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The Market Paintings of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer: *Reflexy-Const*, Recognition and the Pursuit of the "Real"

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Pieter Aertsen's (1508-1575) *The Market Woman with Vegetable Stall* (fig. 1) features a gleaming, pulsing heap of vegetables that appears to spill out into the viewer's space.[1] The seller opens her arms and invites us to behold nature's bounty: we cannot help but think of the taste, texture and smell in addition to the obvious visual appeal. Every grape reflects light individually, sharing the space with leafy, papery cabbages, various warped and twisting root vegetables, and chalky apricots whose matte rendering recalls fuzzy, dusty skin. Bumpy, gnarled surfaces nestle up against their glossy counterparts, and crimson flirts freely with emerald, mauve and orange. The vibrant, frolicking colours, light and textures meld into a veritable symphony that stops just short of engaging the viewer's every sense; the only obstacle is the surface of the canvas.

How does Aertsen manage to verge so closely upon the "real?" What was it about this work and others like it that made them so familiar to contemporary viewers and their daily lived experiences? And finally, what greater purpose did this "realism" serve?[2] In order to begin trying to answer these questions, I will consider the market and kitchen paintings of Aertsen and his nephew and student, Joachim Beuckelaer (1533-1574). The paintings in question feature in their foregrounds great heaps of meat, fish and produce that enjoy a "push-pull" dynamic with their respective backgrounds, simultaneously overshadowing and drawing attention to the religious or secular scenes that appear behind them. I will analyze the

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[1]   Elizabeth A. Honig, *Painting & the Market in Early Modern Antwerp.* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 33. Honig describes a similar effect in her discussion of *The Meat Stall.*

[2]   A discussion with EM Kavaler on December 6, 2018 helped me to formulate these key questions.

Fig. 1: Pieter Aertsen, *Market Woman with Vegetable Stall*, 1567
Oil on wood, 11 cm x 110 cm, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

techniques that Aertsen and Beuckelaer utilize to provide a degree of verisimilitude to these images, despite the obvious impediment - their construction out of paint on a two-dimensional surface. I will also consider contemporary art theoretical writings to understand viewers' reactions to these works at the time. Finally, by placing them within the larger context of the economic and spiritual life of Antwerp, I hope to understand how this work allowed people to forge connections between these paintings and their lives and, ultimately, the implications of this relationship between representation and reality.

What existing conditions could have prepared sixteenth-century viewers to understand the novel subject matter employed by Aertsen and Beuckelaer? At the time, it was without precedent in the visual arts.[3] Nevertheless, the creation of these market and kitchen scenes was clearly a profitable endeavour.[4] Margaret Sullivan traces the origins of many of these comestible images back to classical rhetoric: ancient writers regularly employed them in satire to moralizing effect, and the aim of satire itself is, fittingly, "to tell the truth with a smile".[5] For example, Horace's Satire 2.2 employs jocular comestible imagery in order to comment on subjects such as appropriate behaviour, overindulgence, and the importance of maintaining one's reputation.[6] This subject matter also found some of its sources in "European folk imagery," the significance of which will be discussed below.[7]

One way to understand Aertsen and Beuckelaer's ability to portray objects in a "realistic" manner lies in the art theoretical writings of Karel van Mander. His writings provide a vocabulary with which to understand their brand of "realism" and the viewer's response to it. Chapter Seven of Van Mander's major publication, the *Schilderboek*, deals with the concept of *reflexy-const* - simply put, the interplay of light and surface.[8] Sven Dupré relates this to perspective, as both were methods used by artists to create "the illusion of space".[9] What roots this concept so firmly in reality is the

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[3]   Margaret A. Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen and Market Scenes: Audience and Innovation in Northern Art," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 2 (1999): 236.

[4]   Junius, quoted in Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen," 240.

[5]   Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen," 237; Horace, quoted in Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen," 245.

[6]   Nicola Anne. Hudson, "Food: a Suitable Subject for Roman Verse Satire," *Leicester Research Archive,* (Dissertation: University of Leicester, 1991) p.56-57

[7]   Ethan Matt Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall Divers Aspects of the Market Piece," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40, no. 1 (1989): 71.

[8]   Sven Dupré, "The Historiography of Perspective and "reflexy-const" in Netherlandish Art," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 61 (2011): 37.

[9]   Dupré, "The Historiography of Perspective," 35.

fact that Van Mander considers it primarily in relation to nature. He demonstrates an interest in reflections of objects on water, the changing colours of the sky at different times of the day, and rainbows, recognizing the sun as being "the source of all reflected light".[10] One way of looking at Van Mander's conception of nature and its relation to art comes from an anecdote written by him about Pieter Bruegel the Elder's journey through the Alps. The story goes as follows: "On his travels he drew many views from life so that it is said that when he was in the Alps he swallowed all those mountains and rocks which, upon returning home, he spat out again [regurgitated] onto canvas and panels, so faithfully was he able, in this respect and others, to follow Nature".[11] Though this anecdote involves a different artist than those who are the focus of this study, it is easy to discern Van Mander's understanding of nature and its relationship with art more broadly. An artist's skill in producing realistic work, in Van Mander's view, lies not only in his ability to imitate it convincingly, but also in the synthesis of his own essence (here analogized rather viscerally with his digestive processes) with that of what he sees in front of him.[12] For the purposes of this study, the latter category is here understood as that of nature; an object independent of the artist. Representation, on the other hand, is understood as being a product of the artist's observation, imitation of, and interaction with the object.[13]

Van Mander systematizes a vocabulary with which to deal with various aspects of light and reflection, including terms like "mirroring (*spiegeling*), reflection (*reflectie*), polish (*glans*), re-reflection (*weershijn*) and reverberation (*reverberatie*)".[14] Van Mander's understanding of the relationship between painting and mirrors (described by Dupré as that which both "imitates and ensues from the process of reflection") conflates representation, reflection and reality.[15] The sheer variety of terms utilized by Van Mander provides three key concepts for our purposes. The first (and most obvious) is the importance afforded to *reflexy-const* in his understanding of contemporary painting. Secondly, his awareness of the concept's natural sources allows us to forge a strong link between its use in representation and its roots in reality. Finally, terms like *glans* and

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10   Dupré, "The Historiography of Perspective," 52; Ibid, 51.
11   Karel Van Mander quoted in Denis Ribouillault, "Regurgitating Nature: On a Celebrated Anecdote by Karel Van Mander about Pieter Bruegel the Elder," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 1 (2016), 3.
12   Ribouillault, "Regurgitating Nature," 8-9.
13   Morais Inês, *Aesthetic Realism* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 2-4. This section helped me to conceptualize this distinction more fully.
14   Ibid, 51.
15   Ibid, 53. Note: Dupré develops this idea in relation to Jan van Eyck.

reverberatie demonstrate a firmly synaesthetic understanding of its effects. Aertsen's treatment of the myriad vegetables and fruit in *Market Woman with Vegetable Stall* provides an excellent example of the visual application of *reflexy-const*.

Elizabeth Honig provides an additional application of the term when she notes that "color and reflection, as Van Mander presents them, are not only the grounds of all visibility but also essential means of defining the interrelation of objects within a painting".[16] *Reflexy-const* has several functions: it does not solely have to do with the "realistic" portrayal of light on surface, but also the relationships between varied representations.[17] Honig points to a related concept, *houding,* which Willem Goeree describes as making "everything from the nearest point to the most central, and from there to the most distant, stand in its own position, without seeming nearer or further, lighter or darker, than its distance or closeness permits; placing each thing, without confusion, separate and well apart from the objects which are next to and around it".[18] *Houding* and *reflexy-const* both relate to the ways in which light functions against the surfaces of various objects, reinforcing the "realism" of their representations by employing the "united strength of their vibrant reflections and colors".[19]

At this point, it is helpful to briefly turn to the relationship between *reflexy-const* and alchemy, demonstrating its connection to nature. Van Mander claims that the convincing representation of surfaces relies on "intimate knowledge and sustained investigation into the reflective properties of different materials".[20] From the fifteenth century onward, an increased desire to comprehend the material world gripped Europe, and this inclination towards deciphering the "real" world can be observed in Joachim Beuckelaer's series *The Four Elements*, where he assigns the elements of water, air, fire, and earth a series of foodstuffs.[21] *Water* (fig. 2) is interpreted in relation to its inhabitants, the fish of the sea, while *Air* (fig. 3) is represented through birds that can soar through it. In both cases, the animals have been removed from their environments and available for

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16   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 32. Honig also discusses this in relation to Van Eyck.

17   The aforementioned discussion with EM Kavaler helped me to understand the significance of this concept.

18   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 244. In Honig's notes to pages 31-33, she calls attention to *houding* as a related concept. Willem Goeree quoted Taylor, Paul. "The Concept of Houding in Dutch Art Theory." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 211.

19   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 33.

20   Dupré, "The Historiography of Perspective," 55.

21   Craig Harbison, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in Its Historical Context* (New York, NY: H.N. Abrams, 1995), 26.

purchase on the market. *Fire* (fig. 4) with its large slabs of meat proves a little murkier, but the background kitchen emphasizes its preparation (ostensibly over a roaring fire) as opposed to its sale. Vegetables and fruit, the bounty of the earth, account for the last element, *Earth* (fig. 5). In each painting, the deft surface treatment and interplay of colour, texture and light provide examples of *reflexy-const* in action. Honig argues that these "elemental markets" represent one of the ways "through which humanity and its relation to the natural world had long been rationalized and understood."[22]

The alluring way in which Aertsen depicts food for sale, entreating the viewer "to grasp, to possess" is what Honig calls "visual seduction".[23] In an increasingly mercantile society, the desire for material possession was one that would have resonated with contemporary viewers. However, contemporary playwrights and rhetoricians also speak to the deceptive role of merchants, siphoning off any advantages that came with what were considered increasingly clandestine operations within the market.[24] These accounts illustrate a situation in which the merchant was no longer a fair-minded, trusted provider of supplies (as he had been considered from the Middle Ages onwards, thanks to ideas such as the "policy of provision"[25]). During the sixteenth century, the term "merchant" came to describe a growing subset of the population within Antwerp's increasingly commercial society. The steady weaving of mercantile activity into the fabric of Antwerpian society is reflected in contemporary paintings. Although unthinkable in the fifteenth century, by Aertsen and Beuckelaer's time it was increasingly commonplace for citizens to be both a merchant and part of a craft guild.[26] The anxiety over deceptive merchants, Honig argues, is transferable to the role of the artist.[27] After all, the ability to deceive was considered a hallmark of artistic ability at the time.[28] Van Mander's description of Aertsen's talent for illusion corresponds to this belief:

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22   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 147. Note: Honig uses this term to describe the work of Sebastiaan Vrancx, though she also alludes to Beuckelaer's *Four Elements* series in relation to it. Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 148.
23   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 31.
24   Ibid, 9, 12.
25   Ibid, 6. Note: the "policy of provision" was a charitable expectation of the merchant left over from the Middle Ages, based on the idea that "if by chance he should acquire extra funds, they were of course to be given to the deserving poor.'
26   Ibid, 10.
27   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 13.
28   Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 80.

Everything seemed alive, the green with the ripe,
One would almost think to grab it with his hands
Some platters resting in the dark,
Where a lustre is reflected,
As one may see by a favorable flame
In the works of an art lover at Amsterdam.
In sum, in art he was a genius,
At pleasantly rendering reflections,
Indeed, a great adroit and craft deceiver
Of people's eyes, and an intelligent liar, as well:
For one thinks he sees all kinds of things,
But it's only paint, which he knew how to mix,
So that the flat seems round, and the level raised,
The dumb to speak and the dead to live.[29]

The ability to produce convincingly "real" pictures certainly stems in large part from Aertsen's ability to mix paint and his mastery of *reflexy-const*. However, these are not the only techniques that aid in this endeavour. The sheer size of Aertsen and Beuckelaer's market and kitchen works brings to life the commodities that are featured in the foreground, endowing them with a presence and level of detail that is not unlike what one might expect to find in a real marketplace. The elevated perspective of these paintings, too, successfully creates the illusion that the viewer is standing in front of a market stall or a kitchen table and surveying an array of available goods.[30] In Van Mander's *Dutch and Flemish Painters*, he emphasizes that some of Beuckelaer's paintings contain "life size"

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[29]   Karel Van Mander quoted in Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 80.
[30]   Ingrid Ciulisová, "Paintings of the Market for the Market," *Dutch Crossing* 27, no. 1 (2003): 75. Note: Ciulisová takes note of the elevated perspective as seen in Beuckelaer's *Seller of Fruits and Vegetables* (though she does contest its attribution).

Fig. 2: Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Four Elements: Water*, 1569
Oil on canvas, 158.1 cm x 214.9 cm, The National Gallery, UK

Fig. 3: Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Four Elements: Air*, 1570
Oil on canvas, 158 cm x 216 cm, The National Gallery, UK

Fig. 4: Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Four Elements: Fire*, 1570
Oil on canvas, 158.2 cm x 215.4 cm, The National Gallery, UK

Fig. 5: Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Four Elements: Earth*, 1569
Oil on canvas, 158 cm x 215.4 cm, The National Gallery, UK

figures.[31] The boundary of the canvas' surface becomes increasingly permeable with devices that enable the viewer's interactions with the comestibles and figures come into play. In works such as Aertsen's *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery* (fig. 6), both the effect of the display of goods and the eye contact established between the viewer, the egg merchant, and the seated man behind the group of figures on the left help to create a sense of an enterable space; the former, by pushing the goods into the viewer's space, and the latter by connecting the viewer visually with the figures within the work. Victor Stoichita is of the opinion that the foreground facilitates access to the picture space, acting as a "springboard" for the viewer.[32] The viewer gets the impression that they have stumbled into a situation in which they are expected to browse what they see in front of them. Aertsen successfully creates the illusion that this is a moment of interruption and interaction, wherein the viewer seems to startle the merchants seated in the foreground.

Having discussed the role of foreground in detail, I will now focus on the backgrounds of the works in question. The question of whether the religious scene in the background is a continuation of the contemporary moment in the foreground or a distinct space unto itself is an ambiguous one. On one hand, the desaturated colours and relatively limited value scale that characterize the background scene contribute to a sense of atmospheric perspective, implying that the events unfolding in the background are spatially distant but still taking place in the same moment as those of the foreground. On the other hand, the hazy, atmospheric effect that Aertsen employs could also imply a temporal or even spiritual distance, a "divine time" that is positioned in contrast to the "human time" of the contemporary Antwerpian marketplace.[33] Indeed, morality and the market were intertwined in the sixteenth century in a way that would seem foreign to today's viewer.[34] The concept of morality was developed by theologians and applied in the marketplace through notions such as the "policy of

31   Van Mander, Karel. *Dutch and Flemish painters. Translation from the Schilderboeck and introd. by Constant van de Wall.* (New York: McFarlane, Warde, McFarlane, 1936), 174.

32   Stoichiță, Victor Ieronim. *The self-aware image: an insight into early modern meta-painting.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4. Note: Stoichita is referring to Aertsen's Christ in the House of Martha and Mary.

33   Kavaler, "Introduction" (lecture, FAH 1463: Realisms, Sidney Smith Hall, Toronto, September 20, 2018). My understanding of the juxtaposition of "human time" against "divine time" in this particular work stems from EM Kavaler's discussion of sculpture in Early Modern Antwerp.

34   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 73.

Fig. 6: Pieter Aertsen, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, 1557-58
Oil on canvas, 122 cm x 180 cm, National Museum, Sweden

provision".[35] The idea that market dealings should be moral and forthright was reinforced by the fact that the marketplace was often the physical site in which justice was carried out (usually inside or in front of the town hall).[36] Certain authors consider the religious scenes in the backgrounds of the market works as a condemnation of overly materialistic interests and greed that may have become increasingly worrisome in light of the commercial boom of the sixteenth century.[37]

Another way to consider the inverted still-life is in relation to the concept of the picture within a picture. Stoichita writes that "on the one hand, the scene is depicted as a separate entity, framed, "pictorialized;" and on the other, it would seem to be a continuation of the foreground".[38] The dynamic tension between what is "real" and what is not is discernible in works like Aertsen's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (fig. 7), *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery*, and *The Meat Stall* (fig. 8). On a conceptual level, this is in keeping with the idea that the spiritual could not necessarily be separated from the quotidian in any simple, clean-cut way.[39] Honig writes in regard to *The Meat Stall* that "the historiated landscapes seen through the shed's frame are visually comprehended as relatively discrete images that are more among than behind the represented objects".[40] The juxtaposition of what essentially constitutes two different levels of reality, the quotidian positioned against the divine, has clearly been applied in a number of Aertsen and Beuckelaer's paintings. The everyday experience of shopping at the market is represented in contrast to an elevated, spiritual state; in aesthetic terms, this is parallel to the juxtaposition of "realism" against "non-realism," the former of which functions in contrast to the latter.[41] Furthermore, the religious tableau is nestled amongst the various meats and fish, almost as if it is a commodity for sale. This points to the interrelationship of morality and the market, as well as calling attention to the role of painting itself as a commodity, an idea to which Aertsen certainly subscribed.[42] The painting, according to

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[35] Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 73.
[36] Ibid, 71.
[37] Moxey, Keith P. F. *Pieter Aertsen, Joachim Beuckelaer, and the rise of secular painting in the context of the Reformation*. (New York: Garland Pub, 1977), 32.
[38] Stoichiță, *The self-aware image*, 5. Note: Stoichita is referring to Aertsen's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* when he writes this.
[39] Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 81.
[40] Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 30.
[41] Kavaler, "Introduction" (lecture, FAH 1463: Realisms, Sidney Smith Hall, Toronto, September 20, 2018).
[42] Ibid, 39.

Fig. 7: Pieter Aertsen, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1552
Oil on Panel, 61 cm x 101 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Fig. 8: Pieter Aertsen, *The Meat Stall*, 1551
 oil on panel, 115.6 cm x 168.9 cm, North Carolina Museum of Art, USA

Honig, acts as "the ultimate commodity that would mediate the market itself".[43] These market and kitchen scenes, then, do not just represent or "reflect" reality; they can be understood as active agents that mediate between reality and sixteenth-century viewers.

The role of "viewer" and that of "customer" in these works are conflated to the point that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. What the contemporary viewer saw in the paintings was also what they were accustomed to seeing every day at the market.[44] It was not just the available merchandise that was familiar to them, but also the way in which it was displayed. In a sense, the elevated perspective contributes to this effect, but there is also much to be said about the composition of the "still-life" elements themselves. The various vegetables, fruit and meat all seem to exist in independent spaces - not as a result of excessive distance between them but of how each ware is presented to the viewer. Every object is visible from its most attractive angle in a way that "appropriates" the manner a vendor would organize their stall.[45] Many of Aertsen's works, such as *Market Woman with Vegetable Stall* and *The Meat Stall*, and numerous others by Beuckelaer, such as *The Fish Market* (fig. 9) and *The Well-Stocked Kitchen* (fig. 10), are excellent examples of this "additive" composition.[46]

The Well-Stocked Kitchen contains many of the elements that are hallmarks of Beuckelaer's oeuvre: figures who make eye contact with the viewer, Italianate architecture and, of course, a rich assortment of foodstuffs in the foreground.[47] That this is a kitchen rather than a market does little to change the overall effect of the work. Instead of a potential customer, however, the viewer takes on the role of a guest in the home. Indeed, fruit, vegetables and various meats (as well as birds and rabbits that still have all of their feathers and fur) are laid out in a way that recalls the arrangement of a market stall. Products from various food-seller's guilds are all painted alongside one another.

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43   Kavaler, "Introduction" (lecture, FAH 1463: Realisms, Sidney Smith Hall, Toronto, September 20, 2018) 12.

44   Ibid, 67.

45   Ibid, 29.

46   Ibid, 34. Note: I am borrowing Honig's term.

47   Moxey, *Pieter Aertsen, Joachim Beuckelaer*, 41- 44. Note: Moxey discusses the influence of "High Renaissance" architecture and Sebastiano Serlio's Fourth Book of Architecture at length in his study, referring to Aertsen in this particular section. It is conceivable that this treatise would have had a similar influence on Beuckelaer.

Fig. 9: Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Fish Market*, 1568 oil on Baltic oak, 128.6 cm x 174.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA

Fig. 10: Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Well-Stocked Kitchen*, 1566 oil on panel, 171 cm x 250 cm, Rijksmuseum, Netherlands

Curiously, some of the market pictures also tend toward this mixing of wares; Ethan Matt Kavaler writes that *The Meat Stall* "includes many products within the purview of competing guilds".[48] Another instance of dissonance within these market paintings is the apparent seasonal disparity of the fruit and vegetables on display. All these elements contribute to the idea that these market scenes have been fabricated by the artist. Sullivan notes that "the offerings in Aertsen's kitchen and market scenes are "not representative of the full range of produce available to and consumed by townspeople in Aertsen's time," and that "the artist included fruits and vegetables that do not ripen together. All of these factors indicate that the paintings are artistic constructs".[49] James Snyder, too, states that "the fruits and vegetables presented in Aertsen's paintings are peasant foods, but they are a feast for the eyes. These market scenes are not slices of everyday life, but plausible inventions".[50] This idea is reminiscent of verism, in which the expectations of the viewer are satisfied by an image that could plausibly be one of the real thing. Though the market scenes as a whole was not painted from life, it is represented realistically, in such a way that it *could* have been painted from life.[51] However, this is only the case when it comes to the overall composition. In terms of individual objects, their "realism" is not so much linked to verism as it is to their real-life referents. Aertsen and Beuckelaer both claimed their products to be painted *ad vivum*, or from life.[52] Van Mander confirms this in an anecdote about a certain patron of Beuckelaer's, who prevented Beuckelaer from being able to "earn his bread and cheese" by continuously bringing him "some object to be included in the painting".[53] The fact that each of these elements is said to have been brought and placed before him convincingly grounds their representations in reality; indeed, if the artist's progress was being hindered by the introduction of new objects, then the representations of these objects must certainly have been created from life.

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[48]   Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 70.

[49]   Reindert Falkenburg quoted in Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen," 250; Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen," 250.

[50]   Snyder, James, Larry Silver, and Henry Luttikhuizen. *Northern Renaissance art: painting, sculpture, the graphic arts from 1350 to 1575*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), 480.

[51]   Kavaler, "Introduction" (lecture, FAH 1463: Realisms, Sidney Smith Hall, Toronto, September 20, 2018). The concept of "Verism" was introduced during the second FAH 1463 seminar meeting and elaborated on during the fifth, which took place on October 11th and was entitled "The Everyday."

[52]   Kavaler, "The Everyday" (lecture, FAH 1463: Realisms, Sidney Smith Hall, Toronto, October 11, 2018).

[53]   Van Mander, *Dutch and Flemish painters*, 174.

Beuckelaer's *The Fish Market* provides an important intersection of devices explored in this study, including the quality of appearing to be assembled out of many individual parts, the acknowledgement of the viewer by a figure in the work, life-size constituents and a display table that is tilted at an unnatural incline in order to show off the fish at their best angles (which would certainly have been in the interest of a real fishmonger!). Beuckelaer is employing *reflexy-const* to wonderful effect: the glistening red of the meat in between strata of thick, iridescent fatty tissue, the play of light on the scales of various fish and the sharp lash of black that traces their tails and gills act jointly to bring a heightened "realism" to the pictured elements. This painting, like others of its kind, is the site of a network of connotations and interpretations that would have been recognizable to its contemporary viewers. Its connection to the contemporary market can be found in the fishing industry flourishing in Flanders and Brabant at the time. Fishing was a lucrative business from the Middle Ages through to the late sixteenth century, and fishing centers were established along the coast of the Netherlands. It has been posited that some of Beuckelaer's many paintings of fish markets might have been commissioned by fishmongers.[54] In this painting, as in many others by Beuckelaer and Aertsen, there is an underlying insinuation of sexual desire: the merchant casts a suggestive glance at the woman on the right, implying that the two may share a relationship that is more than commercial.[55] Whether this is the desire for material wealth or for a sexual relationship, the two are brought together and framed within a real-world setting that any contemporary would have recognized as originating from their lived experience.[56]

Fish also played an important role in society in a more spiritual sense. Kavaler discusses the role of comestibles in rituals that, too, would have been recognizable to any contemporary viewer of these paintings.[57] He writes that "the contrast between Carnival meats and Lenten fish was one of the commonplaces of European folk imagery".[58] Carnival was an occasion for feasting, celebrating and "indulgence of the flesh,"

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[54]   Cavalli-Björkman, Görel. "A Fishmarket by Joachim Beuckelaer." *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 55, no. 3 (1986): 117.

[55]   Note: it is difficult to find a source which does not at least touch on the sexual insinuations present in Aertsen and Beuckelaer's market and kitchen scenes. See Ciulisová, Honig, Kavaler, Sullivan and others.

[56]   Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen," 261.

[57]   Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 71. Note: though Kavaler is referring to a different painting, the same concept can be applied to others of its kind. Kavaler writes in regard to this imagery that Aertsen would have "found a comprehending and appreciative audience."

[58]   Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 71.

emblematized by meats, while Lent was a time for "ascetic fare" such as fish.[59] The two foods act as representatives for much weightier concepts of behaviour and decorum during occasions that marked annual performances of the spiritual.[60] Another example of comestible imagery standing in for moral principles can be found in Aertsen's *Market Woman with Vegetable Stall*. On the left side of the painting, sitting unassumingly on a wooden plate, is a single fish. Its stark contrast to the plethora of vegetables and fruit that surround and threaten to engulf it provides us with another instance of Lenten restraint juxtaposed with objects of desire.

The hedonistic festivities surrounding Carnival and the self-control that was typical of Lent would have been familiar to just about everyone in Antwerpian society.[61] The larger implications of these rituals and the manner in which contemporaries had to conduct oneself are elucidated by Kavaler: "the abundant meat confronts us with our susceptibility to physical pleasure, whereas the fish, which lie beneath the Holy Family, remind us of higher obligations".[62] Antwerp in the sixteenth century represents the perfect commercial center in which Aertsen could employ his marketplace imagery, drawing attention to a moral conundrum that any consumer in an increasingly capitalist society would have faced.[63] Whether this is a moralizing endeavour, a sensual indulgence or simply an observation on Aertsen's part, the market was a relevant frame through which Aertsen and his viewers could consider these questions.[64] In all of its iterations (whether materialistic, sexual, or gluttonous), desire could be negotiated through the familiar imagery of the market and kitchen paintings.

Ultimately, the life-like quality of Aertsen and Beuckelaer's market and kitchen paintings would have permitted contemporary viewers to cognize their reality through representation. Though it is Aertsen who is singled out in contemporary literature (most notably that of Van Mander) as possessing this skill, both artists forged this connection through their mastery of deception, analogous to the atmosphere that permeated the real-life market during the sixteenth century and embodied within the realm of the visual arts in the concept of *reflexy-const*.[65] Sullivan writes that "Aertsen's low-life paintings encouraged viewers to reflect on their own situation, their

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59   Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 71.
60   This is my personal understanding of the concept of "ritual" in sixteenth-century Antwerp; my focus on its importance stems from the aforementioned discussion with EM Kavaler.
61   Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 71. See footnote 61.
62   Ibid, 76.
63   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 4.
64   Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 76.
65   Honig, *Painting & the Market*, 13; Karel Van Mander quoted in Kavaler, "Pieter Aertsen's Meat Stall," 80.

own problems and their own temptations - the craving for luxuries, the temptation of the sexual, the passion for money, and the ease with which spiritual values are corrupted in the drive to acquire more material possessions".[66] Desire in its many forms was interpreted by Aertsen and Beuckelaer through "realistic" market imagery that would have been a major aspect of the lives of their contemporary viewers, and was thus made comprehensible and interpretable through this frame. Most importantly, in a world where the material and the spiritual were inextricably tied, the "realism" employed in the works of both artists could serve as a point of contact between the viewer's day-to-day life and the exalted realm of the divine.

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[66]   Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen," 261.

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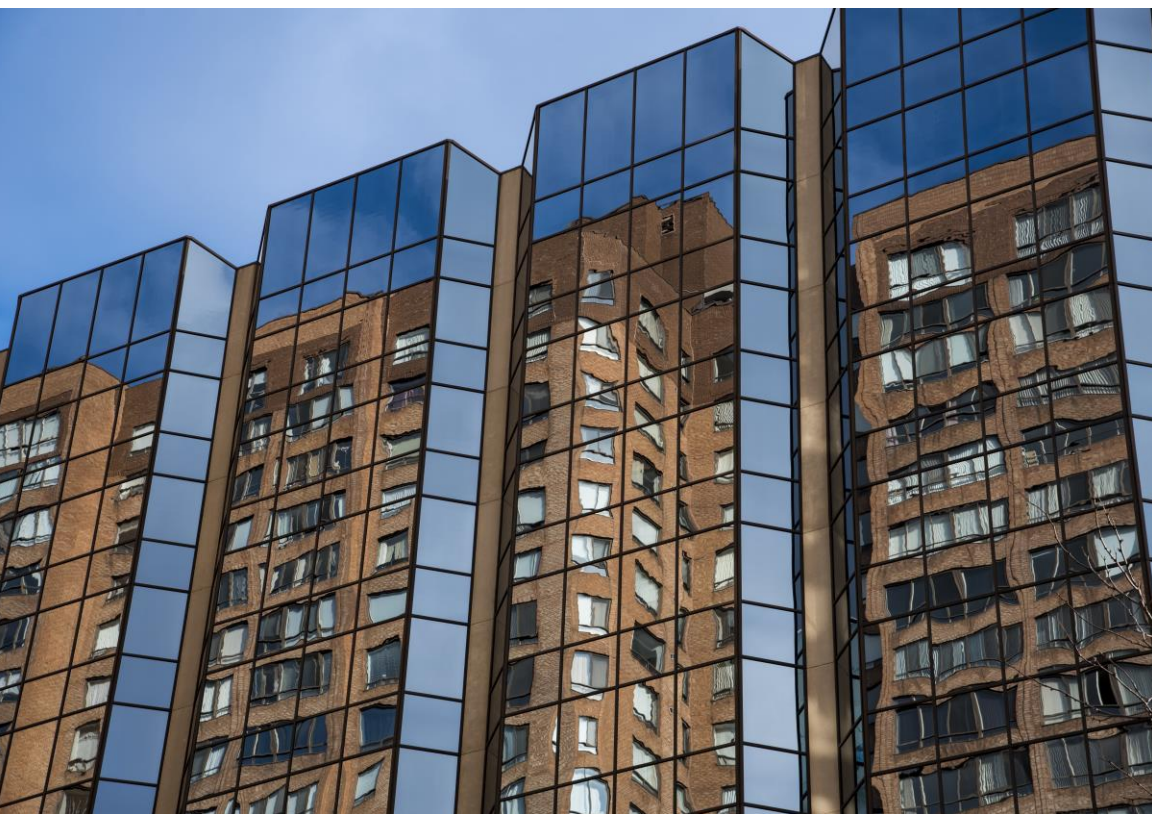
Photography by Mohammad Bayati

Martin Everald, *Encounters*, ongoing series,
polaroids, 3.5" x 4.2"

Examining the Impact of Flying Buttresses and Other Innovative Strategies in High Gothic Cathedral Design

Austin Ruddle

Establishing Clarity:
Addressing Flying Buttresses and Notre Dame de Paris

The integration and evolution of the flying buttress into the architecture of high gothic cathedrals was the defining paradigmatic entity that shaped structural organization, and lead to the establishment of the period's aesthetic typological identity. Innovative architectural elements such as these allowed the iconic structures of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to soar to staggering heights and establish significance within architecture's historical narrative. The advent of the flying buttress was a fundamental mechanism in early French gothic architecture which subsequently facilitated additional structural experimentation in French cathedral architecture, resulting in many expressive features of the High Gothic.

In order to properly understand the rich advancements of this period, it is necessary to first clarify a number of semantic and epistemological topics that will be addressed at length in this essay. Firstly, the language around the flying buttress itself is restrictive, as the English terminology does not divulge to the same degree of distinction as that of the French. The more detailed French expression of the architectural element is a composite of three features; the *contrefort* (buttress), *boutant* (flyer) and the *culée* (upright).[1] For the purposes of this essay the term *flying buttress* looks to encompass all three segments of this design component, however it is nonetheless important to enable the reader with an advanced description of the topic as it proves to be a most crucial factor in the greater discourse of high gothic design. It is also worth stating clearly that the references within this paper to the Romanesque primarily denote the consistent method of cathedral construction produced through the distinctive implementation of bays, prevalent in Normandy. The regional proximity of Romanesque architecture naturally influenced early Gothic architects who borrowed and innovated on the methods utilized therein. The term High Gothic hierarchically orders the distinct and inventive cohort of cathedrals at Bourges, Amiens, Chartres, Reims and Beauvais above the proliferated homogeneity found broadly within the "over-refined" architecture of the

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[1]   Stephen Murray," Notre-Dame of Paris and the Anticipation of Gothic." *The Art Bulletin* (College Art Association) 80, 2, (1998): 230.

Rayonnant.[2] Another topic necessary to address is that of the Cathedral Notre Dame de Paris and its antecedent relationship to High Gothic architecture. Though categorically excluded from the classification of High Gothic architecture, its fundamental importance to the development of the movement as well as its pioneering of the High Gothic's crucial techniques[3] more than qualify it to be a predominant discussion point in association with the broader topic of High Gothic and of the structural innovations that defined it. An important distinction in the case of this article is not that Notre Dame de Paris ought to be included within the ranks of High Gothic Cathedrals – as it would be out of place among its lofty peers – but rather the cathedral should be positioned as an ancestor or an experimental forerunner, which through its success made accessible several advanced characteristics iterated throughout the High Gothic physiognomy.

The Networking Innovation throughout High Gothic Cathedral Designs

> …if experience is to have maximum benefit, it must be rapidly communicated to other building sites. From our studies of prescientific, Gothic structures we have concluded that similar, if a bit slower, communication occurred as early as the 12th century. With the establishment of such a network of communication the empirical approach to structural design proved surprisingly effective.
>
> - William W. Clark and Robert Mark in
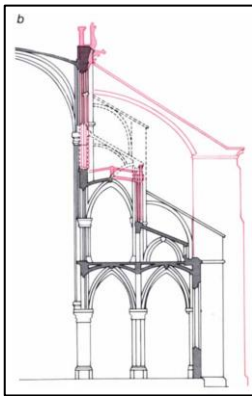> *Gothic Structural Experimentation*

The widespread introduction of the flying buttress throughout various projects is indicative of the expansive network of connectivity that ran throughout the patrons and craftsmen who designed, implemented, and built the cathedrals of the High Gothic. Unlike the structures of today that are planned with the aid of structural analyses and expensive computer software, the structures of the High Gothic were erected and constantly reworked as design challenges and failures became known. Robert Mark, a majorly cited source in the modern discourse of Gothic architecture states

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2   Christopher Wilson, *The Gothic Cathedral: The Architecture of the Great Church*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 14.

3   Jean Bony, *French Gothic Architecture of the 12th and 13th Centuries*, (CA: University of California Press, 1983), 180.

that these structures were created "themselves as models"[4], built at the fullness of possible scale so that they could stand as examples of current techniques and form. The revolutionary strategies employed at Notre Dame de Paris that brought such great distinction from its early Gothic and Romanesque predecessors were made possible only through the study and refinements of the practises engaged within their designs. The buttress system of Paris was comprehensively restructured in 1220 (and again later in the nineteenth century), creating further advancements in structural support as the original system is believed by archaeologists to be much simpler and considerably less effective.[5] These improvements include the utilization of much larger *boutants* that spanned both aisles (as seen in Figure 1), a distance of 11 meters,[6] to better support the towering walls of clerestory. Developments of this kind were necessary as the structures of the High Gothic soared ever higher, and with new heights came new challenges such as combatting wind velocity (which grows exponentially more severe the higher you build). This problem was encountered at Paris, and upon the later construction of Chartres and Bourges the architects were apparently aware of these weaknesses in the original design of Notre Dame and assembled their cathedrals accordingly.[7] The lessons learned from Notre Dame's design and redesign were paradigmatic to the development of the iconic aesthetic typology that emerged at the turn of the century.

Fig 1.
Diagram of the renovations to the existing buttress structure at Notre Dame.
Robert Mark and William W. Clark in *Gothic Structural Experimentation*

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[4]   Robert Mark and William W. Clark, "Gothic Structural Experimentation." *Scientific American* 251, no. 5 (1984): 176-84, doi:10.1038/scientificamerican1
[5]   Ibid., 179.
[6]   Maria A Nikolinakou, and Andrew J. Tallon, "New Research in Early Gothic Flying Buttresses." *Revue Européenne De Génie Civil 9*, (2005): 2351.
[7]   Mark and Clark. "Gothic Structural Experimentation," 176-184.

The Structural and Aesthetic Effect of the Flying Buttress on the Clerestory Level

As outlined in the section prior to this, the consequential influence of Notre Dame's design effected change in the subsequent cathedrals of the High Gothic period. The strategies expressed in the design of the late twelfth century cathedral allowed for structural and aesthetic ventures that had previously been impossible to explore, which in turn produced the iconic aesthetic of the High Gothic. The incorporation of the flying buttress at Notre Dame allowed for the vaulted ceilings of the nave to be established thirty-three meters above the floor, comparatively more than eight meters higher than its French and English contemporaries.[8] On top of the scaling effect the interior possessed by simply being extremely tall, the original nave design featured large expanses of unarticulated walls, uninterrupted by window moldings or obtrusive ornamentation that could potentially disrupt the entry of natural light. Displayed within the choir were delicate moldings, which were in turn duplicated in the nave with a more exaggerated slenderness to contribute even further to the theme of verticality within the nave.[9] The intention of the nave designer is made clear through ornamental decisions such as this, that the cathedral of Notre Dame was establishing its immediate significance not just through its true height, but even more so by its perceived height.

Concurrent with the development of the flying buttress system came the rejuvenation of another crucial feature of Gothic architecture: ribbed vaulting. Though previously established well before the introduction of the flying buttress, there were constructional limits to the ribbed vaulting system until the flying buttress's introduction, which provided additional stability to the clerestory walls.[10] Though greater fenestration had already been achieved than that of the groin and barrel vaults of the Romanesque and early Gothic, these increasingly efficient means of load dispersion throughout the wall and ceiling structures enabled the transition from restrictive load bearing walls, to vast windows broken up by intermittent bodies of masonry.[11] It should also be noted that the previously stated

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[8] Mark and Clark, "Gothic Structural Experimentation," 176-184.

[9] William W. Clarkand Robert Mark, "The First Flying Buttresses: A New Reconstruction of the Nave of Notre-Dame de Paris," *The Art Bulletin* (College Art Association) 66 (1), (1984): 47-65.

[10] William Taylor , and Robert Mark, "The Technology of Transition: Sexpartite to Quadripartite Vaulting in High Gothic Architecture," *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (December 1982): 579-87. doi:10.2307/3050269.

[11] Robert Mark, "Structural Experimentation in Gothic Architecture: Large-scale Experimentation Brought Gothic Cathedrals to a Level of Technical Elegance Unsurpassed until the Last Century," *American Scientist* 66, no. 5 (September/October 1978): 542-50.

technological achievements transpired all without the aid of any scientific methodology, as Galileo's paramount works regarding mechanics would not be established for another four centuries.[12]
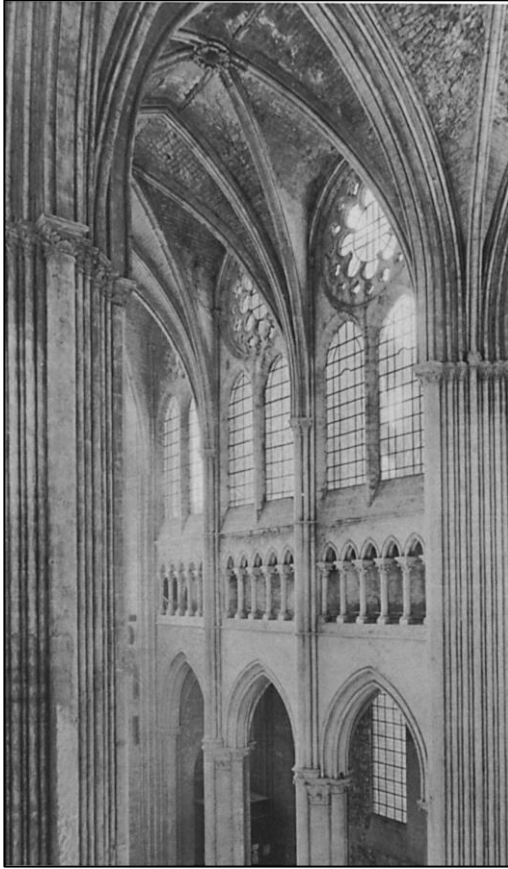
Fig. 2: Chartres Cathedral, view of transept wall and quadripartite vaulting.
Photo Courtesy of *Archives Photographique*.

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[12]   Ibid.

**Renovations of Vaulting Technologies: Bourges and Cologne**

Chartres Cathedral provides an exemplary manifestation of the High Gothic's newfound confidence in expansive vaulting systems. Its vaulting springs enthusiastically above the clerestory level, which itself is increased to a remarkable level, and enables enormous panes of glass to flood the interior with natural light (Figure 2). Previous to the thirteenth century, vaults commenced well below the clerestory level springing from fortified walls, unlike what is seen at Chartres. Additionally, the more commonly used sexpartite vault of the Gothic period was more or less switched out in favour of the quadripartite vaulting system, enabled by the trend of increased structural flexibility. In *The Technology of Transition: Sexpartite to Quadripartite Vaulting in High Gothic Architecture* a comparative study is performed, examining the sexpartite vaulting system of the Bourges Cathedral alongside Cologne's quadripartite vault of a similar magnitude. The surmised load straining on the vault systems of the clerestories of these cathedrals are 31,000 lbs (Bourges) and 35,000 lbs (Cologne).[13] The longitudinal pressure produced by the roof structure is a factor that had to be considered extensively while finding the delicate balance between adequate support and the incorporation of immense window panes that defy the great burden directly above, as well as the amount of support required parallel to the nave to maintain structural integrity (shown in Figure 3). These longitudinal pressures were approximated in the same study at 42,000 lbs and 20,000 lbs respectively, meaning that Cologne's quadripartite vault diffuses the force by fifty-two percent.[14] Though a study of such sophistication would have been impossible at the inception of these structures, it is clear that the modernisation of the ribbed vaulting system from sexpartite to quadripartite enabled prolific advancement throughout the High Gothic.

[13]   Taylor and Mark, "The Technology of Transition: Sexpartite to Quadripartite Vaulting in High Gothic Architecture," *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (December 1982): 579-87. doi:10.2307/3050269.

[14]   Ibid.
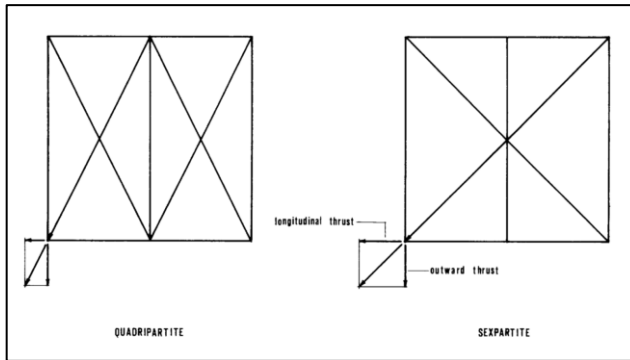
Fig. 3: Plan depicting comparison of sexpartite and quadripartite vaults with their outward and longitudinal thrust. Diagram by William Taylor and Robert Mark, from Technology of Transition.

Honest Architecture and Contrasting the Interior and Exterior of Notre-Dame

Naves of the High Gothic were increasingly flooded with natural light as the clerestory level underwent a transformation in the period. The interior atmosphere of these spaces was described by Irénée Scalbert as "a crowding together of vertical lines, briefly held apart by the rose of a transept or the fanning of clerestories and chapels in the curve of the choir"[15] all illuminated by soft light penetrating from the exterior. However, the relationship between the interior and exterior of these cathedrals was not always as intuitive as may seem. In the previously mentioned article, Scalbert declares the uncanny characteristic similarities upon experiencing the interior spaces of various High Gothic cathedrals throughout France. In photographs and drawings it is easier to pinpoint the subtle differences of the employed architectural elements, however upon first-hand experience these spaces adhere systemically to a familiar theme.[16]

Regarding the relationship between interior and exterior at Notre Dame de Paris, the design provides a particular eccentricity worth delving into. The exterior bolsters the avant-garde use of the flying buttress, openly showcasing the structural innovations integrated into the design. Meanwhile, the design for the interior of the cathedral is shaped by the historic *renovatio*, calling back in time to Merovingian and Early Christian

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[15]   Irénée Scalbert, "The Nature of Gothic." *AA Files*, no. 72 (2016): 73-95.
[16]   Scalbert, "The Nature of Gothic," 73-95

heritage.[17] The two entities seemingly exist oblivious to the other, as the interior yields next to no evidence of the phenomenal struts required to support its audacious grandeur. This nonsynchronous style opposes the self-contained and simplified forms of the Romanesque period, in which free standing supports and structural elements were rarely individualized if ever even visible. The apparent and self-proclaiming structures of High Gothic innovation demonstrate the ability to be understood externally, a trait not shared with the Cathedrals of the Romanesque that came before, whose simplified forms produced little indication of structural necessities.

Exploring Design Possibilities with Newfound Freedom and Implications

Among the quadripartite vault and the other techniques and innovations allowed by the flying buttress, the growth in intricacy and complexity of the rose window is made apparent through the juxtaposition of the north transept rose window at Chartres (1194-1220) to that of St. Etienne de Sens (1140). The structural freedom of Chartres with the incorporation of High Gothic design methods allowed for the ambitious and sophisticated utilization of a bar tracery rose window which far exceed that of Sens in beauty, where Sens' was only constructed a half-century prior. Jean d'Orbais has been credited as the father of bar tracery, the evolved and more delicate ornamental style stemming from plate tracery, as first seen in his work at Riems Cathedral. This progression was only part of the inventive success at Reims, as it was the only Cathedral of its time to replace the standard stone tympanum with a glass one modeled in this new bar tracery style. This cathedral was a place of great significance for the French Monarchy, due to its relevance to Carolingian history, and one may speculate was well because of its reputation as a technological forerunner of the High Gothic. The nave of Reims itself was quite dark in contrast to that of contemporaneous cathedrals, such as Chartres, where the clerestory flooded the choir and nave with light (Figures 4&2). The increase innatural lighting in these places of worship and teaching brought a change to the attitude to such traditions. No longer did the spaces reflect a mood of drudgery and proliferate somber attitudes of elitism, but instead the spaces of the High Gothic accompanied the outgoing movement of philosophical scholasticism which reached new heights in the thirteenth century. At this time the rigid legalism of the Church was slowly dissolving as numerous passionate Christian groups brought new emphasis to theology.[18] The Papacy was still thriving throughout this era as was the broader church, thus

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[17]   Stephen Murray," Notre-Dame of Paris and the Anticipation of Gothic." *The Art Bulletin* (College Art Association) 80, 2, (1998): 229-253.

[18]   Harm Goris "Tense Logic in 13th-Century Theology." *Vivarium39*, no. 2 (2001): 161-84.

the innovations of the High Gothic were accompanied by social and religious changes, and could be argued to be mutually influential.[19]

Conclusions

The innovation of the flying buttress first seen at Notre Dame de Paris was an architectural catalyst that prompted various iconic attributes of the High Gothic period. The structural and aesthetic qualities that were enabled both directly in the manifestation of the flying buttresses, as well as indirectly in architectural elements supported by its innovation are far and above that of any other single component of the period. New explorations of the discourse of cathedrals' interior and exterior relationship were enabled, evidence for systems of connectivity within architects and builders throughout various projects of the Gothic and High Gothic were evident as a result of widespread design incorporation, and the facilitation of countless environmental and physical High Gothic developments can all be attributed to the flying buttress. The integration of the flying buttress had repercussions of such magnitude within the High Gothic that is would therefore be obstinate for the discussion surrounding its design to solely focus on the height of the High Gothic.

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[19]   Ray R. Noll, "A Concise History of the Early Church by Norbert Brox." *The Catholic Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (1997): 293-94. doi:10.1353/cat.1997.0139.

Fig. 4: Interior photograph of Riems Cathedral depicting the glass tympanum and rose window.

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Photography by Mohammad Bayati

The Innovative Downtrodden: The Importance of Primitivism in Ukrainian Modernist Art

Katrin Zavgorodny-Freedman

In the early twentieth century, modernist art emerged as a reaction to modernity and sought to overthrow the predominant Western artistic tradition. European artists from across the continent challenged deep-seated artistic norms by creating innovative abstract art. Single-point perspective and representational art had been the default since the Renaissance — a direct approach to art through which the image contained all necessary information with no need for context or input from the viewer. Modernism subverted this tradition by adopting non-figural and non-representational forms and a flat, non-illusionistic canvas. European Cubist artists further challenged entrenched norms through "primitivism," in which they were influenced by the art of Africa and Asia to explore non-Western ways of seeing and develop new artistic paradigms. Within the wider spheres of primitivism and Cubism, Ukrainian abstract art of the early twentieth century rose to prominence. However, Ukrainian avant-garde art is unique in the world of modern art due to its inward (as opposed to external) interpretation of primitivism.[1]

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[1]   Primitivism has become largely discredited as a term. This article employs its use solely as a comparative aid. While primitivism had many incarnations, one contemporary understanding of the practice is of an unequal power relationship, resulting in an "othering" of foreign cultures. Several artists across Europe during this period used primitivism to establish a power dynamic of Westerners seeing "other" peoples, cultures, and practices, interpreting them in a voyeuristic fashion. For some, primitivism now represents an external perspective on ethnic life as lived in its own culture. In the context of this paper, Ukrainian "internal primitivism" applies this concept of primitivism as a view of ethnic practices, albeit in a different way. Ukrainian avant-garde artists were, at times, both outsiders looking at the "other" (cosmopolitan intellectuals looking at rural folk arts) and insiders (a people seeking unity and national identity). These artists were learning from their folk traditions after many years of cultural oppression, and they took ownership of these traditions instead of cultivating a city-country divide. Thus, "internal primitivism" here refers to this dual identification of the term, where an ethnic practice was viewed by artists that were both external voyeurs and "native"

Ukrainian "primitivism" was unlike other Western modernist practices, as Ukrainian artists reinterpreted the "primitivist" perspective to look within its own culture instead of co-opting the culture of others. Visually, it held the same values of flatness and non-representational form as non-Ukrainian modern art. However, while many Western artists were challenged by the non-figurative and non-narrative elements of abstract art, "internal primitivism" in Ukraine allowed radical avant-garde art methods to be adopted easily. Broad interest in Ukrainian folk art was fuelled by anti-Russian-imperialist sentiments as well as the early Soviet regime's Ukrainianization initiative.[2] "Internal primitivism" thus functioned as a relegitimization of Ukrainian culture and can be understood as an unofficial nationalistic process. As a result of nineteenth century Russian imperial studies into Ukrainian history and culture, and the Soviet period of Ukrainianization, Ukraine's cultural heritage was vindicated and renewed after centuries of oppression, subjugation, and amalgamation by Russia and other colonial powers. The specific example of the Yiddish *Kultur-Lige* demonstrates the synthesis and ingestion of these ideas. Drawing inspiration from Ukrainian traditional practices, the *Kultur-Lige* complicates and expands the understanding of Ukrainian nation-building and society during the era. Following such themes, this article will detail primitivism's key role in distinguishing Ukrainian avant-garde art from other modernist art practices at the time, and apply further nuance to the complex art historical term of "primitivism."

"Internal primitivism" was a major concern and a unique signifier of the Ukrainian avant-garde in the canon of modern art. Using elements of their cultural past, artists such as Kazimir Malevich, David Burliuk, and Vladimir Burliuk developed a uniquely Ukrainian modernist artistic style rooted in Ukrainian folklore, iconography, and pastoral traditions. They "paraphrased their domestic heritage" by finding inspiration in Ukraine's long-suppressed cultural history,[3] and they expressed agency by celebrating

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insiders. For more information on the legacy of Primitivism, see Thomas McEvilley, William Rubin, Kirk Varnedoe, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief: Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984," *Artforum* 23/3 (November 1984): 54-61.

[2] Ukrainianization was a mini-Renaissance of Ukrainian culture, during which the Soviet authorities allowed for the exploration of Ukrainian history and the use of the Ukrainian language, reviving Ukrainian culture after the long dominance of Russian language and culture. For further information see: Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*: *The Land and its People,* 2nd ed. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2010), 569, 573.

[3] John E. Bowlt and Nicoletta Misler, *Twentieth-Century Russian and East European Painting* (London: Zwemmer, 1993), 13.

this history and using it as a foundation for their art. This method of "internal primitivism" dictated the visual composition of Ukrainian modern art and enabled the Ukrainian avant-garde to quickly find a place in the contemporaneous artistic movement across Europe. While Western European primitivism drew from the racialized other as a source of inspiration, Ukrainian artists took a different approach, focusing on the "primitive" art of the Ukrainian peasant. Avant-garde artists in Ukraine looked inwardly to the culture of their own people to find a pristine form of art, and "went native" much like the primitivist artists of Western Europe.[4]

In their internal approach to primitivism, Ukrainian artists looked to the visual culture of the Ukrainian countryside — textiles, religious icons, and *Pysanky* (Easter eggs). The modernist artist Alexandra Exter, who found fame not only in Ukraine, but also in Russia and France, used these folk-arts to inform her teachings in her studio in Kiev. The revival of Ukrainian language and culture due to Ukrainization justified the use of such reclaimed visuals in modern art. Furthermore, many Russian and Slavic artists were convinced that a Slavic cultural revival was impending, and thus forged their own cultural identity based on the "unique, non-Western features" displayed by their cultures,[5] which complemented the modernist interest in primitivism. For Ukraine, this meant creating an individual identity to separate the country from other Slavic cultures during its revolutionary periods and the eventual integration into the United Soviet Socialist Republic.

Many artists felt that the turn towards Ukrainian history and culture would usher in a "self-proclaimed Renaissance."[6] Instead of solely adopting modernist language, some artists would thoroughly mix in elements of their own cultural past, creating a unique version of primitivism. By borrowing from indigenous art forms, the artist David Burliuk demonstrated an "eclectic mix of cubism, futurism, and Ukrainian folklore."[7] One can observe Burliuk's combination of symbols of the Ukrainian countryside with his interest in the formal modernist elements of perspective and

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[4]   Bowlt and Misler, *Twentieth-Century Russian and East European Painting*, 13.

[5]   Myroslav Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," In Irene Rima Makaryk and Virlana Tkacz, *Modernism in Kyiv: Kiev/Kyïv/Kiev/Kijów/Ķiev: Jubilant Experimentation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 231.

[6]   Irena K. Makaryk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation," In Irene Rima Makaryk and Virlana Tkacz, *Modernism in Kyiv: Kiev/Kyïv/Kiev/Kijów/Ķiev: Jubilant Experimentation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 18.

[7]   Bowlt and Misler, *Twentieth-Century Russian and East European Painting*, 60.

collapsed ground of in his work *Bridge. Landscape from Four Points of View* (fig. 1). The form of the "bridge" is fragmented and difficult to discern, but elements such as water, a horse, and a peasant are recognizable. The image synthesises analytic cubist ideals of several viewpoints with traditional symbols of rural Ukraine. Through this synthesis, Burliuk's art helped revive the folk tradition of Ukraine by including it in his oeuvre, elevating it to the level of avant-garde modernist art.

   Many artists would travel to the cities to "overthrow dominant intellectual and artistic trends by introducing perspectives learned elsewhere."[8] On occasion, the historical past of Ukrainian artists would manifest itself in their later work. The 1915 exhibition of Malevich's work in Moscow at "0.10: The Last Futurist Exhibition" used the repeated motif of the "Black Square" (fig. 2). The perfect and pure square was placed on an angle in the corner of the exhibition room, looming over the rest of the Suprematist works. The "Black Square" here served as an icon — a form with a long tradition in Ukrainian art. Malevich's upbringing and artistic training as a young adult took place in Ukraine, and he was certainly familiar with the emblematic idea in the region of the icon as a prominent visual profession of religious belief. The religious art of the Byzantine *Kyivan Rus'*[9] included "richly painted icons with their sense of cosmic space and the simultaneity of time."[10] Malevich's use of a looming "Black Square" treats the form as an icon, placing it in a position where it appears that one could view and worship it in the hope of attaining the higher level of spirituality that Suprematism desired.

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[8]   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 230.
[9]   The Kyivan Rus' 'were a political entity in the eastern Slavic lands from the ninth to fourteenth centuries. They are often regarded as some of the cultural predecessors of Ukrainians (as well as other Slavic groups in the area).
[10]   Makaryk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation," 18.
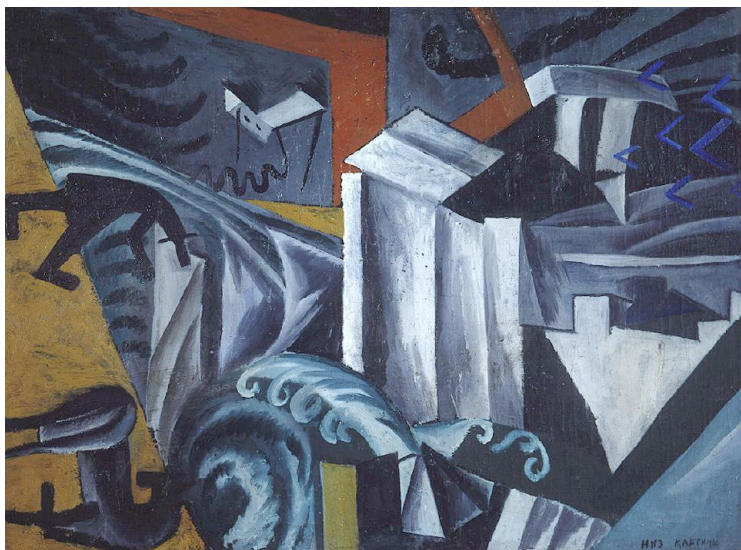
Fig. 1. David Burliuk, *Bridge. Landscape from Four Points of View*, 1911, oil on canvas. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.
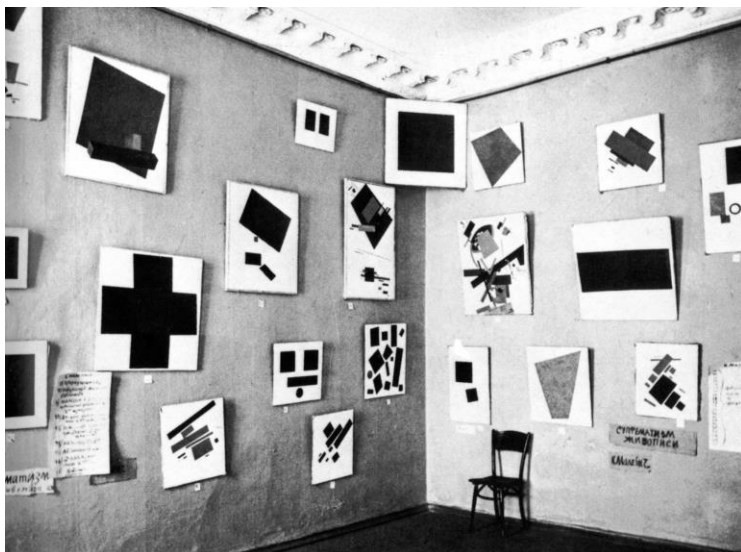
Fig. 2. Picture of room dedicated to Malevich at the 0.10 Exhibition. *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures, Petrograd*. In Altshuler, Bruce ed., *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions that Made Art History, Vol. 1: 1863-1959* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008), 177. FADIS.

Modernism in Europe was reacting to a transforming world. While many artists were fascinated by these changes, exploring new ideas, sensations, and cultures, some artists expressed worries about the transition to the alarming world of capitalist production and the loss of integral parts of their social identity. As a result, Western European modernism often reflected a sense of discontinuity, fragmentation, and alienation. Ukrainian avant-garde artists responded to this situation with a different approach – they used the changes of modernism as a means to restore the historical and cultural continuity of the Ukrainian people.[11] Thus, they used modern art to reject an imperial past and regain autonomy. Strengthened by commissions and projects dealing with their cultural identity, many Ukrainian artists devised to create an innovative modern image of Ukraine. Whether inspired by political, nationalist, or artistic aims, many Ukrainian artists contributed to a distinct artistic practice that rejected the conventions of both Western visual traditions and their own colonial past.

Ukrainian avant-garde art was in dialogue with its own past, not something alien or outside.[12] As a result, early-twentieth century Ukrainian artists were comfortable "domesticat[ing] the 'primitive'" by using their own past, which had been characterized by many as savage and backwards for centuries.[13] Removing itself from both elitist and self-deprecatory narratives, this period in Ukrainian art practice was able to join the avant-garde art scene by mixing its long-subjugated "low" culture with the "high" culture of Western art. In doing so, Ukrainian art was democratic and accessible to all,[14] which was a key element in the future visualized by many modernist and avant-garde artists. Such democratic ideals, whether consciously intended or not, suggest that the Ukrainian avant-garde had a more nuanced version of modernism than that of Western Europe.

The synthesis of Western modernism and Ukrainian modernist ideals resulted in an art that was distinguished by its "extraordinary feeling for materials."[15] Due to the ease of collaboration and collective work, Ukrainian art quickly integrated cubism and primitivism.[16] Ukrainian avant-garde art was particularly adaptable due to its willingness to embrace both the outside West as well as its local history. This adaptability lent Ukraine an important position in the trajectory of modern art during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Due to its radically different visual language, most avant-garde art required justification to its audience. However, Ukrainian art was more easily able to ingest many modernist

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[11]   Makaryk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation," 18.
[12]   Ibid., 19.
[13]   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 232.
[14]   Ibid., 234.
[15]   Ibid., 232.
[16]   Ibid.

ideas by exploring them through the lens of their cultural past. A study of the formal characteristics of the Ukrainian avant-garde illustrates this more clearly.

Western modernism's visual language was easily adopted in Ukraine due to "internal primitivism," since Ukrainian folk art was already characterised by the use of abstract forms and symbolic colours.[17] Because of elements such as the decorative florals on textiles and *Pysanky* created by countryside peasants, Ukrainian modernists were already familiar with painting non-illusionistic and "flat" art (fig. 3). The concept of a two-dimensional picture plane was not as alien to the Ukrainian avant-garde as it was for other Western artists, as such practices were part of Ukrainian artists' cultural background.

Fig. 3. *Pysanky* (Ukrainian Easter eggs) from the Podolia region. Ukrainian Museum, New York. In *Ukrainian Folk Art*, 14.

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[17]   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 233.

Western ideals entering Ukrainian avant-garde teachings were quickly fused with native Ukrainian art. In their workshop in Kiev, Alexander Bohomazov and Alexandra Exter taught elements of abstract modernist art which they had gleaned from their Western-European contacts. Following Western practice, existing narratives had to be filtered through the new artistic processes of the modernists.[18] The meaning of an abstract work was to be found in its use of form and colour, not the story it was trying to tell. Exter taught students a non-objective approach based on Western artistic ideas through the aforementioned *Pysanky*. Using the decorative elements of the yearly tradition of dyeing eggs, as well as the carpet and ceramics designs of the peasants,[19] Exter taught her students the theories of Picasso and Cezanne on the volumetric elements of art and how to flatten them so as to understand the picture plane as two-dimensional and flat. In doing so, Exter used local traditional arts to teach her students the concept of "painting as painting" —that it was the process of creation and not the painting's subject matter which made it profound. This teaching process proved effective, as two students proclaimed in their own writings, "form is the essential element, while the content is a bad distraction."[20] The synthesis of Western art with Ukrainian visual tradition created a unique group of artists who reached similar conclusions as their Western counterparts, albeit in a more organic and multifaceted way.

The unique nature of Ukrainian "internal primitivism" and its use in understanding modern and abstract art became a foundation on which some artists sought to develop their own national identity. In comparison to the West's idea of "nationhood as given fact" that allowed for the comfortable exploration of other cultures, Ukraine's historical subjugation meant that many artists questioned why "nationalism" was not a term used in art at the time.[21] Even those artists unconcerned with "national art" would nonetheless draw inspiration from their Ukrainian roots,[22] or they would seek to have an emphatically non-Russian artistic practice.

The perception of Russia as an imperial and colonial power was the drive for many Ukrainian artists in creating a new artistic style – one which could express regional agency free of Russian influence. The Ukrainian

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18   Dmytro Horbachov, "Teachers and Pupils: Ukrainian Avant-gardists Exter and Bohomazov and the Kyiv Circle of Jewish Cubo-Futurists, 1918-20," In Wolf Moskovich and Atli Rodal, *Jews and Slavs: The Ukrainian-Jewish Encounter: Dimensions*, Vol. 25 (Jerusalem: Philobiblon in association with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem), 105.

19   Ibid.

20   Ibid.

21   Myroslava Mudrak, *The New Generation and Artistic Modernism in the Ukraine* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1986), 1.

22   Makaryk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation," 21.

avant-garde created art which "instead of willingly assimilating to the 'superior' Russian culture,"[23] competed with the artwork of its previous colonizer. Ukrainian artists were disenchanted with their past of being overrun and degraded as part of Russian imperialist cultural dominance.[24] Thus Ukrainian avant-garde artists were contending that the strength of Ukraine lay in its identity as a crossroads, borderland, and uniquely creative power.[25]

After Russia's imperialist colonization of Ukraine's provincial countryside in the eighteenth century to create pastoral estates for Russians, Ukrainian artists were fuelled by innovation in working to escape the narrative of Russian imperialism.[26] The beginning of the abstract modernist period was seen as "a flinging open of all the old imperial doors and windows."[27] The Ukrainian avant-garde were hoping to transcend the impositions of external influences and "forge a continuum of culture" in conjunction with contemporary artistic practices in order to reclaim dignity of their national identity.[28] As such, their "internal primitivism" was a means to fight against the concept of the Russian city in Ukraine by taking folk art from the countryside, putting it front and centre, and thereby re-establishing the narrative of the peasant.[29] In this way, the Ukrainian avant-garde catered to the goal of national liberation through the use of its own cultural heritage.[30]

Another way in which the Ukrainian avant-garde tried to establish its own identity independent from Russia was in its effort to differentiate itself from the Russian art of the time. The goal of art for many Russian artists paralleled the ideology surrounding the communist movement and the October Revolution — to overthrow "bourgeois culture and its mechanisms of domination and control."[31] While Russian artists were rebelling against *bourgeois* control of their lives, Ukrainian avant-garde artists were trying to overthrow the historical *Russian* control over art by legitimizing the folk arts of the Ukrainian countryside. Whereas Russian avant-garde communism provided a dogma that was anarchistic, apocalyptic, and yet, simultaneously messianic, the Ukrainian avant-garde had more muted approach and focused instead on criticizing its colonized past.[32] Too much

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23   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 226.
24   Makaryk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation," 18.
25   Ibid., 22.
26   Ibid., 18.
27   Ibid., 19.
28   Ibid.
29   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 231.
30   Makaryk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation," p. 20.
31   Ibid.
32   Makaryk, "Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation," p. 20.

criticism of Russian colonialism by Ukrainians could result in sharp reprimand, especially when it was overtly denouncing historic Russification and imperial conquest.[33] This is perhaps why many Ukrainian avant-garde artists chose to participate in their "internal primitivist" national revival – it undermined Russia's imperial legacy indirectly. Using "internal primitivism," artists were free to explore modern and abstract techniques, while continuing to make a covert nationalistic statement.

The rapidly changing revolutionary period of 1914-1917 meant that many artists would shift their political leanings and adapt to prevailing ideologies. For avant-garde artists, their goals of remaking and seeing the world anew were coupled with their politics.[34] Many tried to stay apolitical, or, if required, would capitalise on a particular political situation. The ability to have multiple and shifting loyalties was in the artist's favour. With the creation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the imposition of communist ideology had a major effect on the trajectory of Ukrainian modernism. During the late 1920's, the rise of compulsory use of Soviet Realism ended the avant-garde movement's independence. Just as artists began to grapple with the duality of national and communist identities, their exploration of "ambiguous and divided loyalties" came to an end under Soviet influence.[35] "Internal primitivism" played into the ambiguity of Ukrainian loyalties by simultaneously being an artistic reaction to avant-garde art across Europe, a nationalistic reaction to imperialism, and a political reaction to communism.

As the artistic intelligentsia had played a key role in creating the Ukrainian national republic during the revolutionary years,[36] the incoming communists posed a threat to the newly burgeoning national rediscovery. The Bolsheviks made three attempts to take over Ukraine,[37] and when they finally succeeded, they "felt entitled to take revenge on 'the counter-revolution by repressing Ukrainian culture." This was easy to accomplish, since the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine (CP(b)U) was over a third Russian and a third Jewish, with Ukrainians only making up less than a quarter of the membership.[38] Since the CP(b)U claimed Ukrainian art was unrefined and antisemitic, its leadership pitted the Russian "culture of the city" against the Ukrainian "culture of the village" and, in elitist fashion, assumed the quick triumph of Russian culture.[39] However, the Ukrainian

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[33]   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 228.
[34]   Ibid., 220.
[35]   Ibid., 223-224.
[36]   Ibid., 224.
[37]   For an overview of the history of Communism in Soviet Ukraine see
         Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 565-584.
[38]   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 224.
[39]   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 224.

national cultural revival would eventually witness a reversal of this oppressed status, later becoming supported by the party.

The policy of Ukrainianization brought about "indigenization," which created a Ukrainian culture "national[istic] in form but socialist in content."[40] The CP(b)U was willing to support the anti-Imperial Russian rhetoric of the Ukrainian avant-garde, as it meshed with their goal of emancipating Ukraine from *bourgeois* ideals, but they needed to eliminate the concept of national liberation.[41] Nonetheless, Ukrainian avant-garde artists continued to strive to combine social and national liberation. Modernist avant-garde artists seemed able to work no matter the political climate, even in Ukraine, where it changed so often. Historically, Ukraine's political culture was seen as more Western, with emphasis placed on individual rights and the separation of church and state.[42] The repression of Ukraine's national and political culture may have played a role in strengthening the avant-garde,[43] as many citizens expected the rights that they had been long denied.

A case study of a later, but prominent, Ukrainian avant-garde group exemplifies the themes discussed in this article. The Yiddish *Kultur-Lige*, a Jewish artistic organization founded in Kiev, which later opened many other branches around Europe, focused on creating an identity and an art that uniquely integrated the past and looked inwards towards their own culture, similar to the practices of the "internal primitivists." The *Kultur-Lige* demonstrates not only how "internal primitivism" could manifest in various forms in the same geographic region, but that the legacy of this nationalistic and ethnic approach to modern and abstract art in Ukraine was significant and distinct in the canon of European art.

The *Kultur-Lige*, founded in 1917, was a group of modernist-oriented artists who were banded together by their shared Jewish and Yiddish identity. Ukraine's tumultuous revolutionary period allowed for several advances in Jewish and Yiddish emancipation. The political turmoil meant many parties could form a coalition,[44] and Yiddish was made an official language by the Central Rada, the Ukrainian government of the era.[45] The ousting of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadski[46] and the abolition of the Ministry of

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40   Ibid., 226.
41   Ibid., 229.
42   Ibid., 230.
43   See Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 234.
44   Hillel Kazovsky, ed., *Kultur-Lige: Artistic Avant-garde of the 1910s and the 1920s*, (Kiev: Dukh I litera, 2007), 34.
45   Kazovsky, *Kultur-Lige*, 50.
46   Pavlo Skoropadski was the Hetman (chief of state) of Ukraine from April to December 1918. His short-lived governance was characterized by its conservative and right-of-centre nature, including the reestablishment of

Jewish Affairs, which had previously been in charge of organising Jewish and Yiddish cultural efforts, meant that the newly minted *Kultur-Lige* would inherit all of the Ministry's financial assets and establishments. The *Kultur-Lige* thus became the "representative organ of Jewish autonomy in Ukraine."[47] Its socially and politically diverse activists' foundational goal of united action is reflected in its use of "league" in its name.[48] Even in the face of pogroms and discrimination, the *Kultur-Lige* were part of the Pan-Yiddishists – those of Jewish faith who believed in remaining in Europe in contrast to the Zionists' desire to leave and create a Jewish homeland. These artists were interested in establishing and cementing their own culture, both distinct from and a part of the larger Ukrainian nation. This meant that the *Kultur-Lige,* in a similar manner as the larger Ukrainian avant-garde movement, sought to connect its new national art with the developments in modern European art of the era.[49]

The *Kultur-Lige*'s interest in using ideas from European art also required "internal primitivist" elements to complete its synthesis. Much like Ukrainian avant-garde looked to their past to create their innovative work, the *Kultur-Lige* were interested in absorbing folk tradition to create a new Jewish art.[50] The *Kultur-Lige* was willing to adopt modernist trends, as they believed that the "creative activities of the masses" would generate a modern Jewish culture.[51] Many elements of traditional Jewish and Yiddish life would advocate isolated adherence to religion, which influenced the possibility of art production. In some Jewish traditions, restrictions are placed on drawing or painting human images. The advent of non-mimetic and non-representational abstract art, foregoing figural representation as subject in favour of shape, line, and colour, signalled the "manifestation of Jewishness in art" in the eyes of the *Kultur-Lige*.[52] Modern culture had formally aligned with Jewish artistic limitations as such abstract artwork complied with this prohibition on reproducing the human image. This signalled that Jewish artists were welcome and encouraged to work within this Western avant-garde art practice.

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private property and authoritarian rule. See Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 518-523.

[47] Ibid., 28.

[48] Ibid., 26.

[49] Vita Susak, "Parallels in Ukrainian and Jewish 'National Styles' in Art in the First Third of the Twentieth Century," In Wolf Moskovich and Atli Rodal, *Jews and Slavs: The Ukrainian-Jewish Encounter: Dimensions*, Vol. 25 (Jerusalem: Philobiblon in association with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016) 117.

[50] Kazovsky, *Kultur-Lige*, 34.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Horbachov, "Teachers and Pupils", 105.

When comparing Ukrainian and Jewish artistic styles of the period, one can draw many parallels. Ideologically, the synthesis of a traditional past and a burgeoning Western future forged vibrant and new national identities. Formally, the parallels are even more evident. Nearly all of the *Kultur-Lige* members studied in Exter's workshop, and it was there that they learned from her fusion of national Ukrainian art with her knowledge of the Parisian modernist discourse.[53] Exter's teachings inspired members of the *Kultur-Lige* to look even further within their own Jewish culture for inspiration. The Hebrew alphabet was one key cultural source.[54] In Mark Epstein's cover for Itzik Kipnis' collection of poetry, *Oksen* (fig. 4), he combined the new style of abstraction with this linguistic tradition. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet, here forming the Yiddish word for "oxen," are broken into geometric shapes and placed on a diagonal, drawing attention to the flatness of the picture plane and showing influence from the emergence of the modernist art movement of Futurism. In using such traditional references, the art of the *Kultur-Lige* exhibits the same "principled localism [and] determination" showcased by "internal primitivist" Ukrainian avant-garde art.[55]

The *Kultur-Lige* exemplifies the formal characteristics of "internal primitivism" in Ukrainian art in the early twentieth century in addition to the conditions influencing this reinterpretation of primitivist borrowing. The fluctuating political climate of the time allowed for the organization and facilitation of Jewish groups in Ukraine, and the floodgates were opened for Jewish cultural research by the elevation of Yiddish to a national language in 1917. Combined with an interest in Western modernism, the *Kultur-Lige* created a national art that held many of the same formal characteristics as the larger Ukrainian avant-garde movement. The practices of the *Kultur-Lige*, however, should not be seen as separate from Ukrainian avant-garde artists. In addition to sharing many artists as members, these two groups shared an excitement in exploring their own "native" cultures, both of which were deeply enmeshed in Ukrainian history.

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53   Kazovsky, *Kultur-Lige*, 54.
54   Susak, "Parallels", 121.
55   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 235.
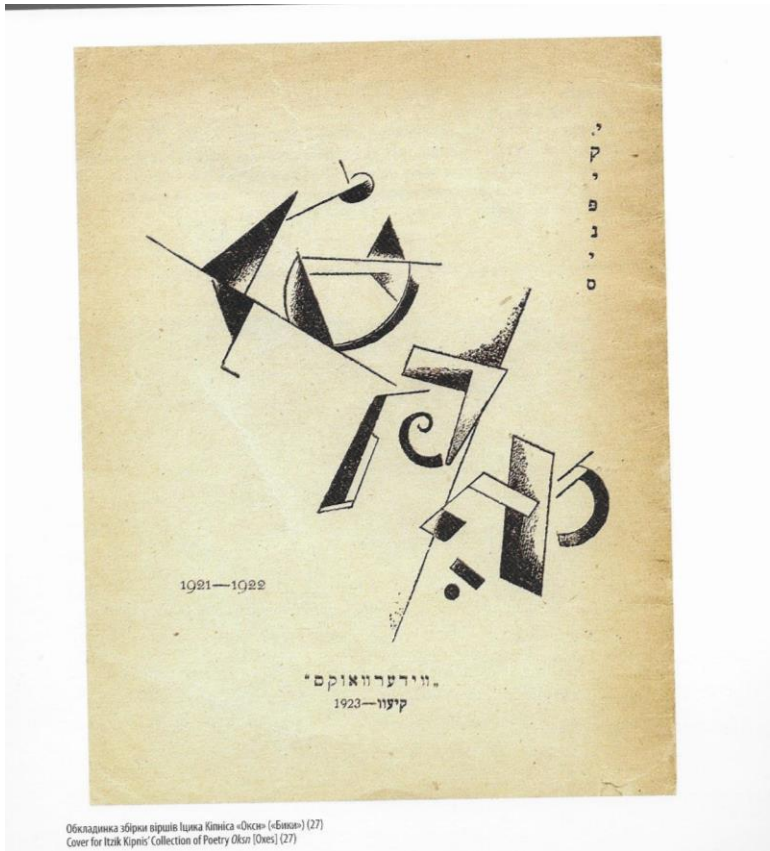
Fig. 4. Mark Epstein. *Cover for Itzik Kipnis' Collection of Poetry "Oksn (Oxes)"*. 1923. Lev Drobiazko Collection, Kiev. In Kazovsky, Hillel ed., *Kultur-Lige: Artistic Avant-garde of the 1910s and the 1920s*, 99.

As a whole, Ukrainian avant-garde art stands out from the wider artistic movement of modernism during the early twentieth century as a result of its "inwardly-focused primitivist" practices. This form of "primitivism" had many benefits for Ukrainian avant-garde artists. Firstly, the use of ethnic

folk arts provided a foundation to learn from and adopt Western artistic ideas. Secondly, "internal primitivism" made radical avant-garde concepts more accessible, as the abstracted forms and flattened two-dimensional picture planes of modern art could already be seen in Ukrainian religious icons and decorative art. Lastly, it provided a way for Ukrainians to develop national art that was autonomous and democratic, in addition to being politically and ethnically independent. "Internal primitivism" fuelled by the political and social circumstances of the revolutionary and early Soviet period gave artists the will to create a uniquely national art. Other groups in Ukrainian society were also inspired by such approaches, including the *Kultur-Lige* in their search for a new Jewish art. Many Ukrainian artists of the period, Malevich in particular, have rarely had their Ukrainian background studied or mentioned.[56] Scholarship often ignores this background, relegating the Ukrainian avant-garde to a fringe artistic movement under the larger banner of the "Russian" or "Soviet" modernist movements. However, the unique visual and theoretical impact of this heritage on abstract and modernist art is clear.

Ukrainian avant-garde art had a more nuanced understanding of primitivism than many Western counterparts. While Western artists were more concerned with changing their own artistic traditions through the observation of other cultures, Ukrainian artists sought to rediscover their own culture through the practice of ethnic anthropology, fusing it with modernist Western influences. The Ukrainian avant-garde not only produced an art that was formally and socially revolutionary — this artwork was tied to a historically significant political and national hegemony and began to dismantle generations of the subjugation of Ukraine, which had been conflated with other cultures. Western modern art is, of course, an enormous step in the historical legacy of European art, but in some regards the Ukrainian avant-garde achieved an even more significant shift during the first two decades of the twentieth century. With an inwardly-focused self-awareness, Ukrainian artists produced work that has gone largely overlooked and understudied. A true appreciation of the nuance found in the "internal primitive" practices of the Ukrainian avant-garde contributes an important chapter to the story of the wider artistic tradition in Europe during the early twentieth century.

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[56]   Shkandrij, "Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde," 230.

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Women's (Art) Work
Re-Weaving the Textile in Ancient Greece

Brittany Myburgh

"Wife, you weave at a great rate."[57]

- Aristophanes, *Clouds*

Weaving as Creation

In recent years, vases depicting women working with wool have received increased attention. Images of textile production have been linked to the role of women in the *oikos*, and textile production has been defined as both an economic activity and one that reinforces the ideal of woman as mother and homemaker. Weaving and spinning in Ancient Greece have often been viewed as activities that confine women to designated domestic spaces. Consequently, textile production has been described as an activity that oppresses women, yet other scholarship suggests that this is too simplistic.[58]

This paper presents notes on wool working scenes popular in the period 550 – 450 BC and a brief consideration of how the motifs of the mirror and the juggler might be interpreted within the context of wool work.[59] The majority of images considered are Attic red-figure vases, with most available sources on weaving pertaining to Athenian women rather than Spartan citizen women.[60] Recent studies have offered archaeological

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[57] Translated by William Hickie, *The Comedies of Aristophanes*, London: Bohn, 1853: 25

[58] Sheramy Bundrick, "The Fabric of The City", *Hesperia*, vol. 77, no. 2, (2008): 286

[59] The paper does not suggest a comprehensive iconographic analysis of all available data, nor an assessment of archaeological evidence for the techniques of textile production. For information on this topic see: Barber, E. J. W. *Women's Work: the First 20,000 Years; Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1994; Cancik H. & Schneider H. (Eds). (2009). *Textile production.* Brill's new pauly encyclopedia of the ancient world (Vol. 14). Boston: Brill.

[60] As the majority of these notes are focused on Athenian citizen women's wool work and textile production it should be noted that not all those engaged in textile production were equal, particularly within Sparta where both enslaved men and women were involved in the act of spinning and

evidence which suggests that weaving took place in many different rooms of a Greek house and could even occur outside in courtyards.[61] While weaving itself takes place within the domestic sphere, textile products transgress private and public boundaries. In the context of Ancient Greece, wool work has continuously been highlighted as important in an economic and social context. Given the lack of physical material evidence, representations of women weaving on Ancient Greek vases might instead be examined as metaphors for creation.[62]

Examples of Weaving in Literature

In Ancient Greek literature textiles were both defined as merely women's work and as highly skilled craft. The act of spinning was also used frequently as a metaphor by philosophers and in fiction. This section considers select examples that demonstrate the variety of metaphors associated with spinning and weaving in literature, and while it does not argue for a direct correlation between literature and images, this provides potential background context for the iconography of vase painting to be later discussed. Weaving was consistently used as a metaphor for order and balance in works which addressed Greek politics. In both Plato's *Statesman* and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* weaving is used as a metaphor for state. In her assertion of the value of women's work, Lysistrata proposes to "run the whole city on the model of the way we deal with wool."[63] The entire process of weaving is proposed as a civic model for men to conduct their affairs better.[64] Lysistrata uses this art form, traditionally assigned to women, to propose the city unifies all members. Just as women collect together the materials for wool work, she argues that so should the state collect all its members and weave a warm cloak for its people.

These concepts of unity, balance and intertwining which are associated with weaving also exist in Plato's discussion of state. The statesman and the weaver practice measurement and balance to achieve their goals. Ultimately, the control of the state becomes an art form comparable to weaving: "the art which holds sway over them all and watches over the laws

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weaving. See: Cancik H. & Schneider H. (Eds). (2009). *Textile production.* Brill's new pauly encyclopedia of the ancient world (Vol. 14). Boston: Brill: 343.

[61] Bundrick, "The Fabric of The City", *Hesperia*, vol. 77, no. 2, (2008): 312

[62] Nanette Kelly, "Spinning the Thread, Weaving the Web, Images of Women Spinning and Weaving in Western Art" (Doctoral Dissertation, Union Institute Cincinnati, 1998): 5

[63] Lisa Vetter, *Women's Work as Political Art: Weaving and Dialectical Politics in Homer, Aristophanes and Plato.* (USA: Lexington, 2005): 65

[64] Vetter, *Women's Work as Political Art,* 65

and all things in the state, weaving them all most perfectly together" is defined as "statecraft."'[65]

Within Plato we also find the description of weaving as a craft which is similar to the creative and constructive arts of painting and architecture. Plato describes how weaving, as part of all material culture, is able to produce good grace through harmony and rhythm.[66] While the qualities of grace and beauty can be evident in both material items and people, there is a notion in Plato's work that material items will influence the character and outlook of those surrounded by them.[67] Moreover, works which exhibit these qualities have the beauty of style, and style expresses the character of a person's soul, and reflects their true nature.[68] Perhaps weaving within this context can therefore be viewed as the reflection of a woman's self.

The ability of mortal everyday women to create works of self-reflection and beauty is not explicit in Plato's *Republic*. However, we find a mythological tale of weaving in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which supports the view of weaving as an art form. Arachne boasts that her weaving can surpass Athena's and so a competition is devised. Ovid accounts at length the colour of thread, describing shades of purple dye, and gradients in which a thousand colours shine with transitions that are so convincing they are unperceivable to the human eye.[69] Finally, threads of gold are added and ancient tales are spun in their webs. In Athena's didactic tapestry Gods are presented in glory and mortals who overstep their boundaries are punished. Ovid then describes how Arachne's tapestry creates the ideal and naturalistic representation that was sought in Greek art. Arachne weaves a depiction of Europa and the bull and "you would have thought it a real bull and real waves."[70] Her work recounts the failings of Gods and cannot be faulted. She is punished by Athena and transformed into a spider. Unable to weave subversive figural patterns, she is fated to weave geometric webs forever.

In the same way that Athena intends her tapestry to teach Arachne her place, Ovid's myth could function as a lesson to mortal women not to be boastful of their skill. The myth potentially demonstrates that, despite possessing the creative potential, women should not create works which

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[65]   Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12 translated by Harold N. Fowler, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 305e

[66]   Myles Burnyeat, "Culture and Society in Plato's Republic: Couches Song and Civic Tradition". (Lecture 1, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Harvard University, December 10-12, 1997): 218

[67]   Ibid., 219

[68]   Ibid.

[69]   Ovid. *Metamorphoses* translated by Brookes More, (Boston: Cornhill Publishing Co. 1922): Book 6 card 87

[70]   Ibid.

would exist in the masculine realm of fine art. There is a recognition in this story of the power of weaving as an art which tells a story in image. The myth therefore functions as a warning for women. Women are instructed not to use their creative ability to be subversive and not to construct works which speak against both Gods and men.

It is evident in many other ancient literary texts that weaving was employed as a metaphor for order, balance, harmony, storytelling and creativity. In Homer's narrative, Helen weaves a double-fold purple tapestry which depicts scenes from the Trojan War. Helen is presented in the story weaving at the moment in which a battle between two men is being fought that will determine her future.[71] Denied the ability to choose her fate and speak for herself amidst the disorder and chaos, she retreats to the activity of weaving to restore a semblance of balance and to voice her fears and hopes.[72] Through weaving she finds a form of agency, and is able to record a version of events as she herself sees them. This story will live on after her as her *kleos* and her voice will be preserved for future generations.[73]

Weaving as agency or storytelling is further evident in Ovid's story of Philomela.[74] Ovid describes in detail the abduction, rape and imprisonment of Philomela by her sister's husband, Tereus. After regaining her senses Philomela vows to tell of the crime and even to scream out against Tereus' actions to all of earth and heaven. Angered by the power of her voice and afraid, Tereus cuts out her tongue, leaving her mute. Philomela remains captive for a year and devises a plan to weave the tale of her capture and send it to her sister. Philomela is able to weave the story in such a way that Procne immediately recognizes what has happened and is able to locate and free Philomela. Philomela's weaving enables her to present a material representation of her silent and immaterial speech, and she is given what Sophocles' describes as "the voice of the shuttle."[75] While this is by no means a comprehensive account of weaving in Greek literature, within these select texts weaving afforded women the means to weave creative and even figural narrative scenes which could reflect their identity. Despite

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[71]   Maria Pantelia, "Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer", *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 114, No. 4 (1993): 495
[72]   Ibid., 498
[73]   Pantelia, "Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer": 495
[74]   Evy Haland, "Athena's Peplos: Weaving as a Core Female Activity in Ancient and Modern Greece", *Cosmos: The journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society* Vol. 20, (2006): 170
[75]   Geoffrey Hartman, "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature". *The Review of Metaphysics,* Vol. 23 No. 2: 240

severe limitations, including the threat of violence, weaving gave women a voice.

Images of Wool Work

In her extensive analysis of images of textile production Sheramy Bundrick argues that textile production became an increasingly popular subject in Classical Athens and was largely depicted on vases intended for use by women.[76] Her statistical analysis of vase shapes is significant. While it is impossible to attain conclusive results from existing evidence, statistics indeed reflect that these images were placed increasingly on vases used by women such as the lekythos or pyxis.[77] It is possible to conclude that these images were therefore deemed appropriate for women, or of interest for them to view.

Despite the extensive use of weaving as a metaphor for storytelling in literature, very few vases depict women in the act of weaving at looms, let alone producing figural tapestry. If elaborate pictorial narratives were possible in weaving it could be difficult to depict these in detail in vase paintings, and scholars have also argued that looms would have been difficult to spatially render.[78] However, there are a large variety of vases which depict items associated with wool-work, and it is possible to also analyze these to discuss textile production. This section presents example images of mythological women who weave and spin, mortal or citizen women engaged in textile production, and images of women where a *kalathos* is present.

Vases which depict images of women working with wool contain a wide range of iconographic motifs which defy easy categorization. Often in scholarship images on these vases are placed into two broad categories: scenes where women actually do work, and scenes where wool work implements are held or are present.[79] While it is true that these distinctions exist, there are a range of iconographic motifs within these images. Vases which do depict the act of weaving offer valuable visual manifestations of the Greek loom. There are also a few remaining scenes where many women weave, either in the context of weaving as a social activity or perhaps as an activity associated with worship.

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[76] Bundrick, "Fabric of The City", *Hesperia,* 289 - 290
[77] Ibid.
[78] Lena Loven, "Textile Production, Female Work and Social Values in Athenian Vase Painting", in *Perspectives on Ancient Greece* ed. Schallin, Stockholm (Athens: Svenska Institutet, 2013): 141
[79] Bundrick, "Fabric of the City", *Hesperia:* 286 and Loven, "Textile Production, Female Work and Social Values in Athenian Vase Painting", in *Perspectives on Ancient Greece:* 138

The majority of images which contain wool working implements, or women who are engaged with wool work, depict the *kalathos*. Elisabeth Trinkl calls for further analysis of the iconography of the *kalathos* in her article on the wool basket.[80] Trinkl notes that the *kalathos* had a variety of functions. Her study of basketry allows her to distinguish those vessels that were used to contain wool as round baskets without lids or handles which have a cylindrical, wide-mouthed and upward flaring body.[81] She argues that images of tools needed for wool-working may have broader symbolic connotations, as illustrations from antiquity make use of a repertoire of codes to present complex meaning.[82] The *kalathos*, interpreted within the context of a domestic setting, is viewed as a further metaphor for the harmony of the *oikos*.[83] Yet it is also an element which situates the narrative of the scene within the context of wool work. Images containing a *kalathos* allow for other items present to be analyzed as complex symbols which are perhaps related to textile production.

Athena's Peplos

There are many examples of mythological women who are associated with wool work, and wool work also played a part in religious worship. Weaving was a central part of the most important Athenian festival, the *Panathenaia*. Each year a peplos was presented to Athena Polias, and the presentation of this dress required a procession and marked the beginning of the New Year.[84] The creation and presentation of this garment is an indicator of the importance of women's social roles in both the *oikos* and the *polis*. The creation of the object was surrounded by ritual and took nine months to complete, with young girls, young women, and married women all involved.[85] The peplos was woven in many bright colours, and usually the background was saffron-yellow, a colour associated regularly with female deities. Moreover, the peplos depicted a story. The subject is repeatedly mentioned as Athena overcoming Enkelados in the battle of Gods and Giants, an appropriate tale to offer thanks for Athena's protection of the city.[86] The procession is displayed on the Parthenon frieze and was led by

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[80]   Eliabeth Trinkl, "The Wool Basket: Function, Depiction and the Meaning of the Kalathos" in *Greek and Roman Textiles and Dress: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* ed. Mary Harlow and Marie Louise Nosch, (Oxford: Oxbrow Books, 2014), 191

[81]   Ibid, 191

[82]   Ibid.

[83]   Ibid, 202

[84]   Haland, "Athena's Peplos: Weaving as a Core Female Activity in Ancient and Modern Greece": 155

[85]   Ibid., 156

[86]   Ibid., 159

female weavers who presented the peplos and dressed the cult statue of Athena in her new garment.[87]

Figs. 1, 2. New York, Metropolitan Museum
31.11.10, *ABV* 154.57, BAD 310485.

There are a few surviving vases which depict several women weaving that may be related to such festivals. Although it is impossible to conclusively say that these images represent women weaving Athena's peplos, these vases do provide depictions of women who are weaving a cloth of such scale and importance that the involvement of many women is required. A vase by the Amasis painter in the Met Museum depicts a scene of eleven women who are dying wool, spinning wool, weaving at an upright loom and folding finished products (Fig 1, 2).[88] The women themselves are dressed in decorated or perhaps embroidered garments, and are therefore of status. There are elements of the vase which support an analysis of this as the creation of Athena's peplos. The two figures engaged in weaving appear decidedly smaller and younger than all other figures, and it is possible that they represent Arrephoroi, the girls aged between seven and twelve who were dedicated to weaving the peplos.[89] The figures which line the shoulder of the vase also appear to be women engaged in a dance or a procession on one side, while on the other a host of figures approach a central seated figure.

A comparable vase in the Louvre also depicts seven women engaged in various aspects of weaving, and on the other side a group of deities

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[87]   Haland, "Athena's Peplos", 160
[88]   New York, Metropolitan Museum 31.11.10, *ABV* 154.57, BAD 310485.
[89]   Haland, "Athena's Peplos", 156

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surrounding the central figure of Athena.[90] Athena's peplos is important to a discussion of the place of weaving in Ancient Greece, as it is evident that both the textile product and those who created it were highly valued by Athenian society. Perhaps the few remaining depictions of many citizen women involved in large-scale weaving on vases can also be seen to acknowledge weaving as a highly valued social skill.

Fig. 3. Chiusi, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 1831,
ABV 1300.2, BAD 216789.

Penelope

Possibly the most famous example of a crafty woman from mythology is Penelope in the Odyssey, who promises to choose a suitor once she completes weaving a funeral shroud. Penelope works at her loom during the day and secretly unravels her weaving by night, buying herself time to wait for Odysseus and restore the harmony of her *oikos.* Most identifiable images of Penelope do not depict her working at her loom, and she is rather shown in the moment before recognizing Odysseus. Although Penelope no longer needs to weave to trick her suitors in the famous image on a skyphos by the Penelope painter, the loom forms the backdrop to Penelope's narrative (Fig. 3).[91]

This vase is particularly striking and useful because the loom is depicted in such detail and with such clarity. An upright loom is shown with indications of a warp and weft and is weighted with loom weights which control and separate strands of spun wool. While this is a depiction of a mythological scene and cannot be interpreted as reality, the artist would have drawn from prior knowledge of existing forms, and the vase provides one of the few visual documents of figural weaving. Penelope's upright

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[90]   Paris, Musee de Louvre F224, *ABV 320.5*, BAD 301676.
[91]   Chiusi, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 1831, *ABV* 1300.2, BAD 216789.
         Image accessed via www.college.columbia.edu

loom here would not have provided her with enough tension to create what we might call true tapestry, but it is possible that figural patterns on textiles existed even prior to the geometric period in vase paintings and would continue to develop into tapestries resembling wall paintings.[92] The vase therefore remains one of the only visual representations of textiles which indicates the complexity of pattern employed and highlights the level of skill involved in creating these artworks.

Fig. 4. Spinning Aphrodite from Elmer Suhr, "The Spinning Aphrodite in the Minor Arts."

Aphrodite

While it is Athena who is most associated with weaving, Aphrodite is more often depicted engaged in wool work on vases. Aphrodite is usually described as the goddess of sexual desire, yet alongside physical desire she is also the goddess of love and can be linked to fertility and creation. On a lekythos in Berlin Aphrodite's relationship to both spinning and cosmic creation are evident. (fig. 4)[93] In his article on images of Aphrodite spinning, Elmer Suhr provides analysis of vases which he argues have been consistently misinterpreted.[94] He argues that scholarship at this time remains ignorant of "spinning as a symbol of creation" and does not acknowledge Aphrodite's association with "the elemental force of fertility."[95] The iconography of the vase could certainly be analyzed as symbolic of fertility and spring, and therefore of the creation of life. Aphrodite, surrounded by Ares and Eros, rides on the back of a swan against

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[92]   Haland, "Athena's Peplos": 158

[93]   Image available in Elmer Suhr, "The Spinning Aphrodite in the Minor Arts", *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 67, no.1, (1963): (pl. 13, fig. 2)

[94]   Suhr, "The Spinning Aphrodite in the Minor Arts": 64

[95]   Ibid., 65

the backdrop of a full moon. Suhr argues that when comparing the position of Aphrodite's arms to other images of women spinning, we can conclude that she is engaged in the activity of spinning thread.[96] The swan which Aphrodite rides is a water bird and signals the return of spring. The moon is the controller over water from where all life sprang, and Aphrodite herself emerges from the sea in mythology. Riding over the ocean while spinning the thread of life she signals the return of spring and rain, representing new life and creation.

Fig. 5. The Spinning Aphrodite from Elmer Suhr, "The Spinning Aphrodite in the Minor Arts."

On a kylix in Leningrad Aphrodite's connection to spinning is clear, and it is this vase that presents a model for many other images of mortal women in wool working scenes (fig. 5).[97] Aphrodite is depicted engaged in the act of spinning thread from wool in a *kalathos* which is placed beside her. In one hand she holds the distaff used for spinning and with the other she holds the unspun wool. Her body is turned towards an attendant who holds out a mirror. Aphrodite is depicted gazing at her reflection while spinning. In this image, Aphrodite is not engaged in her role as mediator of physical desire but is rather Aphrodite Urania, goddess of the moon and creation, who represents celestial love of body and soul. An archaic triple Aphrodite was also believed to be older than time and representative of the three aspects

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[96] Ibid., 64

[97]   Image available in Elmer Suhr, "The Spinning Aphrodite in the Minor Arts", *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 67, no.1, (1963): (pl. 13, fig. 1)

of the fates, or Moerae.[98] She is later associated with Clotho, the spinner, and all three fates are linked to mystic wisdom and divine knowledge.[99] Aphrodite looking in her mirror may not merely be an exercise in vanity or an act of desire, but possibly an exercise in self-reflection and in locating truth and wisdom within herself.

There are also further complex mythological scenes which employ the combined motifs of mirror and *kalathos*. On the front of a red-figure skyphos, currently in the Bible Lands Museum, a figure labelled Thebe retreats from a figure identified as Demeter.[100] On the other side a figure labelled Salamis extends her arms towards a figure carrying a *kalathos* and a mirror. This vase has been discussed in relation to the polis as a visual representation of the political relationship between Thebes, Salamis, and Athens.[101] Yet it is equally plausible, if the identification of the unnamed figures is accurate, that the vase represents aspects of female religious festivals such as the Thesmophoria or perhaps even aspects of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The figure holding the *kalathos* and mirror has been identified as Persephone, as she performs a parallel role on the vase to Demeter. Demeter holds a septre and phiale, used for libation in worship, towards the nymph Thebe. The figure of Thebe may also be viewed as the personification of the island which is home to a sanctuary of Demeter and

Persephone. On the reverse Persephone holds a *kalathos* and extends a mirror to Salamis, the island which the sanctuary at Eleusis overlooks. Although it is impossible to conclusively identify this figure as Persephone, within the context of the vase the figure holding the mirror and *kalathos* certainly appears connected to both fertility and worship. While the figures of Thebe, Demeter and Salamis have been examined, it appears that the key symbols of the mirror and *kalathos* have received less attention.

Fig. 6. Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago 1916.410

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[98] Kelly, "Spinning the Thread, Weaving the Web, Images of Women Spinning and Weaving in Western Art", 19

[99] Ibid.

[100] Jerusalem, Bible Lands Museum 4771, BAD 1066

[101] Amy Smith, *Polis and Personification in Classical Athenian Art*. (Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill: 2011): 32

The Mirror

The symbol of a mirror in the context of a mortal wool-working scene has been interpreted as either simply a marker of a domestic interior or as an indicator that the woman is a hetaera.[102] Aphrodite was the goddess of hetaera, and associated with both spinning and the mirror. It is certainly not impossible that these women could be hetaera, and weaving was a creative process practiced by women of all status. Yet regardless of the spinning hetaera debate, it remains essential to address fully the symbol of the mirror, an object which does not simply relate to sexual desire.

It is the act of looking in a mirror while engaged in spinning that reoccurs as a motif in the depiction of mortal everyday women in vases, and a similar image to that of Aphrodite spinning by her mirror can be found on a vase in the Chicago Art Institute. (fig. 6)[103] This vase depicts a woman spinning flanked by a heron and an attendant holding a mirror. Within this image too we find symbols of fertility in the water bird, of creation through the spinning of thread, and of self-reflection in the mirror. An assessment of the mirror as an active symbol in these scenes might reveal its relationship to textile production. In scenes where women are holding both a mirror and a *kalathos* it appears that there is a direct relationship between a woman looking at her reflection and wool-work. This motif is rendered in detail on a red-figure lekythos by the pan painter.[104] In the majority of these scenes a woman may be spinning and looking into a mirror held by an attendant or holding a mirror herself while a *kalathos* is placed at her feet.

While artists have used the mirror as a symbol of vanity, the mirror has also been used as a symbol for identity, the soul, creativity, truth, magic, knowledge, and self-reflection. The concept of self-reflection in encapsulated in the complex maxim "know thyself" by the oracle at Delphi, a key philosophical concept in Ancient Greece which has been interpreted in a number of ways.[105] In discussions between Plato and Socrates "know thyself" is a warning to remember not to be boastful and know one's place, and to "know thyself" is also viewed as significant as one cannot understand the wider world without first understanding one's own nature.[106]

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[102] For a discussion of heitara in the textile industry and the mirror as a vanity item see Marina Fischer, "Anicent Greek Prostitutes and the Textile Industry in Attic Vase Painting ca. 550-450 b.c.e", Classical World, Vol. 106, No. 2, Winter 2013: 223, 249

[103] Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago 1916.410, Image accessed via The Art Institute of Chicago, www.artic.edu

[104] Brussels, Biblioteque Royale 10, *ABV* 556.110, BAD 206353

[105] The maxim is discussed throughout Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 translated by Harold N. Fowler

[106] Ibid., 48c

Knowing oneself through reflection is central to the myth of Narcissus, and within this myth we find themes of desire and knowledge. Narcissus is both deceived and comes to know himself through his reflection.[107] The reflection in the pool becomes simultaneously a symbol of illusion and self-knowledge. Significantly, Narcissus is later identified as the first artist because he embraces the surface of the pool as reality.[108] He becomes a painter of his own image and his reflection acts as a portrait which is so convincing that he believes and participates in his own illusion. The symbol of the mirror could therefore simultaneously represent the necessity of self-reflection and the search for knowledge, while also referencing the danger of imagery and the creation of illusion.

In the context of scenes that involve wool-work, gazing into a mirror appears alongside the production of textiles and perhaps the activities can be linked. Both weaving and looking into a mirror can be symbolic for the construction of images. Both activities appear to be reserved for women in vase painting. A gendered reading of these symbols allows us to consider the role of the gaze in the construction of identity and performativity. In many of these images the mirror allows the woman, to borrow Berger's phrase, to be "continually accompanied by her own image of herself."[109] If read in this way, weaving and gazing in the mirror might both be considered activities that allowed women to construct an identity. However, the ability for women to construct their own identity and have agency was viewed as problematic in Ancient Greece. While speculative, images of ideal housewives on vases alongside didactic myths may be designed to reinforce the maxim 'know thyself'. Perhaps these images reinforce for women the importance of knowing oneself through a process of reflection that enables creative expression, but also of knowing one's place and the boundaries of one's creativity.

Fig. 7. New York, Metropolitan Museum 41.162.147, *ABV* 733.62, BAD 209053.

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107   Heather Goscilo, "Vision, Vanitas, and Veritas: The Mirror in Art", *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature*. Vol. 34 no. 2, (2010): 282

108   Kelly, "Spinning the Thread, Weaving the Web", 19

109   John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (Britain: Penguin 1972): 46

Women Juggling

The discussion of images which are symbolic for the creation of illusion extends to images in which women are depicted juggling. These images too take place in the context of wool working scenes. Women are represented juggling balls of wool which they have picked up from their *kalathos*. Scenes with juggling depict women equally in a group and alone, and the act of juggling is represented through several balls of wool arching through the air. Although there are accounts of men juggling in Ancient Greece it appears that artists chose to predominantly depict juggling as an activity performed by women.

The popularity of images of women juggling coincides with the popularity of wool working scenes from 550 – 450 BC. It appears that a depiction of a *kalathos* can be identified in the majority of juggling scenes. There are several well-preserved depictions, including a lekythos in the Met Museum in which a sole woman is standing over her *kalathos* and throwing three balls of wool into the air (fig 7).[110] Scenes featuring multiple women and juggling are also common, and a Hydria in a New York collection depicts a seated woman juggling next to a *kalathos* in the company of two other women.[111]

Particularly interesting are scenes of multiple women in which various symbols previously discussed are combined within a narrative. In a red-figure pyxis in the Toledo Museum of Art five women are depicted in a wool working scene (fig. 8, 9).[112] Two women are seated in front of *kalathoi*, one of whom is juggling. Two attendants are depicted holding a ball of wool towards them, and a fifth woman gazes into a hand-held mirror. In a red-figure pyxis in the British Museum four women are also depicted in a wool working scene.[113] Within this scene a hand-held loom, a heron, and a woman juggling are all present. Given that the activity of juggling is present in scenes which include wool-work, looking into a mirror, and symbols of fertility such as the heron, it seems possible to also examine juggling as a symbol in the context of creation.

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[110]   New York, Metropolitan Museum 41.162.147, *ABV* 733.62, BAD 209053. Image accessed via The Metropolitan Museum, www.metmuseum.org
[111]   New York, Sothebys, BAD 7155
[112]   Ohio, Toledo Museum of Art 1963.29, *ABV* 1675.94, BAD 275416. Images accessed via The Toldeo Museum of Art, www.toledomuseum.org
[113]   London, British Museum, 1907.5-19.1, BAD 2089

Figs. 8, 9. Ohio, Toledo Museum of Art 1963.29,
ABV 1675.94, BAD 275416.

The Greek words γοητεία and μαγγάνευμα for 'jugglery' have various other meanings including witchcraft and trickery.[114] The term τερατεία is also used in Greek rhetoric to describe someone who deceives others in argument, and in Lysistrata women are commanded to "cease from juggling lies."[115] Considering the literary context, it may be possible to identify images of juggling as symbolic of play and deception. In the same way that looking into a mirror creates an illusion of a subject's image, women are able to create images but also tricks and deceptions.

The ability to weave afforded women creative power, and perhaps in the context of Ancient Greece these images are a further reflection of an unease with the creativity of women. Women are capable of creating wonder, but when viewed as inherently deceptive what they will create may be understood as designed to trick. This concept of deceptive creation is exemplified in another tale of textile production, in the myth of Pamphile. Pamphile is described as both a mythological and real figure in literature.[116] In all stories she is attributed as the first woman to weave silk, yet in some versions she is identified as a sorceress. Recognized for her creativity and skill, she is also notable for her deception. Pliny the Elder describes her skill for weaving garments which simultaneously "cover a woman" and

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114   Liddell and Scott. *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon. Oxford.* (Clarendon Press. 1889)

115   Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* translated by Jack Lindsay and Norman Lindsay. (New York: Hartsdale House, 1946), 749

116   Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*. Translated by John Bostock, M.D., F.R.S. H.T. Riley, Esq., B.A. (London:Taylor and Francis, 1855), Book 11 Chapter 26.

"reveal her naked charms."[117] By all accounts, Pamphile chooses to weave the silk into transparent garments designed to incite the sexual desire of men. The figure of Pamphile exemplifies how creative power in women was both acknowledged and feared.

Re-Weaving The Textile

The further analysis of scenes which contain a *kalathos* alongside these other symbols could reveal more information regarding images of wool work. To say that the *kalathos* and the mirror are merely markers of a domestic interior is too simplistic. These brief notes merely suggest that with these same motifs repeated it becomes increasingly necessary to question their importance. Particularly in the case of women juggling, there are a range of vases which depict this motif, and it appears that the activity became symbolic and that these images held significance. Although analysis of these symbols may never prove conclusive, examining the relationship between symbols within these scenes offers new possible meanings which both support and extend previous analysis.

Images of women with mirrors and wool baskets may also still be read as reinforcing social ideals. It is possible to view these scenes as simultaneously depicting the ideal domestic woman and as images of creation. It is evident that wool-work was not only a practical task for survival, but it was also a creative activity through which women were able to construct identity. Perhaps even if it is impossible to examine physical textiles and study them as art, it is possible to find evidence that vases acknowledge the creative power of women within the parameters of Ancient Greek society.

In her comprehensive study of images of women weaving and spinning across the ages, Nanette Kelly argues that depictions of women engaged in wool work must be acknowledged as rare visualizations of women of the past working as artists.[118] Addressing the history of Western representations of women working wool, she concludes that in spite of severe limitations women were able to maintain artistic energy.[119] Within contemporary art artists continue to challenge the heirarchical classification of different media. Artists also continue to be influenced by Ancient Greeks and their stories of weaving.

Tatiana Blass' installation *Penelope* takes its name from the Greek myth (fig.10).[120] The red carpet, representing the harmony and nobility of the interior or perhaps *oikos,* is unwoven and escapes outwards into the garden

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117   Ibid.
118   Kelly, "Spinning the Thread, Weaving the Web": 8
119   Kelly, "Spinning the Thread, Weaving the Web, 105
120   Tatiana Blass, *Penelope,* 2011, carpet loom and wool, located at the Chapel of Morumbi. Image accessed via http://www.tatianablass.com.br

enveloping the entire house. Read from exterior to interior, the tangled, external, and creative chaos of Penelope is filtered through her loom to create balance, harmony, and beauty. Yet we know that Penelope was in the process of continually unravelling her work. Read from interior to exterior the scope of her creative power consumes the entire household and runs free far beyond the confines of the *oikos*. As a woman she is simultaneously creative but also destructive, powerfully chaotic and rationally ordered, and her greatest act of creativity is also one of the greatest acts of deception and cunning. It is possible that within Greek vase painting artists demonstrated through complex symbolism an understanding of female creativity. In the select examples from literature discussed, the creative ability of women is acknowledged as both powerful and dangerous. And certainly, as Blass visually represents, Penelope's art and her life-thread are considered forces with which to be reckoned.

Fig. 10. Tatiana Blass, *Penelope,* 2011, carpet loom and wool, located at the Chapel of Morumbi.

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