offer that the 1951 quartet was the first expression of Carter’s “authentic voice” and that what came immediately before amounted only to “bridge” works that allowed Carter to move in the direction of “his first maturity.”²³ Although they differ on many particulars, Carter specialists David Schiff and Jonathan W. Bernard agree that the first distinctly “Carteresque” composition was the 1948 *Sonata for Cello and Piano*.²⁴ Ned Rorem, whose comparison of Carter’s music to Jackson Pollock’s paintings was invoked at the start of this essay, wrote with confidence that “it was [in] 1946, with his Piano Sonata, that Elliott Carter is generally agreed to have turned into Elliott Carter.”²⁵

These debates notwithstanding, the postwar “epiphany” resulted in Carter reminding himself of a simple fact that composers had known for hundreds of years but which seemed to have been to an extent forgotten not just by him but by many other mid-twentieth-century musical modernists: more or less simultaneous with Adorno’s writing of his 1948 *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Carter remembered that music’s real essence had to do not with the relatively static content of moment-to-moment

pitch structures but with dynamic progression through time.²⁶ In keeping with tradition, Carter's earlier work – most of which he eventually destroyed – indeed unfolded linearly, with one idea following another; his innovative work beginning in 1946 likewise unfolded in linear fashion, but more and more it featured simultaneous trains of musical thought. The perceptible effect was hardly the same as that of traditional polyphony, in which the voices are distinct but nevertheless stem from the same motivic germs and "move" together toward the same teleological goals; in Carter's new kind of polyphony, the rhetorical voices were independent to the extreme and usually they "moved," each at its own pace, toward different goals.

Laying one completely independent voice over another was more efficiently accomplished with the 1948 cello-piano duet than with the 1946 piece for solo piano. Only with great difficulty could a lone pianist realize, for example, a slow-moving line with his left hand and at the same time realize a slightly faster-moving line with his right hand; in a duet for instruments that produced very different types of sounds, it was by comparison easier for each player simply to execute his own meticulously notated part without paying much heed to what his partner was doing, and it was likewise relatively easier for listeners to attend *at the same time* to a pair of lines that not only moved at different rates but which emanated from two different locations on the concert stage.

The idea of spatial stratification that reinforced temporal stratification worked well in the 1948 cello sonata, and it was an idea that Carter would employ strategically as his music's intervallic content (the *sub rosa* ingredient that in subtle ways lends consistency to audibly diverse materials) rapidly gained in complexity. Carter's 1951 *String Quartet No. 1* is a tight mesh of lines that often differ in pace but, like those in the piano sonata, do not differ all that much in actual sound. In contrast, the compositions that followed all reveal Carter's increasing interest in the timbral separation of different materials that flow, independently, through time. Timbral/spatial stratification is suggested in the titles alone of the 1952 *Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello and Harpsichord*, the 1961 *Double Concerto for Harpsichord and Piano*, the 1974 *Duo for Violin and Piano*, and the 1976 *A Symphony for Three Orchestras*, and the idea of sonic coloration as a means for helping listeners distinguish between simultaneous lines of very different music comes through at least in a listen to the 1953–55 *Variations for Orchestra* and the 1969 *Concerto for Orchestra*. But Carter's concern for the spatial "placement" of diverse sonic materials is perhaps most evident in his 1959 *String Quartet No. 2*, a

work that like the first quartet involves similar sounding instruments but which “casts” those four instruments (not just by means of tempos and vocabularies of intervals but also by means of characteristic musical gestures) in enormously different quasi-dramatic “roles” and which, furthermore, instructs the players to sit as far apart as possible.

To make a long story short, Carter’s musical breakthrough – which occurred almost exactly at the same time that Pollock began to explore what later would be called “action painting” – centered on the idea of music that offered to the listener not a single stream of information but, rather, simultaneous streams. Each stream of information in Carter’s mature music of course involved elements occurring – *nacheinander* – one after the other. But Carter’s presentation of contrasting musical ideas was not at all akin to the traditional painterly side-by-side presentation – *nebeneinander* – of contrasting pictorial elements. Hardly a juxtaposition of one thing next to or after another, Carter’s characteristic postwar music featured a superimposition – what Lessing might have described, had the thought crossed his mind, as *übereinander* – of one thing *over* another.

- Time for Pollock •

Responding to a question from Edwards about the degree to which “the sense of musical motion” contributed to coherence in a composition, Carter tellingly stated that “any technical or esthetic consideration of music really must *start* with the matter of time.” Music being so obviously one of the “arts of time,” one wonders why Carter felt it necessary to say this. The reason for the comment is that, in Carter’s view, most analysts in the postwar years in fact did not approach music this way; instead of regarding music as a series of “*transitive* steps” that lead from one moment to another, Carter said, they regarded musical materials as static.²⁷

The elements of a painting, once the paint has dried, of course are truly static. Yet even Lessing observed that paintings and other examples of spatial art at least in a sense have temporal qualities, not just because of their post-production “continuance” but also because the mere act of experiencing them in fact takes time.²⁸ Early writers on Cubism, whose practitioners often with a single image deliberately attempted to portray multiple views of a single object, noted that certain Cubist paintings seem

to “move in front of our eyes,” that whereas “formerly a picture took possession of space, now it reigns in time also,” that the idea of an artist’s “moving around an object to seize it from several successive appearances ... [in effect] reconstitutes [the object] in time.”²⁹ And later aestheticians such as Lionello Venturi held that *all* painting provokes a temporal experience; at first glance, Venturi suggested, viewers get no more than “a vague impression of a picture,” and only after time-consuming “analysis of all its components” do they “understand the meaning” not just of the various components but of “the picture as a whole.”³⁰

For Clement Greenberg, who during the late 1940s and early 1950s was one of Jackson Pollock’s most outspoken supporters, Venturi’s ideas amounted to utter nonsense,³¹ and Greenberg held that all paintings – abstract or otherwise – “stand or fall by their unity as taken in at a single glance.”³² But Greenberg, just because he so famously served as “curator, custodian, brass polisher, and repairman” of Pollock’s reputation, was not necessarily right about all this.³³ After all, Greenberg in the 1940s was a Lessing loyalist who staunchly held his high ground as a champion of modernist “aesthetic purism.” And the postwar years, evidenced as much in music as in the visual arts, fairly teemed with aesthetic impurities.

The essential impurity that flavored Pollock’s efforts was painterly performativity. For the staunchly formalistic Greenberg, how Pollock went about making his postwar masterpieces was never an issue; Greenberg’s concern was never with Pollock’s methods but only with his results, and he persistently described Pollock’s characteristic work not as examples of “action painting” but, rather, as representatives of what he called the “all-over,” or the “decentralized,” or – interesting in light of this discussion – the “polyphonic” picture.³⁴ How Pollock actually made his paintings, on the other hand, was crucial to rival critic Harold Rosenberg, who regarded most works of art not in terms of their formal aspects but in terms of their expressive potential. In the 1952 essay in which he coined the term “action painting,” Rosenberg wrote: “At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.”³⁵ Later in this essentially theoretical essay, Rosenberg suggested that “action painting” obviated not just representation but also such traditional artistic considerations as space, color, and composition. All this “had to go,” Rosenberg explained, “so that nothing would get in the way of the *act* of painting,” and therefore, he concluded, “the new American painting is *not* ‘pure’ art.”³⁶

Rosenberg argued that “action painting” is “inseparable from the biography of the artist,” and that “the painting itself” is in effect just “a ‘moment’ in the unadulterated mixture of [the artist’s] life.”³⁷ Vis-à-vis this theory, already in wide circulation at least five years before its 1952 articulation, Pollock was almost literally a poster boy. Along with a full-color shot of him standing (“moodily,” according to the caption) with arms folded in front of his eighteen-foot-long *Summertime: Number 9A*, the photographs by Martha Holmes that illustrate the four-page 1949 article in *Life* magazine include a pair of images showing Pollock at work, dribbling paint or sprinkling sand on a floor-mounted canvas and wearing on his face an expression of apparently intense concentration.³⁸ Intense concentration, coupled with its equivalent in physical energy, similarly radiates from the now iconic photographs that accompany an article by Robert Goodnough that appeared in 1951 in *Art News*.³⁹ Hans Namuth, who during a visit to Pollock’s Long Island studio in the summer of 1950 took the black-and-white photographs that illustrated Goodnough’s article and also shot color motion-picture footage that was used for a 1951 documentary film, recalled that

[Pollock’s] movements, slow at first, gradually became faster and more dance-like as he flung black, white, and rust colored paint onto the canvas. He completely forgot that ... I [was] there; he did not seem to hear the click of the camera shutter My photography session lasted as long as he kept painting, perhaps half an hour. In all that time, Pollock did not stop. How could one keep up this level of activity?⁴⁰

Journalistic accounts of this level of activity – a seemingly near-maniac level that sometimes involved paint violently thrown, splashed, and splattered – meshed with the occasional gossip-column report on Pollock’s misbehavior to create an image of Pollock as psychologically super-charged anti-hero. An early biography of Pollock bore the subtitle “Energy Made Visible”;⁴¹ in an article published less than six months before Pollock’s death, *Time* magazine dubbed him “Jack the Dripper.”⁴² And Pollock himself – with statements such as “I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them,”⁴³ and “painting is a state of being ... painting is self-discovery” – contributed plentifully to the popular perception that his characteristic works not only represented particular “moments” in the “unadulterated mixture” of his conflicted life but also in one way or another served as examples of personal catharsis.⁴⁴

The notion that the physical activity necessary for the making of an “action painting” was for Pollock somehow cathartic has been challenged over the decades by numerous critics,⁴⁵ and recent biographies suggest that Pollock regarded himself not at all as the wildly Dionysian expressionist celebrated by Rosenberg but, rather, as the quiet Apollonian formalist celebrated by Greenberg.⁴⁶ Recent biographies also suggest that Pollock’s quick move from representational painting into abstract painting – a transition that happened more or less simultaneous with Elliott Carter’s equally quick move from tonal music into free atonality – was the result not of a stroke of genius on the part of Pollock but of suggestions on the part of his wife, fellow painter Lee Krasner.⁴⁷

For the purposes of this essay, the development of or motivation for Pollock’s distinctive style, and the possible relationships between Pollock’s paintings and his psyche, are quite beside the point. To the point is the idea, suggested at the essay’s start, that the experience of viewing certain works in Pollock’s “action painting” style is similar to the experience of listening to certain passages in contemporaneous musical works by Carter.

The similarity of experience has to do with the perceiver’s taking in, during specific moments of clock-measured time, of multiple streams of information. In the case of Pollock, of course, the information is not aural but visual, and the streams do not actually “move” in time but, instead, only *seem* to do so. As with the brush strokes that go into the making of any painting, the drippings and pourings that resulted in a characteristic Pollock canvas were obviously executed, *nacheinander*, one after another, and as with any paint applied by brush strokes, the once-liquid paint that Pollock dripped or poured now exists statically in two-dimensional space, with one area of dried paint – *nebeneinander* – next to another. But so long as the results of Pollock’s actions are not too densely packed – so long as they do not meld, as do the myriad little dots of a “pointillistic” painting, into a single image – they arguably give the impression of existing not in two- but in three-dimensional space. And like the streams of Carter’s music, the multiple streams in Pollock’s paintings seem to flow – *übereinander* – one over the other.

• “Present-Tense Verbs” in Carter and Pollock •

Daniel Albright, in a commentary for a 2004 anthology of source readings that link ideas of modernism specifically with music, recalls that Lessing had been of the opinion that music in general “can depict action, but has no power to depict the thing that acts. Music is all verb, no noun.”⁴⁸ Elliott Carter seems never to have used this image, but — insisting as he did for most of his career that the essence of music was not its “objects” but the various “ways in which it goes along” — surely he would have appreciated Albright’s likening of music not to nouns but to verbs. Surely, too, he would have agreed that the “verbs” of music, like the “verbs” of cinema as described by the French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, because of the medium’s linear nature are only “in the present tense.”⁴⁹

It is to the “present tense” that Albright refers when, in his earlier book on modernism in general, he foreshadows the above-quoted remark in a comment having to do not with the obviously temporal arts of music or cinema but with the obviously spatial art of painting. Praising Lessing for the intelligence and resourcefulness with which he had defined the *Laocoön* question, Albright nevertheless notes that Lessing’s strictures have been loosened by certain twentieth-century works that blur the lines between space and time; he mentions the prose of Gertrude Stein, which instead of moving smoothly often seems quite static, but first he mentions “Jackson Pollock’s spatters and drips, a painting style that is all verb and no noun.”⁵⁰

Using the grammar-related terminology of Albright and Robbe-Grillet, let us say that Carter’s postwar musical compositions and Pollock’s postwar “action paintings” indeed contain the audio or visual equivalents not of “nouns” but of present-tense “verbs.” But all music, as we have seen, is in a way verb-like, and the painterly “verb” figures not only in Pollock’s canvases but also in the canvases of Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, and other mid-century Abstract Expressionist identified by Harold Rosenberg as “action painters.”⁵¹ Carter’s and Pollock’s work of course shares traits with the work of many others, yet it nonetheless — and in a singular way — stands apart. Except in the spatial/temporal margins of their work — at the edges of canvases, at the silence-framed beginnings and endings of musical movements — Pollock and Carter in their characteristic work offer their viewers/listeners a mixture of verb-like informational units. These units are in and of themselves worthy of deep-

focused attention, but they are presented, and very likely perceived, as wholes; indeed, the characteristic works of Pollock and Carter are *characterized* by the idea that their wholes comprise individually perceptible bits of data arranged one atop another.

Elliott Carter's *String Quartet No. 1* and Jackson Pollock's *Number 32* were created more or less at the same time, the quartet in the last months of 1950 and the early months of 1951 while the composer worked in quiet isolation in Tucson, Arizona, the painting in June 1950 while the artist worked at his Long Island studio. Both pieces are of relatively large scale, the quartet having a duration of approximately forty-five minutes, the painting measuring fifteen feet in width and almost nine feet in height. Important for the sake of this comparative description, both pieces are – in effect or literally – monochromatic; as mentioned above, the quartet's cello, viola, and two violins do not differ much at all in the timbres, or "sound colors," they produce, and the painting involves only black enamel applied to a white canvas.

Carter has stated that the "overlapping of speeds" is consistent throughout his first quartet, but the superimposition of different speeds is, to the listener, more evident in some sections than in others.⁵² One of the most aurally striking instances of temporal superimposition comes early in the piece's opening "Fantasia" movement, when all four instruments first come into play, after an accelerating solo for bowed cello has been punctuated only by occasional interjections from the pizzicato second violin. At the start of the quartet's measure 22, the hitherto frenetic cello settles into a steady pace-setting passage that consists of quarter notes played at the rate of 120 per minute. The parts for the other instruments are written in the same meter (4/4) and fitted with the same metronome mark (i.e., quarter note = 120), but each player is asked to generate a stream of music whose rate of flow has little to do with the cellist's. Against the cello part the second violin, still in pizzicato mode, loudly plucks chords or single pitches whose articulations occur slightly slower than those of the cello, whose durations each consist of a quarter note tied to a sixteenth note. A second and a half after this friction of tempo has been initiated, the first violin introduces pitches – bowed softly, in the high register – that each last the time of three and one third quarter notes. Soon afterwards the viola enters, with quarter-note triplets whose sharply iterated pitches move slightly faster than the cello's quarter notes. The viola now forcefully setting a pace quicker than what had been set by the cello, the cello pauses briefly before coming to the fore with a low-register series of sustained pitches whose durations (two and a half

quarter notes) are precisely three fourths of the durations of the first violin's pitches. Then the second violin, still loud and pizzicato, takes its cue from the viola and sets a newer pace as the other three instruments in turn finish their business and enter into yet another round of simultaneous but different rates of flow.⁵³

It is impossible to delineate, with similar precision, the simultaneous "rates of flow" depicted in Pollock's *Number 32*, and it would be preposterous to suggest that a viewer might notice the painting's elements in any particular order.⁵⁴ Experiencing the Carter quartet, a listener has no choice but to first hear the cello's smooth pace-setting melody in combination with the second violin's brittle punctuations, then the first violin's lyric long-note melody, then the viola's aggressive triplets, and so on. Experiencing the Pollock painting, the viewer's first-glance attention indeed might likely be drawn to one of the larger swaths of black enamel, but there are arguably at least a dozen of these, and none of them dominates, as do so many central images in traditional paintings, by means of size or color or of placement at some "golden mean" division of horizontal or vertical dimensions. Even when the eyes settle on a particular area of the canvas's more than 130 square feet, there is no distinguishing (unless one were to inspect the layers of paint with a magnifying glass) between foreground and background; focusing here or there, or perhaps everywhere, the viewer of course sees weighty shapes in combination with a web of tendrils and a mist of droplets, but it is as easy to see the shapes through a translucent web/mist as it is to see the web/mist through a solid lattice of weighty shapes.

The preceding paragraph deliberately used nouns to depict the various elements of the Pollock painting: the elements of the painting were represented as so many "objects," as swaths, shapes, tendrils, and droplets that in effect formed webs, mists, and lattices. In contrast, the paragraph about the Carter quartet deliberately used verbs. In addition to simply introducing material or entering into the ensemble, the various instruments were said to "set a pace" or "punctuate" or "rise to the fore," and a longer description of the music might have used a panoply of active verbs to suggest the temporal relationships between the various parts; a wordier account might have said, for example, that the cello "plods" while the second violin "lags behind," or that the viola "rushes" ahead of the cello while the first violin "floats" above the mix. But comparable verbs could just as appropriately be applied to the elements of the Pollock painting.

Like Carter's violin line, Pollock's droplets also seem to "float," in a time/space quite independent of everything else on the canvas. Pollock's tendrils seem to "swell" or "shrink," depending on what one might take to be their starting points, or perhaps they listlessly "dangle" or explosively "shoot" from some perceived fixed location, or perhaps they simply "meander" about the canvas. Pollock's larger shapes all "stand" wherever they are on the canvas, but some of them seem to "thrust" upwards to the right, or to "fall" precipitously to the left, or to "wobble" indecisively between movement in one direction or another.

In Carter's *String Quartet No. 1*, the mix of "present-tense verbs" — that is, the mix of different but simultaneous rates of flow — is carefully prescribed, and the listener takes in the whole of it during the music's real-time unfolding. In Pollock's *Number 32*, the mix of painterly "verbs" is in its entirety fixed on canvas, and the viewer takes in as much of it as he wants in whatever order, and at whatever pace, he chooses. As far as perception is concerned, however, the results of hearing the music and seeing the painting are, I would argue, very much the same: in their *übereinander* totality, the "verbs" of Pollock as much as of Carter form a rich palimpsest of differently paced activity, a collection of stimuli that at any one moment of actual observed time offers a multiplicity of images of perceived represented times.

• Conclusions •

In her 1953 *Feeling and Form*, a book to which Carter often referred in his various writings on musical time, the American philosopher Susanne K. Langer noted that whereas "virtual space is the primary illusion of all plastic art," "the primary illusion of music is the sonorous image of passage."⁵⁵ The word "passage" here is apt, but it is unfortunately identical to a term that in everyday English refers simply to an episode of music irrespective of its content or qualities.⁵⁶ Although her sentence deals with illusion and image, Langer here uses "passage" in a concrete way; holding to the first definitions offered by most dictionaries, she indeed means migration, the passing, or movement, through two- or three-dimensional space from one physical point to another. Making an analogy, and generalizing sweepingly about Western music, Langer suggests that music's many instants include at least some that strike

listeners as more significant than others, and that the “image of passage” has to do with how music seems to “move” from one of these significant instants – points not in space but in time – to another.

How an episode of music *seems* to move, or how a “gesture” of a painting *seems* to move, or how any stretch of real time *seems* to pass, is – as they say – relative. A cliché attributed to Albert Einstein, author of the famous theory of relativity, reminds us that “an hour sitting with a pretty girl on a park bench passes like a minute, but a minute sitting on a hot stove seems like an hour.”⁵⁷ But Einstein apparently did not address multiple and simultaneous passages of time; he did not speculate, apparently, on how time might seem to pass when sitting with a pretty girl not on a park bench but on a hot stove. Apropos of this essay’s topic, one wonders: How *does* time seem to pass when one is confronted with a number of different sonic or visual “images of passage”? How many different “images of passage” can the healthy mind deal with in a single period of clock-measured time? And – especially important when one considers the music of Elliott Carter and the paintings of Jackson Pollock – does the nature of these “images” have anything to do with how the total impression is processed?

Perhaps frustrated that their medium had for decades offered viewers one-at-a-time successions of “verbs” only “in the present tense,” some filmmakers in the 1960s explored the idea of multiple “present-tense verbs” displayed simultaneously. Their experiments with “split screen” techniques indeed depicted activities with diverse physical and psychological tempos, but almost invariably these depictions were arrayed, like the represented objects in a traditional painting, one alongside the other.⁵⁸ The filmmakers’ decision simply to juxtapose the imagery was doubtless wise, for to superimpose moving pictures, especially in a narrative film whose content involved not just actions but also the various entities acting and being acted upon, would have led to disaster; audiences perhaps might have been able to grasp ironies or cross-references suggested by the cinematic equivalent of a double exposure, but anything beyond that likely would have been quite incomprehensible.

The characteristic works of Carter and Pollock go far beyond mere “double” exposures. In the context of the artists’ entire output, the *String Quartet No. 1* and the *Number 32* described above rank as fairly simple works, in essence thin-textured “monochromatic” pieces whose overlays typically involve no more than three or four “streams of information” delivered to listeners/viewers at one time. But the later characteristic

compositions of Carter, and many of the earlier characteristic paintings of Pollock, are thick-textured “polychrome” works that offer to listeners/viewers “present-tense” data streams far too numerous to count.

Why, then, are the characteristic works of Carter and Pollock *not* incomprehensible? Indeed, why are these multi-layered efforts – the music with its “simultaneous streams of different things going on together,” the paintings with their overlapping drips and splatters and swirls and swipes – *not* generally perceived as just so much hodge-podge?

Writing favorably of Pollock and suggesting that abstract painting in the manner of Pollock “comes closest to music in the way it propels perception,” F. David Martin described Pollock’s large canvases as being not just “forceful, rhythmic, and seemingly spontaneous” but also “full of the chaos of chance.”⁵⁹ Pollock’s work, however, involves neither chaos nor chance. “I deny the accident,” Pollock famously told an interviewer, and he resented implications that his formally complex paintings resulted from cathartic acts of personal expression.⁶⁰ It may be true that some of Pollock’s paintings seem to convey the idea of chaos or chance, just as certain passages in Carter’s music perhaps seem to convey, as Ned Rorem put it, the notion of “insanity.” Yet these conveyances are deliberate, the result in Carter’s case of meticulous pre-compositional planning and in Pollock’s case of intensely disciplined improvisation; behind the “madness” of Carter’s music lies method aplenty, and in Pollock’s “action paintings” virtually nothing is the result of random actions.

Genuine randomness, of course, did figure importantly in the efforts of certain influential artists who, like Carter and Pollock, rose to fame in the early 1950s. But syntactic connections between the diverse components of “indeterminate” works – by, for example, composer John Cage or choreographer Merce Cunningham or painter Robert Rauschenberg – exist only in the minds of the works’ perceivers.⁶¹

In marked contrast, syntactic connections between the diverse components of Pollock’s paintings and Carter’s music were very much intended by the works’ makers. The projection of an image of chaos was seldom the point of Carter’s and Pollock’s characteristic work; indeed, most often the point was just the opposite. British music critic Antony Bye astutely summarized the entirety of Carter’s mature oeuvre in a 1994 article, writing that “despite the composed randomness of his foreground rhetoric, [Carter] *wants* his pieces to exhibit a fundamental unity.”⁶² The same could be said of Pollock, and it might also be said that the deepest

impact of Pollock's paintings and Carter's music owes less to the demonstrable fact of their fundamental unity than to the audience's perception of that unity.

Seldom is this perception conscious. But it is a perception nonetheless real, a perception felt almost viscerally as one listens or looks, in effect, *through* the various scrimms that contain Carter's and Pollock's "present-tense verbs." Confronted with any situation that involves multiple layers of activity, the perceiver can by definition focus primary attention on only one layer at a time, yet invariably the layer chosen for momentary special consideration is experienced in the context of all the others. Although in any such situation the ears/eyes flit from this to that, the brain constantly takes in the whole of it, and concentration on one bit of information is always modified/influenced by an awareness of all the other bits. But only in a situation in which the various elements are wholly compatible — as is the case with Carter's music and Pollock's paintings — is a single impression made by an aural/optical Gestalt.

In any of their characteristic works, the various streams of Carter's music and Pollock's canvases do form a single Gestalt, not simply a "form" or "shape" as might be suggested by a literal translation of the German word⁶³ but, rather, in the sense used by psychologists, a "configuration or pattern of elements *so unified as a whole* that its properties cannot be derived from a simple summation of its parts."⁶⁴ Indeed, it was doubtless his observation that the diverse elements of Carter's music are tightly unified that prompted Ned Rorem to state that what Carter's music projects, above all, is "necessity," and one suspects that it was an awareness of painterly "necessity" that caused Rorem to include, in his celebration of Carter, the casual mention of Pollock. And perhaps Rorem also noticed that the work of Carter and Pollock share, in addition to unity and/or "necessity," the phenomenon that has been the subject of this essay.

Regardless of how it might have been applied, all the pigment on any exhibited canvas remains dried and static; regardless of their rhythms and note values, all the sounds that constitute any piece of music occupy a finite span of time that can be measured by a clock. In the works of Jackson Pollock and Elliott Carter, the existence of simultaneous "present moments," or of *multiple times* that *seem to pass at the same time*, is thus only an illusion. But it is a powerful and palpable illusion, one that succeeds again and again, even for audience members familiar with the works at hand and somewhat knowledgeable — as this writer claims to be

— about their machinations. Realized as effectively in Pollock’s paintings as in Carter’s music, the image of simultaneous “present moments” remains one of the twentieth century’s most intriguing and most enduringly potent artistic coups.

• Notes •

¹ Ned Rorem, “Setting the Tone,” *Christopher Street* magazine, 1980. In *Setting the Tone: Essays and a Diary* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1983), 93.

² Rorem, “Our Music Now,” *The New Republic*, 1974. In *Settling the Score: Essays on Music* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 281–82. Emphases original.

Four years later Rorem rephrased the thought, but his changes involve only the sentence that refers to the painting from ca. 1833 by Quaker preacher Edward Hicks: “Carter’s glory dwells in the knack for inscribing productive tantrums with such accuracy that after the third or the nineteenth hearing the notes fall as logically as the arrangement of animals in *The Peaceable Kingdom*.” Ned Rorem, “Messiaen and Carter on Their Birthdays,” *Tempo* (New Series), no. 127 (December 1978), 23.

³ In the annals of journalism there may well be comparisons of Carter’s music to visual art. In the rather vast scholarly literature on Carter that is now easily accessible by means of on-line searches — and in the collections of Carter’s own thoughts that include Allen Edwards’s *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds: A Conversation with Elliott Carter* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), *The Writings of Elliott Carter*, edited by Else Stone and Kurt Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), and *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937–1995*, edited by Jonathan W. Bernard (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997) — there are many comparisons between Carter’s music and both film and modernist literature, but virtually no comparisons between his music and painting. In an autobiographical section of *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds*, Carter recalls that as a high school student he was excited by the avant-garde paintings of David Burluk, El Lissitzky, and Kasimir Malevitch (42). Near the end of their *Elliott Carter: A Centennial Portrait in Letters and Documents* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2008), Felix Meyer and Anne C. Shreffler note that the “impulse” for Carter’s 2007 *Sound Fields* for string orchestra “came from ‘color field’ painting as practiced by Helen Frankenthaler”; “color-field painting,” they explain, was “commonly seen as a less overtly subjective, ‘cooler’ alternative to the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock” (344). Early in the first edition of his *The Music of Elliott Carter* (London: Eulenburg, 1983), David Schiff writes: “Musical time creates a counterpoint between measured time and illusionistic time, just as a painting creates a counterpoint between the flat pattern of paint on a canvas and the illusion of depth. In Carter’s music, as in [Hans] Hofmann’s or [Jackson] Pollock’s paintings, the conflict between these basic types of perception is no longer resolved by a traditional hierarchical formula of meter or perspective” (24); in the 1998 second edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), this allusion is omitted.

⁴ For details on how the CIA covertly but quite successfully promoted both Carter and Pollock as “genuine” American artists, see chapter 14 (“Music and Truth, *ma non troppo*”) and chapter 16

(“Yanqui Doodles”) of Frances Stonor Saunders’s *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999). For more on the CIA’s involvement with modernist art, see Ian Wellens, *Music on the Frontline: Nicholas Nabokov’s Struggle against Communism and Middlebrow Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), and Mark Carroll, *Music and Ideology in Cold War Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵ Carter was just four years older than Pollock. Born in 1908 and productive until shortly before his death, Carter since his college days maintained — as reported in countless newspaper interviews — a sophisticated but behaviorally modest lifestyle. Born in 1912 and killed in a 1956 automobile crash, Pollock lived a life of alcohol-fueled bohemian excess; his personality is unflatteringly described in Jeffrey Potter’s *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: Pushcart Press, 1987), and his downfall is vividly depicted in the 2000 theatrical film directed by Ed Harris and titled simply *Pollock*.

⁶ Andrew Porter, “Mutual Ordering,” *The New Yorker*, 3 February 1974. Reprinted in *A Musical Season: A Critic from Abroad in America* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 140.

⁷ In his own writings and in the book-length interview with Allen Edwards, Carter often cites Joyce as an important influence on his mature thinking. Ellen G. Landau, in her 1989 *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Harry N. Abrams), notes that Pollock was familiar not only with Joyce’s 1922 *Ulysses* and 1939 *Finnegan’s Wake* but also with Joseph Campbell’s and Henry Morton Robinson’s 1944 *A Skeleton Key to Finnegan’s Wake*; Landau (172–74) notes as well that Pollock, while making his “action paintings,” sometimes listened to the 1929 recording of Joyce reading aloud the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” section (Book I, chapter 8) of the at that time still very much in-progress *Finnegan’s Wake*.

⁸ For an overview of Pollock’s “action paintings,” see Leonhard Emmerling, *Jackson Pollock: 1912–1956* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003). For an account of Carter’s most characteristic compositions, see chapters 2 and 3 (“Three Seminal Works (1945–51)” and “Maturity (1950–80)”) of James Wierzbicki, *Elliott Carter* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

⁹ Rudolf Arnheim, “A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film,” in *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 203. The *Film as Art* volume contains Arnheim’s own translation of the essay “Nuovo Laocoonte” that was first published in the Italian journal *Bianco e nero* in August 1938.

¹⁰ Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.

¹¹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Roberts Brothers, 1873), 91–92.

¹² The three most famous multi-media works of Irving Babbitt’s day — Alexander Scriabin’s symphonic *Prometheus: A Poem of Fire* (1909), Wassily Kandinsky’s play *Der gelbe Klang* (1909), and Arnold Schoenberg’s opera *Die glückliche Hand* (1910–13), all of which called for the carefully timed projection of specific colors — were premiered after Babbitt published his book. But talk of these works, and others like them, would have been very much in the air during the twentieth century’s first decade.

¹³ Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina, second edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 65–66.

¹⁴ Albright, 14. Emphasis original.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* The Adorno book is titled *Philosophy of Modern Music* in its 1980 English translation by Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Seabury Press); Albright uses the original German title, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, and translates it literally as *Philosophy of the New Music*.

¹⁶ Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 191.

¹⁷ Albright, 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

¹⁹ Jonathan W. Bernard, “Elliott Carter and the Modern Meaning of Time,” *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (1995), 655–56. The quotation is from Edwards, *Flawed Words and Stubborn Sounds: A Conversation with Elliott Carter*, 101.

²⁰ Carter’s pronouncements on the nature of time include a lecture titled “Sound and Silence in Time: A Contemporary Approach to the Elements of Music” that was delivered on 13 February 1957 at the University of California, Los Angeles (reproduced in Meyer/Shreffler, 130–37); a 1965 “Time Lecture” that Carter delivered at Harvard (reproduced in Bernard, 313–18); a brief 1965 lecture-based essay titled “The Time Dimension in Music” (reproduced in Stone, 243–47, and in Bernard, 224–28); and a

1976 book chapter titled “Music and the Time Screen” (originally published in *Current Thought in Musicology*, ed. John W. Grubbs (Austin: University of Texas Press), reproduced in Stone, 343–65, and in Bernard, 262–80).

²¹ Carter, in Edwards, 90.

²² John Rockwell, “Elliott Carter: American Intellectual Composers & the ‘Ideal Public,’” in *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 38.

²³ Michael Cherlin, “Crossing the Millennium with Elliott Carter,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 103.

²⁴ David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, first edition (London: Eulenberg, 1983), 76; and Jonathan W. Bernard, “The Evolution of Elliott Carter’s Rhythmic Practice,” *Perspectives of New Music* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1988), 165.

²⁵ Ned Rorem, “Messiaen and Carter on Their Birthdays,” *Tempo* (New Series), no. 127 (December 1978), 23.

²⁶ Carter was familiar with the *Philosophy of Modern Music* and Adorno’s work in general, but apparently only after the start of the 1960s. There is no evidence to suggest that ca. 1945 Carter, who lived in New York, and Adorno, who at that time was living in Los Angeles, were even aware of each other’s existence.

²⁷ Carter, in Edwards, 90. Emphases original.

²⁸ For a deep study on the “continuance” of works of visual art over long periods of time that was relatively contemporaneous with the emergence of Carter’s and Pollock’s characteristic styles, see André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday, 1953). Malraux’s *Les Voix du Silence* was first published in France in 1951; it was a revised version of his 1949 *La Psychologie de l’Art*, a compilation of his *Le Musée imaginaire* (1947), *La Création artistique* (1948), and *La Monnaie de l’absolu* (1949).

²⁹ The quotations are from writings ca. 1911 and 1912 by the French critics Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, translated — respectively — by John Golding (in his 1968 *Cubism, A History and an Analysis 1907–1914*), Edward Fry (in his 1966 *Cubism*), and Linda Henderson (in her 1971 “A New Facet of Cubism: The Fourth-Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry Reinterpreted” in *Art Quarterly*) and reproduced in Jeoraldan McClain, “Time in the Visual Arts: Lessing and Modern Criticism,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44, no. 1 (Autumn 1985), 48–49.

³⁰ Kenji Kajiya, “Deferred Instantaneity: Clement Greenberg’s Time Problem,” *The Japanese Journal of American Studies* 16 (2005), 208. The quoted paraphrases derive from Venturi’s *Painting and Painters: How to Look at a Picture: From Giotto to Chagall* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1945).

³¹ Greenberg’s opinions on Venturi’s book were expressed in a brief review — titled “On Looking at Pictures” — published in *The Nation* on 8 September 1945; the review is reprinted in volume two of Greenberg’s *Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 34–35. An illuminating discussion of Greenberg’s objections to Venturi’s “wandering of the eye” theory is offered by Lut Pil in his “Clement Greenberg on Narrative in Painting” chapter in *Time, Narrative and the Fixed Image*, ed. Mireille Ribière and Jan Baetens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001).

³² Greenberg, “‘American-Type’ Painting,” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 226. The article first appeared in *Partisan Review* in the spring of 1955.

³³ Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word* (New York: Bantam, 1975), 56.

³⁴ Greenberg, “The Crisis of the Easel Picture,” in *Art and Culture*, 155. The article first appeared in *Partisan Review* in April 1948.

³⁵ Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” in *The Tradition of the New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 25. The article first appeared in *Art News* in December 1952.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26–27. Emphases added.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸ “Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” *Life* magazine, 8 August 1949, 42–45. Along with *Summertime: Number 9A*, the paintings shown in full color are *Number 12A: Yellow, Gray, Black* and *Number Seventeen*; all three paintings date from 1948.

³⁹ Robert Goodnough, “Pollock Paints a Picture,” *Art News*, May 1951: 38–41, 60–61. The photographer who accompanied Goodnough on his interview with Pollock was Rudy Burckhardt; the photographer whose pictures in fact illustrated Goodnough’s article was Hans Namuth. For a detailed account of Burckhardt’s session with Pollock, see Carter Ratcliff, *The Fate of a Gesture: Jackson Pollock and Postwar American Art* (New York: Westview Press, 1998), 7–10.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Pepe Karmel, “Pollock at Work: The Films and Photographs of Hans Namuth,” in *Jackson Pollock: Key Interviews, Articles and Reviews*, ed. Pepe Karmel and Kirk Varnedoe (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 132. The motion-picture footage was used in *Jackson Pollock 51*, a ten-minute film directed by Namuth and Paul Falkenberg, with music by Morton Feldman, that had its first showing at New York’s Museum of Modern Art on 14 June 1951.

⁴¹ See B.F. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955).

⁴² “Art: The Wild Ones,” *Time* magazine, 20 February 1956, 72.

⁴³ Jackson Pollock, spoken in *Jackson Pollock 51*.

⁴⁴ Jackson Pollock, quoted in Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1957), 82. The interview took place in June 1956, two months before Pollock’s death.

⁴⁵ One of the earliest challenges was launched by Thomas B. Hess in “Pollock: The Art of Myth,” *Art News*, January 1964: 39–40, 62–65. Hess’s argument, which suggested that the popular idea of Pollock’s “action paintings” as catharsis stemmed largely from the Namuth photographs and their accompanying texts, was importantly sustained by Barbara Rose in “Hans Namuth’s Photographs and the Jackson Pollock Myth — Part One: Media Impact and the Failure of Criticism,” *Arts Magazine*, March 1979: 112–19. More recently, the argument that Namuth’s photographs led to the “catharsis myth” has been developed by Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock in the “Jackson Pollock, Painting and the Myth of Photography” chapter (165–76) of their 1997 *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press); by Pepe Karmel in the “Pollock at Work” chapter (87–137) of his and Kirk Varnedoe’s 1999 *Jackson Pollock: Key Interviews, Articles and Reviews*; and by Kent Minton in his 2001 “Digitally Enhanced Evidence: MoMA’s Reconfiguration of Namuth’s Pollock,” *Visual Resources* 17: 127–45.

⁴⁶ Along with the already mentioned 2003 *Jackson Pollock: 1912–1956* by Leonhard Emmerling, recent biographies include Deborah Solomon’s *Jackson Pollock: A Biography* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001); Ellen G. Landau’s *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Abrams, 2010); and Evelyn Toynton’s *Jackson Pollock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). One of the most thorough treatments of Pollock and his circumstances is Steven Naifeh’s and Gregory White Smith’s *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989).

⁴⁷ The control that Lee Krasner exercised over Pollock’s career is thoroughly described and interpreted by Sue Wragg in “Lee Krasner: Mrs. Jackson Pollock,” in *Difference in View: Women and Modernism*, ed. Gabriele Griffin (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 111–20, and by Anna C. Chave in “Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript,” in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 329–47. Chave’s article first appeared in *Res* 24 (Autumn 1993).

⁴⁸ Daniel Albright, *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 65. The quotation comes from the introduction to the chapter titled “Testing the Boundaries between the Visual Arts and Music.”

⁴⁹ Robbe-Grillet made the statement in the context of his famously cryptic screenplay for Alain Resnais’s 1961 film *Last Year at Marienbad*. Whereas written literature “has a whole gamut of grammatical tenses that makes it possible to narrate events in relation to each other,” he wrote, the cinema — because of the linear nature of its medium — in effect offers verbs only “in the present tense.” “Alain Robbe-Grillet vous parle de *L’Année dernière à Marienbad*,” trans. Richard Howard, booklet for the 2009 Criterion Collection DVD edition of *Last Year at Marienbad* (CC1815D), 23. Robbe-Grillet’s article first appeared in the Paris magazine *Réalités* in May 1961; the translation by Howard first appeared as the introduction to the English-language version of the screenplay published by Grove Press (London) in 1962.

⁵⁰ Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 10.

⁵¹ The painterly “verb” figures as well in the postwar work of Francis Bacon (1909–1992), an Irish-British painter who was Carter’s and Pollock’s contemporary. Bacon’s for the most part representational images have little in common with Pollock’s abstractions, yet they similarly teem with “gestures” that Gilles Deleuze, in his monograph on Bacon, described as “forces.” See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). As *Francis Bacon — Logique de la sensation*, Deleuze’s book was first published by Éditions de la différence (Paris) in 1981. Also see the “Forces” chapter (pp. 111–30) of Ronald Bogue’s *Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

⁵² Elliott Carter, “Shop Talk by an American Composer,” *The Musical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1960), 193.

⁵³ The just-described passage is from Elliott Carter, *String Quartet No. 1* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1955), 4–5. Mm. 22–29 of the score — with annotations indicating that the cello moves at the rate of 120 pulses per minute, the pizzicato second violin at the rate of 96 pulses per minute, the high-register first violin at the rate of 36 pulses per minute, and the viola at the rate of 180 pulses per minute — are reproduced in Jonathan Bernard, “The Evolution of Elliott Carter’s Rhythmic Practice,” 175 (by the same method of calculation, the cello’s foreground melody — not included in Bernard’s excerpt — moves at the rate of 72 pulses per minute and new pace set by the second violin moves at the rate of 90 pulses per minute). Without annotations, the same excerpt appears in David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, second edition, 58.

⁵⁴ Images of Pollock’s *Number 32* — both in its finished form and as an in-progress canvas photographed by both Hans Namuth and Rudy Burckhardt — are abundantly available on the Internet.

⁵⁵ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 72 and 113.

⁵⁶ In his brief definitions of “passage” for both the 1980 *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and the dictionary’s current on-line version, Michael Tilmouth writes that the term refers to “part of a composition generally characterized by some particular treatment or technique.” Standard dictionaries tend not to qualify the term in regards to music; after first defining “passage” as a physical movement (or means thereof) from one place to another, they offer, for example, that a “passage” is simply “a portion of a book, composition, etc.” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*), “a phrase or short section of a musical composition” (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*), “a segment of a written work or musical composition” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*), “a particular section of a literary or musical work” (*The Oxford Paperback Dictionary: Australian Edition*), or “a section of a piece of music” (*The Australian Oxford Dictionary*).

⁵⁷ The quip is likely apocryphal, but a quoted variant of it appears in Ashley Montagu, “Conversations with Einstein,” *Science Digest*, July 1985, 75.

⁵⁸ The “split screen” technique was introduced at the 1964 World’s Fair in New York and popularized at the 1967 Universal Exhibition (Expo ’67) in Montreal. Among the earliest feature films to employ the technique were John Frankenheimer’s 1966 *Grand Prix*, Richard Fleischer’s 1968 *The Boston Strangler*, and Norman Jewison’s 1968 *The Thomas Crown Affair*.

⁵⁹ F. David Martin, “The Persistent Presence of Abstract Painting,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 1969), 27.

⁶⁰ Pollock’s often-quoted denial of “the accident” was spoken to and recorded by radio journalist William Wright in the summer of 1950 but never broadcast. The text is reproduced in, among other places, *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics*, ed. Clifford Ross (New York: Abrahams, 1990), 144, and Karmel Varndoe, *Jackson Pollock: Key Interviews, Articles and Reviews*, 22–23; the interview is dramatically featured in the 2000 film *Pollock*.

⁶¹ For an exploration of how listeners strive to “make sense” of indeterminate music, see Judy Lochhead, “Hearing Chaos,” *American Music* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 210–46.

⁶² Antony Bye, “Carter’s ‘Classic’ Modernism,” *Tempo* new series, no. 189 (June 1994), 3. Emphasis added.

⁶³ *The New Cassell’s German Dictionary*, s.v. “Gestalt” (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1971), 195.

⁶⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, fourth edition, s.v. “Gestalt” (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 358. Emphasis added.

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