

Non-Linear Temporal Constructs and the Loss of Self in Edgard Varese's Octandre, Jackson Pollock's Lavender Mist, and Robert Penn Warren's Being Here

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Abstract

Prior studies in art, music and poetry have explored the use and meaning of non-linear time, some of which also examine the loss of 'self' as a corollary to the disruption of continuous time constructs. Kaelin (1988), Warren (1990), Jackson (1988) and others, focus on the role of the 'self' in modernist poetry which uses what Warren calls 'freeze time' or the 'frozen moment.' Altieri (1989), and Crozier (1984) explore general relationships between modernist art and poetry without touching specifically on the element of time. Kramer (1988) explores the ways in which time functions in music and defines three temporal modes which exist along the continuum between goal-directed linear time, on one hand, and non-linear (vertical) time on the other. Kramer and Neytcheva (2001) also offer analyses of musical works as examples of ways in which these modes may be articulated. Morgan (1977) provides especially insightful revelations into the minimalization of time in the work of composer Charles Ives. Yet, no one has explored parallels which exist with regard to the use of time in all three (art, music, poetry) disciplines. For example, Jackson's thorough understanding of the changed relationship between the poet and 'the other self' found in non-linear poetry can assist us in our understanding of music which exists in multiply-directed time (Kramer 1988) and also in our interpretation of abstract art which provides no obvious framework for the definition of time and space. This article will focus on parallels which exist between works by Jackson Pollock, Edgard Varese and Robert Penn Warren in order to demonstrate that similarities in these disparate art forms, once realized, can assist in the interpretation and understanding of works by other modernist and post-modern artists.

The sound of water flowing is

An image of Time, and therefore
Truth is all and
Must be respected, and
On the other side of the mirror into which
At morning, you will stare, History
Gathers, condenses, crouches, breathes, waits. History
Stares forth at you through the eyes which
You think are the reflections of
Your own eyes in the mirror.
Ah, Monsieur du Mirror!

Your whole position must be reconsidered.

– Robert Penn Warren, *Tale of Time*

Time and the Awareness of 'Self'

The awareness of time helps define our existence as human beings. Recent studies in the cognitive sciences support the notion that because human beings function within a well-defined timescape, our perception of reality and relationship to objects in that reality is largely defined by the measure of time (past, present, future).¹ Creative works existing outside 'the three extases of time' become encapsulated into the here and now, causing 'a new understanding of self' or a 'presencing' on the part of the observer. In this case, the interpreter of a non-linear work constructs an awareness of the work based on a personal view of reality rather than one grounded within predominate cultural or social boundaries. Works which exhibit a linear depiction of time more closely resemble the patterns found in life. It follows that the ability to comprehend and respond to a work of artistic expression must then depend largely on the capacity for determining a frame of reference for the passage of time.

Modernist work, by definition, often disassociates itself with works of the past and accordingly the notion of a shared tradition between creator and viewer.² The absence of a shared tradition puts into question the existence of the past as an element in the continuum of time, its relationship to the present and the perception of the future. The Modernist's explicit need to make creative work personal and individual cause it to be viewed outside pre-determined historical contexts, thus disorienting the receptor's sense of past in relation to the present or the future expressed (or not expressed) by the work.

If the identity of 'self' is determined by one's perception of the present, its past and the future, the loss of time in a creative work might then cause a re-evaluation of the 'self'. Because text references are more literal than sounds and abstract visual objects, the poet, more than the artist or the composer, uses the passage of time to create the boundaries of reality found in a poem. It follows that the reader's own existence is thus threatened when the passage of time is denied. The manipulation of time, in a poetic sense, causes one to re-evaluate the place of 'self' in relation to the poetry and to the 'real' world.

This article will begin by examining non-linear time constructs in the poetry of Robert Penn Warren. It will then examine the music of Edgard Varese and the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock in order to demonstrate that, though the non-linear relationships in a musical composition or a painting may be less obvious than those in literature, they are still extremely important to our understanding of the role of 'self' in these art forms. Works by Warren, Varese and Pollock were chosen because each presents clear examples of Modernist principles with regard to the treatment of time. Each work moves through time without a clear depiction of past, present or future, and each defines relationships between elements through a non-linear ordering of events.

In addition, this study will demonstrate that:

- a) art, music and poetry which exists in a non-linear time frame requires a different interpretive criteria than works which are conceived with a linear structure,
- b) the new perspective found in non-linear work changes the relationship of the observer to the artist,
- c) the observer's unique personal awareness and perception of reality (as opposed to a reality shared by others) gains increased importance in the understanding of the expression,
- d) the new perspective causes elements in the expression to form a hierarchy of importance which is different from those in works which exist in a linear time perspective), and
- e) parallels exist between works of art, music and poetry which can be useful in understanding the new relationship.

Poet Wallace Stevens explored relationships between reality and imagined reality in much of his work. Therefore, a study which focuses on the relationship between non-linear creative work and an observer's perception of reality rightly begins with a brief examination of Stevens' aesthetic. Much of Stevens' poetry constructs a unique reality as seen through the poet's imaginative sense, a process achieved when the poet distances himself from the text, often by disrupting the natural flow of time. The passage of time has little significance for a reality which exists only in the mind:

The subject matter of poetry is not that collection of solid objects extended in space but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. His own measure as a poet, in spite of all the passions of all the lovers of truth, is the measure of a power to abstract himself, and to withdraw with him into his abstraction the reality on which lovers of truth insist. He must be able to abstract himself and also to abstract reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination.³

Stevens points to the ability of the poet to construct a reality embedded in the imagination which is separate from life. 'Abstract' is the key word in this quote, particularly because it is used as a verb to describe the poet's abstraction from reality. Stevens might have also used the word as a noun to describe something which is non-representational. Both uses of the term are appropriate in the context of this article. Certainly, the works by Warren, Varese and Pollock in the present discussion are examples of abstract expression. But here we are concerned about the 'act' of abstraction, the process which occurs when one is confronted by a non-linear representation of time in a creative work which results in the removal of one's self from a pre-conceived reality.

Stevens suggests that the process of abstraction begins with the poet. I will suggest that the process does not end there. Rather, the interpreter of creative work also abstracts himself from perceived reality when confronted by a creative work which fails to represent time in the linear progression perceived in everyday life. A constructivist viewpoint in the cognitive sciences maintains that the perception of reality is the result of an ongoing constructive process. If this is true, I posit that non-linear time constructs require the observer to construct a new reality based on the modulation provided by the stimulus of the creative work. This new reality can be extremely personal and may have no bearing on the original inspiration for the work's creation. The individuality of the response may also help to explain why non-linear works inspire wide ranging interpretations in published literature.

Non-linearity in Robert Penn Warren's Safe in Shade

This article will begin by examining the passage of time in the poetry of Robert Penn Warren, a poet of the generation following Stevens who, in his late works, explored the nature of existence in direct relation to the perception of time. Like philosopher Martin Heidegger, Warren viewed the passage of time as the purveyor of one's identity, a concept deeply connected with Heidegger's idea of self-referential 'presencing' in which the 'self' defines its own history in relation to its past and future, but especially through its relation to the 'now.'

Numerous works of art, music and poetry created in the 20th-century modernist and post-modern movements are meant to be understood in a perspective outside the boundaries of linear time, something poet Robert Penn Warren calls 'freeze time' or the 'frozen moment' when referring to the work of William Faulkner.⁴ Poems in Warren's collection *Being Here* (1977-1980) contain examples of 'frozen time' which jumps suddenly, like a startled horse, and runs galloping at full tilt into the future only to stop at the brink of a timeless nothingness as suddenly as the poem begins.

When viewed as a time continuum, Warren's description of a soft summer day in the poem *Safe in Shade* divides into three principle sections. The poem presents an interesting example for study because the time frame in which it exists is outside of the boundaries of a natural existence. Time refuses to behave in expected ways partly due to the absence of any meaningful action, nor dialogue, on the part of the protagonists. Rather, the elements in the prose appear to be frozen, as if in a still frame, waiting with pregnant pause for something vital to happen.

For Warren, time defines existence, the 'self'. The awareness of one's predecessors creates a link between those who lived in the past with those who exist in the present, and those who will come in the future. Warren and his characters ponder the meaning of time with a mysticism which permits the past, present, and future to exist simultaneously. Richard Jackson explains that 'the very structure of 'links' and 'chains,' which establishes presence in so many of Warren's poems, also produces gaps between sections where absence opens up.'⁵ This referential structure of presence is most vulnerable when the continuity of the 'now' is broken. Warren's depiction of time is influenced by Faulkner's technique of the 'still moment' as Warren attests in an interview:

That's the frozen moment. Freeze time. Somewhere, almost in a kind of pun, Faulkner himself uses the image of a frieze for such a moment of frozen action. Some of those moments harden up an event, give it its meaning by holding it fixed. Time fluid versus time fixed - In Faulkner's work that's the drone behind the drama. Take a look at Hemingway; there's no time in Hemingway, there are only moments in themselves, moments of action...Everything is outside of the time process...But in Faulkner...a tremendous flux is there, things flowing away in all directions... You have the sense of the small becoming large in time, the large becoming small, the sweep of time over things. That, and the balance of the frozen, abstracted moment against violent significant action.⁶

In *Safe in Shade*, the first section (six stanzas) describes a single moment in time when a boy sits 'safe and secure' in the shadow of the cedar tree in the company of an elder. Two generations sit side by side, one looking at the past, the other trying to make sense of the past by looking into the future. The first stanza describes an old man. The second introduces the narrator as a boy, waiting for the old man to speak. Here the two generations sit motionless together, the boy yearning to know about life,

the old man contemplating its meaning. Through the first six stanzas time appears frozen. Though steeped in description, no action is recorded save the indistinct stirring of the ambience around them in stanza five:

Around us in our shade and hush
Roared summer's fierce fecundity,
And the sun struck down,
In blare and dazzle, on the myth of the world, but we
Safe in the bourne of distance and shade,
Sat so silent that, from woods coming down
To the whitewashed fence but yards behind me,
I heard the secret murmur and hum
That in earth, on leaf, in air, seethed. Heard
One jay, outraged, scream.
The old blue eyes, they fixed on me.⁷

Stanza six repeats the single sentence from stanza three: 'I waited for him to speak.' and adds 'He spoke.' Yet the old man doesn't speak. We learn nothing about the old man for he offers nothing the reader can use which might assist in the development of his character.

The second major section begins at stanza seven which shifts at warp speed into a timeless vortex of unknown, but significant, events in the life of the narrator who reflects on 'That paradox the world exemplifies'. Time reels forward to the present where, in stanza eight, the narrator takes fleeting time as his subject and he looks to the future.

The final section starts when stanza nine asks simply 'Where is my cedar tree?' Stanza ten asks 'Where is the Truth-oh, unambiguous-Thereof?' This final stanza leaves the reader hanging somewhere between the present and the future, yet cycles back to the start of the poem with an unanswerable question. We are left unfulfilled in a timeless nether-land, hanging in mid-air like the wisp of smoke rising from the old man's pipe 'to thread the cedar bark'.

Non-linearity in the first movement of Octandre by Edgard Varese

Music exists fundamentally within the domain of time; art in less obvious ways. Thus the passage of time is more clearly represented in music than in art or poetry and, in fact, can be considered one of the most basic elements controlled by the composer in the creation of a musical work. This is affirmed by composer Earle Brown when he states, 'One should compose as little as possible, because the more one composes the more one gets in the way of time becoming the governing metaphor of music'.⁸ Brown's quote has two parts: the first confirms a detachment between artist and work, and the second expresses the importance time plays in the formation of musical meaning. Here a common theme emerges with the previous discussion of 'Safe in Shade' regarding the detachment of narrator (i.e. poet) from the work itself. In music, as in poetry, the detachment of 'self', and the increased focus on the Other, results from the temporary suspension of time, an odd attribute for an artistic form (music) so based in the domain of time.

The notion of non-linear vs. linear time in music is particularly complex owing to the interaction of pulse, meter, rhythmic pattern and tempo on the perception of passing time. Indeed, Jonathan Kramer has compiled a list of over 850 publications which discuss the role of time in music.⁹ However, as I will demonstrate in this article, the five classifications of time in music defined by Kramer can also be used when drawing parallels between art, music and poetry. These classifications are: goal-directed linear time, multiply-directed time, moment time, non-directed linear time, and vertical time.

This article will focus on the premise that the perceived disruption of linear time in music causes musical themes to be understood equally as objects in their own right as well as parts of a larger whole. Elements (musical themes) in a non-linear, i.e. non-developmental, context establish more complex relationships than in music perceived to progress linearly because

pre-existing assumptions about vertical and horizontal pitch relations, musical intervals, levels of dissonance, rhythmic patterns, timbral and textural changes, do not operate as in works which progress linearly. Relationships are determined anew with each work, unfolding as the work progresses until finally revealed when the work concludes. Edward T. Cone calls this process 'synthesis' when referring to the work of Stravinsky.¹⁰ Kramer classifies a piece consisting of multiple linear sections ordered in a manner which does not suggest logical continuity as being in 'multiply-directed time'. He uses Debussy's *Jeux* as an early example of work functioning in this temporal mode, one which set the stage for later works by Stravinsky, Messiaen, and Stockhausen¹¹. Multiply-directed time becomes 'moment' time when internally static sections appear to be self-contained and do not appear to connect with other sections within the work¹². Karlheinz Stockhausen describes moment form as one where 'Every present moment counts, as well as no moment at all; a given moment is not merely regarded as the consequence of the previous one and the prelude to the coming one, but as something individual, independent, and centered in itself, capable of existing on its own.'¹³

The use of non-linear time in the music of Varese may relate to Varese's awareness of Debussy. Malcolm MacDonald confirms this notion when he traces Varese's lineage to 'three of Europe's leading composers - Debussy, Busoni, and Richard Strauss'¹⁴. The first movement of Varese's *Octandre*, Debussy's *Jeux* and Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* all juxtapose sections consisting of contrasting musical material and avoid the use of transitional material. One can find numerous Modernist works which exhibit these characteristics.

Formally, the entire first movement of *Octandre* can be viewed as an arch comprised of five sections consisting of the initial oboe melody ('A' in mm. 1-9) followed by a 'repeated' note pattern ('B' in mm. 10-18), a center section built around a theme consisting of alternating semitonal clusters 'C' in mm. 19-24), a return of the repeated note pattern ('B' in mm. 26-29) and a transposed shortened version of the initial oboe solo ('A' in mm. 30-32) based on the initial four notes of the piece or a pattern ABCBA.

Typically, the arch form consists of five sections which work toward the middle and then back to the beginning as it moves toward the end of the piece. When the fourth and fifth sections develop material from the first and second sections (ABCB'A'), the arch form could be construed as a linear, developmental form bearing the shape of a Western dramatic curve. The piece under discussion does not present developed material. Rather, section B' presents material from section B in highly altered form which bears little resemblance to the initial presentation, and section A' presents material from section A in truncated and transposed form, thus denying the suggestion of true development. More significantly, the reverse ordering of sections after the half-way point suggests time stalling. In the case where a piece avoids a developmental progression of ideas in the second B and A sections, Paul Wilson (1992) sees a unidirectional process in which 'The large symmetrical design seems initially to create a static framework that denies or constricts the process'.¹⁶ In his analysis of Bartok's *Fifth Quartet*, Wilson continues:

The basic point here is simply that, no matter how much emphasis Bartok (or subsequent commentators on his music) have placed upon the symmetry and balance of the arch form, the musical actuality is a far more evolutionary and directional process than the symmetrical plan alone suggests. Within that evolution the first two movements of the Quartet are originating events, while the last two serve both as transforming memories and as opening to the (uncompleted?) future. One effect of the arch is thus the tension between corresponding similarities and the transforming passage of time. These two movements embody that tension within the larger setting of the Quartet.¹⁷

The arch form can be considered analogous to the poetic 'frozen moment' when it lacks developmental linearity which, combined with the reversal back into itself after the mid-point, causes the form to resemble a circle more than a linear time line.

Because the first movement of *Octandre* (1924) is non-developmental, a factor which contributes to its non-linearity, this piece presents the listener 'not that collection of solid objects extended in space but the life that is lived in the scene that it

composes.¹⁵ Musical themes do not transform into varied forms, rather they present themselves to the listener in different guises, as though observed from different angles through altering shades of light. They reveal themselves as multi-dimensional objects whose details are observed in no particular order not, as in the bulk of Western literature, as objects which develop in a single dimension from beginning to end.

On a more minute structural level, the first movement of *Octandre* exhibits elements of linearity and non-linearity within individual sections as well. Despite the angular, wide intervals of the oboe solo and the juxtaposition of sections based on contrasting material, section 'A' exhibits an overall melodic fluidity of the cantabile style which permeates the melodic texture.

Figure 1: Varese *Octandre*, Mvt. 1, mm. 1 - 9

Peremptory hints of future events occur rarely, the only obvious instance occurring in mm. 5-6 where the initial clarinet entrance introduces characteristics of the repeated-note motif on which the second section is built.

While the movement consists of three principal themes, the ingredients for the entire piece can be found in the initial oboe solo. The inter-connectedness of pitch materials in the piece, stemming from the creation of secondary and tertiary themes drawn from the primary theme, might normally suggest a developmental structure. However, for this to be the case, the relationship between the three themes would have to be clear to the listener. While every listener brings a different perspective to the listening experience, an examination of the themes in the piece suggests that connections between the melodic materials is difficult to discern even after repeated listening. First, the initial theme defies traditional concepts of melodic voice leading by skipping back and forth in wide leaps of major sevenths and minor ninths. The oboe solo in the first four measures uses ten of the 12 notes in the chromatic scale.

Figure 2: Pitch set used in Varese *Octandre*, Mvt. 1, Oboe, mm. 1-4

In measures eight and nine the oboe repeats the process leaving out two different notes this time. The melody never settles around any single pitch, leaving harmonic implications very ambiguous. Intervals found in the first four notes: major ninth - major seventh - semitone predominate in the oboe solo. While these intervals are repeated several times, they are stark and unusual intervals for an audience versed in tonal music and hardly memorable from a melodic point of view. Quite the opposite, the repeated note pattern of the second theme can hardly be called a melody at all, as it is based on single pitches repeated many times (oboe in m. 13-15) or held over long periods (bassoon in m. 13-15, 16-17). See Figure 3.

Fig. 3 *Octandre*, Mvt. 1, mm. 10-18

The sustained, repeated note motif bears little resemblance to the initial theme except that the tail of the first theme always ends on a note of longer duration than the preceding notes. The third theme (mm. 19-24) embodies the melodic ninths and

sevenths found in the initial theme in two ways. First, the vertical sonorities (chords) in mm. 19-24 are based on semitones which are inversionally related to the major sevenths and minor ninths of the first theme. See Figure 4.

19 ♩ = 56
Lourd et sauvage

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn.

Cb.

Bouché

sons réels

sf > p < sfff sf > p < sfff sf > p < sfff sf > p < sfff

sf > p < sfff sf > p < sfff sf > p < sfff sf > p < sfff

ffff

Fig. 4 *Octandre*, Mvt. 1, mm. 19-20 (alternating semitonal clusters)

Second, chordal successions are also based on semitonal (sometimes inverted) relationships, overtly as in mm. 22 and 24 and, perhaps less so, in mm. 19-21 and m. 23. See Figure 5 (opposite).

Measure 23 stands as something of an enigma in the piece and possibly provides the clearest example, though not the only example by any means, of structural non-linearity in the work. Here, the trumpet repeats a three-note motif heard only once before as the clarinet entrance in the first interruption of the oboe in measure five. See Figure 6

Bb Clarinet, mm. 5-6

Trumpet in C, mm. 23-24

sf pp ppp

f sfff ffff

Fig. 6: *Octandre*, Movement 1, mm. 5-6, Bb Clarinet and mm. 23-24, C Trumpet

When first heard (m. 5), the motif suggests a transition into a new section or, possibly, the introduction of a new theme. It is neither, for it divides the oboe melody into two sections (aided by the contrabass natural harmonic in mm. 6-7) and only recurs again in m. 23 played by the trumpet. One is left wondering how the clarinet utterance fits into the scheme of

Fig. 5 *Octandre*, Mvt. 1, mm. 21-24

the piece at all. Its return in m. 23 remains questionable since we never hear the motif again in the movement. The motif is simply an interruption, a disruption of the thematic flow, and the introduction of an object without relation to other objects in the movement. As a result, the purpose of the motif remains in question. But for the connection with measure 5, the motif introduces an element outside the sphere of objects heard elsewhere in the piece. The motif in measure five, and later in measure 23, stops the progression of time and casts the relationship between the listener and the work into question.

Other elements in the movement accomplish the same effect. First, sections are non-developmental with regard to ordering. Section 'A' does not logically progress to 'B' or to 'C' developmentally but rather sequentially. In other words, 'B' and 'C' present new material rather than modifying material heard previously. Then, in the fourth and fifth sections, the ordering of themes reverses itself. 'A' 'B' 'C' becomes 'C' 'B' 'A'. See Figure 7 and Figure 8.

Second, the continually changing meter in *Octandre* prevents any sense of hypermeter developing in the piece. Where the great majority of works written during the common practice period establish a constant, unchanging metrical structure within each movement of a piece, the meter changes constantly in *Octandre*. The irregularity can, in fact, be observed on many levels. Meter changes 19 times in the 32-measure movement. Metric downbeats are avoided throughout the piece as notes are tied across the bar line. Phrases frequently begin off the beat. Only in the 'C' section does Varese compose rhythms highlighting the interplay between downbeat and upbeat. See mm. 19, 21 and 22, then again in m. 24.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 25 to 27, and the second system covers measures 28 to 29. The instruments are arranged in the following order from top to bottom: Flute (Fl.), B♭ Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (C Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Cymbal (Cb.).

System 1 (mm. 25-27):

- Flute:** Measure 25 features a triplet of eighth notes. Measures 26-27 are mostly rests.
- B♭ Clarinet:** Measure 25 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measures 26-27 feature sixteenth-note patterns with accents and dynamic markings of *sf* and *sff*.
- Oboe:** Measures 26-27 feature sixteenth-note patterns with accents and a dynamic marking of *fff*.
- Bassoon:** Measures 26-27 feature sixteenth-note patterns with accents and a dynamic marking of *fff*.
- Horn:** Measures 25-27 feature quarter and eighth notes with accents. Dynamics include *ff*, *mf*, and *ff*. A triplet of eighth notes appears in measure 27.
- Trumpet:** Measures 25-27 feature quarter notes with accents. Dynamics include *mp*, *f*, and *pp*. The term *morendo* is written across measures 26-27.
- Trombone:** Measures 25-27 are mostly rests.
- Cymbal:** Measures 26-27 feature quarter notes with accents and dynamic markings of *sf>p* and *sff>*.

System 2 (mm. 28-29):

- Flute:** Measures 28-29 feature quarter notes with accents. Dynamics include *mf*, *fff*, and *pppp*. Performance directions *molto*, *rall. molto*, and *morendo* are present.
- B♭ Clarinet:** Measures 28-29 feature quarter notes with accents. Dynamics include *fff* and *pppp*.
- Oboe:** Measures 28-29 feature sixteenth-note patterns with accents. Dynamics include *fff* and *pppp*.
- Bassoon:** Measures 28-29 feature sixteenth-note patterns with accents. Dynamics include *ff*.
- Horn:** Measures 28-29 feature quarter notes with accents. Dynamics include *ff* and *pp*.
- Trumpet:** Measures 28-29 feature quarter notes with accents. Dynamics include *ff* and *pp*.
- Trombone:** Measures 28-29 feature quarter notes with accents. Dynamics include *ff* and *pp*.
- Cymbal:** Measures 28-29 feature quarter notes with accents. Dynamics include *sf>p*, *ff*, and *pp*.

Figure 7: *Octandre*, mm. 25 – 29

Where one might expect rhythmic similarities between the respective 'B' sections, only a tenuous connection exists. The most obvious, and sole, rhythmic similarities exist when the first three measures of the oboe are repeated at the end of the piece. See Figure 8.

Figure 8: mm. 30 - 32

Overall, the constantly changing rhythms and wide variety of rhythmic patterns in this piece prevents any sense of metrical regularity to develop, effectively removing meter and, to some extent, rhythm from the list of parameters which might help the listener navigate the formal structure of the piece.

Third, timbral successions help to create a formal structure as several patterns recur in the piece and each section presents unique timbral and textural combinations. First, the oboe provides timbral unity in the opening and closing 'A' sections. The 'B' section presents a rich combination of instrumental colors in no discernible progression. Then, in section 'C', the brass trio (mm. 19 and 21) may be heard as a unit in contrast to the woodwind quintet plus contrabass in (mm. 20, 22 and 24).

As might be expected, Varese puts all instruments together (measures 15, 23, 24 and 29) at climactic moments, such as internal cadences and closing sections. For example, section 'B' reaches a high point in measure 15 when all eight instruments are heard playing simultaneously. After four measures of alternating brass trio and woodwind quintet measure 23 sets up the climactic moment in section 'C' (m. 24) where all eight players finish the large melodic skips.

Were it not for the return of the 'A' and 'B' material after the 'C' section, *Octandre* might function in 'moment' time, a classification attributed to works in which 'there is nothing in a subsequent section that follows from a potential implication in an earlier section.'¹⁸ In fact, the 'B' section and, especially, the oboe theme at the end of the first movement establish a moment of stability by 'explicit association,' repeating an object heard at the beginning of the piece. The oboe theme in 'A' effectively frames the materials of the work within the initial and final statements without providing any sense of harmonic resolution. Linearity is achieved within sections, as melodic, rhythmic and timbral materials form unity within sections. However, the ordering of sections does not promote a sense of progressive forward motion, thus a linear connectedness is not evident on this larger formal level. For these reasons, I propose that the first movement of *Octandre* represents multiply-directed time, a condition which exists when implied linearity exists within sections, but sectional ordering avoids larger

relationships which might make the piece appear to progress toward a logical resolution in which later sections appear to be related to earlier sections through a natural process of evolution.

Non-linearity in the first movement of Lavender Mist by Jackson Pollock

In the 1950s, Jackson Pollock's art was heralded at the same time as the originator of a new school of gestural abstraction and the painter who 'destroyed painting.'¹⁹ In either case, his work from 1946-52 represents an approach which extended the boundaries of artistic abstraction and so presents the viewer with significant challenges in its interpretation. Pollock's drip paintings represent the middle stylistic period in the artist's output which divides the earlier cubist-derived paintings from the later return to dark representational works. The middle period paintings bear several features of relevance to the current topic for they offer little representation of time passing, nor do they place time in a context of past - present - future. Rather, the drip paintings seem to exist in a single active moment, a moment of time stretched beyond the limits of actually perceived time so that individual details of that moment may be examined in a state not replicated in the natural world. Their highly abstract nature suggests an effort by the artist to objectify the expressive content by removing both the artist and any representational content from the depiction.

The drip paintings provide examples of a visual 'moment' form. The sprawling canvas of these paintings does not sub-divide into recognizable sections. The presentation gives one the impression of a single perspective in a unified totality. This, combined with the highly abstract nature of the materials, makes the establishment of time and place nearly impossible to comprehend. One may look at the numerous published interpretations of Pollock's drip paintings to see that no consensus exists regarding the representational context of any one painting.



Figure 9: Jackson Pollock: *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*

Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist) was created from oil, enamel and aluminum on a canvas measuring 87' X 118'. The representational nature of the title should not be overly emphasized. Most of Pollock's works from this period, including *Number 1A, 1948* and *One: Number 31, 1950* are very similar to *Lavender Mist* in design but with less colorful titles.

Furthermore, Lewison suggests that 'not too much importance should be attached to Pollock's titles, since they were mostly suggested to him by other people.'²⁰ No published account suggests the painter held views on the subject whatsoever. Therefore, it seems reasonable to ignore the suggestive qualities of the title of the work under discussion and to concentrate more closely on the expressive impact of the work alone.

Number 1, 1950 is sub-divided by numerous asymmetrical black and white lines running diagonally throughout the canvas. These lines appear to be randomly placed but are so numerous as to connect with other similar lines at various junction points, causing the eye to follow one area of the painting into another. As one follows the longer, more visible black lines, the eye encounters brief interruptions in the line caused by shorter, lighter strokes or spherical jabs. Lighter, but still prominent, rounded shapes appear in pink and grey in contrast to the stark black and white lines. Other colors (turquoise, red, brown) appear very seldom as round droplets.

All of the drip paintings exhibit an extremely active surface caused by the sharp juxtaposition of contrasting colors moving in opposing directions. Lines overlap and collide, causing a myriad of structural disruptions which prevent any sense of formal symmetry to develop. The overall effect suggests a single larger structure consisting of thousands of smaller structures of varying shapes and sizes. The eye is directed nowhere and everywhere all at once. The overall effect and the intricate details bombard the senses simultaneously without one immediately suggesting primacy over the other. Does one first take in the overall or the minute? Hierarchies of representational painting fail the viewer. The painting draws the viewer into its complex framework without suggesting any strategy for its comprehension or interpretation. All references to past experience disappear. All references to time cease to exist. The viewer's sense of 'self' is called into question, forcing a response which can be highly personal and individual. In Pollock's drip paintings the 'self' is confronted with a confusing, disarming visual, in part, owing to the disruption of representational time. By understanding the placement of 'self' in relation to non-linear expressive work we can gain a greater understanding about the expressive intent of the artist and the work itself.

The Frozen Moment and the Loss of 'Self'

It should be clear that the work examined in this article by Warren, Varese and Pollock appears to arrest the natural flow of time. Warren's poetry makes time appear to stop by creating imagery steeped in frozen images. Varese arrests time through asymmetrical metrical patterns and a non-developmental formal structure. Pollock avoids the representation of time completely. The remainder of this article will show that 'frozen time' in a creative work causes the interpreter to lose, to varying degrees, a sense of 'self'. It will also examine relationships between creative work, creator and viewer.

Warren's poem, *Safe in Shade*, offers an example of the gradually emerging 'Self' through the 'Other' because the narrator balances a detachment in the first section which progressively surrenders itself to a personal identity defined by the question at the end of the poem. Time does not flow linearly or naturally in the poem. The 'self' is made clear through its relationship to the narrator only at the end of the work when the accumulative action of the poem moves into the present tense. When the poem ends, the reader knows little about the boy nor the old man who appear at the opening of the poem. Their relationship to the 'Self' and the narrator is not clear. Thus the poem causes the reader to focus on the 'Other'.

Viewed as three main sections, the first section of the poem (stanzas one through six) focuses on the environment. The second section (stanzas seven and eight) depicts the passage of time as the thread of life, and finally the third section poses a personal but unanswerable, almost incomprehensible, question 'Where is the Truth--oh, unambiguous--//Thereof?' in stanzas nine and ten. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the poetry, where time is concerned, is the detachment of the narrator from the opening scene and the objective perspective which is used to describe the thread of life in section two. Only in the final two stanzas does the narrator become a real presence in the poem, attaching himself to the experiences described previously by posing two questions which appear to have import to the narrator and relevance to the previous stanzas. The withholding of the narrator's 'self' results in a focus on the 'Other', what Heidegger might call the 'Outside self'

The poet loses time in the poem and thereby loses the self through his objectivity, the act of distancing himself from any action

in the scene by reducing action to the absolute minimum necessary to convey the detail of motion in a natural environment. The lack of action engenders a frozen moment outside of which the narrator steps in order to view it with a detachment that recalls the 'Other'. Heidegger describes the nature of 'Being' as an act (or literally 'event') of the appropriation of time—past, present and future. He states, 'Because Being and time are there only in Appropriating, Appropriating has the peculiar property of bringing man into his own as the being who perceives Being by standing within true time.'²¹ A detachment from the past through a denial of action thereby reduces the presence of the self and increases the focus on the 'Other'.

Jackson describes a 'withholding... manifest in the distance and separation of the narrator' when describing the making of the self in a poem by James Wright titled 'Time':

By focusing on the Other, the bird, the detached narrator gradually builds a relationship, only to discover in the end that he has also been building a self. The narrator gradually approaches himself, including his past self, through the Other. The discontinuity of time is made continuous. The poem, then, 'balances' detachment and attachment, self and other, discontinuous and continuous, presence and absence. The sense of the self is invoked from the Other, from the 'luminous' language that describes it.²²

Warren builds the narrator's 'self' in *Safe in Shade* by focusing on the 'Other' in the first and second sections but arriving at a 'self' in the final section when posing questions to the reader. The withholding in these two sections disrupts the passage of time which is made continuous in the final stanza.

A similar effect is achieved by the oboe solo in *Octandre* when it returns in the final three bars, transposed up by diminished fifth and shortened, but otherwise unchanged since the initial three bars when it was first introduced. In a typical developmental Western composition, this would be called a recapitulation, a restatement of the principal theme before the final cadence.²³ Yet this theme is not 'developed' in the Classical sense. A full close is not achieved by the restatement, since the last note ends abruptly without harmonic resolution (the final expected 'A' is dropped from the four-note motif at the end). The final statement of the theme is simply a thematic restatement. Morgan comes to a similar conclusion when analyzing the work of Ives: One of Ives' most pervasive techniques for accomplishing this [harmonic stasis] is to make the motion circular—to make it run back on itself, thereby compromising its sense of forward progression and arrival. 'The most common form of this is a restatement at the end of a movement of the material that initiated it. In Ives these restatements are nothing more than brief allusions which link the closing with the opening through explicit association'.²⁴ He cites the first movement of the *Second String Quartet*, the last movement of the *'Concord' Sonata* and the last movement of the *Fourth Violin Sonata* as examples. When a piece is written in a non-tonal idiom the lack of harmonic resolution normally found in a tonal composition seems a natural consequence of the 'missing' tonic. However, the lack of resolution has significant consequences with regard to the formal closure of the piece. As Rosen relates:

The principle of recapitulation as resolution may be considered the most fundamental and radical innovation of sonata style. The germ of this conception may be found in the Baroque binary forms, but the sonata does not, like the binary forms, merely repeat all or part of the exposition now transposed into the tonic. In the sonata there is a reinterpretation of the pattern of the exposition, a transformation of a clearly articulated movement away from stability into the affirmation of a large stable area.²⁵

The last sentence of this quotation illustrates the importance, in a linear process, of moving from stability to instability and back to a large stable area. Linear harmonic motion in a typical sonata form, at the phrase level and on larger structural levels, helps to create varying levels of stability and increases the chances that a thematic restatement may be heard as a linear consequence of a work as it unfolds through time. *Octandre* does not possess recognizable harmonic motion which might contribute to the awareness of changing levels of stability and instability.

The difficult part in *Octandre*, and the element which causes the listener to question the relationship between the 'self' and

the work, occurs in the assignation of meaning to the restatement of the oboe theme. In a composition from the common practice period, the meaning would be obvious and understood by the vast majority of listeners possessing experience with even a small part of the repertoire from this period. The harmonic resolution of tension derived by modulating from an unstable key area to a stable one provides structure and coherence on the part of the informed, attentive listener. Once a listener understands the concept of recapitulation, the phenomenon can be observed in countless works from the common practice period. The meaning of recapitulation can then be understood with regard to the overall form of the work.

As explained earlier, the recapitulative process does not exist in the first movement of *Octandre* despite the return of the opening oboe solo at the conclusion of the piece because the notion of beginning - middle - end does not exist in this piece. Moreover, the concept of linear, unfolding time does not exist in this piece. And since the ordering of events is not presented in a chronological, developmental way, the listener must construct a reality for the piece based on different criteria than in a piece which contains these characteristics

It is with the clarinet motif in measure five and the trumpet motif in measure 23 that a parallel can be drawn with Warren's *Safe in Shade*. Varese's three-note musical motif introduces a new theme which remains unfulfilled and unexplained at the end of the piece. One inherently knows the theme is important to the piece but its meaning is not defined by the context of its presence in relation to other elements in the work. In the poem, when the narrator states 'I waited for him to speak' in stanzas three and six both statements are left unfulfilled. The reader never knows what is spoken since the poem immediately races into a new perspective. The old man reveals nothing about himself and nothing about the narrator is revealed either.

In visual art, a similar parallel might be the introduction of an external foreign object into an otherwise natural scene. The train emanating from the fireplace of a Victorian home in Rene Magritte's painting *Time Transfixed* (1938) provides an example of a visual object which appears out of place in an otherwise coherent context. The name of the painting further confirms the artist's intent to arrest time since the word 'transfixed' means 'to hold or fasten with or on something that pierces.'²⁶ Clearly, the train arrests time as it pierces the fireplace because it forces the viewer out of the realm of the real world into a fantasy conjured by the artist's imagination. This 'frozen time' causes the viewer to question the relationship between the 'self' and the reality posed by the painting. The meaning of this reality must be constructed from the viewer's unique perspective, one which might clash with that of the artist.

The use of an extreme level of abstraction in a painting removes the subject matter from its natural environment. While the artist exerts more manipulative creative license in presenting the elements to the viewer, in equal proportion, this manipulation removes the elements further from a common reality, forcing structure and content to present themselves to the viewer in a more prominent manner than one might find in representational artistic rendering. The result, according to Krauss (1993) who paraphrases Clement Greenberg in 'The Later Monet' from a 1956 article in *Art and Culture* causes the viewer to understand 'space as an object,' an analogue of 'vision itself' where 'It would be the matrix of a gaze that, cut loose from the viewer's body, was free to explore the dimensions of its own projective movement buoyed by nothing else but subjective reflection on its own form of consciousness.'²⁷

If space can be viewed as an object, a musical composition (another type of space which spans time) can also be viewed similarly. When the first movement of Varese's *Octandre* is viewed as a 'frozen space' framed by the oboe solo, the entirety becomes a container 'cut loose from the viewer's body.' Heard in this way, thematic ordering and thematic relationships become meaningful as constituent parts of a whole rather than a developing process which behaves cumulatively. The meaning of non-linear events may not be clear until the totality of the experience is complete after all elements have been expressed at the conclusion of the work. One's comprehension of a work depends less on actual ordering of phrases than on the unique qualities of objects within phrases. Non-linear time requires a different set of assumptions on the part of the observer, a different way of thinking about events which make up a work.

The import in all three art forms is the same: time stops for a moment. The art form throws a question at the viewer who is now asked to interpret the object as part of the art, as something separate from the art, or as something simultaneously within

and without the context of the artistic meaning.

The apparent loss of time in abstract painting, just as in poetry and music, causes the viewer to question the relationship between the reality presented by the art and the reality formed through the viewer's awareness of events around him. Altieri points out that 'rather than reduce the semantic level of art to the production of aesthetic emotions, the new art sought a formal syntax capable of sustaining the abstract scope of allegory, while redefining its basic relationship between the spirit and its objects in two ways: There must be different means of securing the work's claims to semantic significance, and the new semantics would have to make the conditions of response serve as testimony for their thematic claims'.²⁸ The new semantics are based on the use of objects which represent themselves shorn of the cultural and historical meanings they might have in representational art. Musical themes, for example, are reduced to their primary elements: intervals, rhythmic motifs, color (timbre). The new semantics are forced on the viewer only when real-time ceases to function relative to time in everyday life. Then as the parallel between life and art becomes unclear, the rise of abstract semantic relationships force the re-examination of 'self' during the interpretation of the art work.

Freezing time causes objects to lose their familiar relationships with other objects. The juxtaposition of unrelated objects begins to make sense, not because they become familiar, but because they are viewed as themselves for what they are. The odd entrance of the clarinet theme by the trumpet in measure 23 of *Octandre* and the line 'I waited for him to speak' Warren's *Safe in Shade* seem out of place for they remain unresolved and unjustified as the works unfold. Yet they make sense in works which exist outside the domain of linear time because they are part of the totality being expressed.

So which strokes in Pollock's *Lavender Mist* are odd entrances which remain unresolved and unjustified? All of them. Each and every one appears unresolved, set into motion yet frozen through the lack of direction the multitude of drips conveys. The entirety itself remains unresolved, frozen without time. Pollock's art takes the notion of non-resolution to the extreme, much as one of Schoenberg's 12-tone serial compositions treats intervallic and harmonic dissonance, by ignoring the need to resolve to a consonance. The difference between Schoenberg and Pollock is that Schoenberg keeps one foot in the past by holding on to a linear time suggested by strong beats fitting into a consistent, steady meter, by writing melodic lines which arc and come to rest, by following rules laid down by Bach, Scarlatti and Rossini. Pollock will have nothing of the past; nor will Varese.

Gooding points out that Pollock attempted to eliminate depiction altogether by creating an object (the painting) charged with effective energies. Varese's use of pointillistic melodies and disjointed successions of musical themes provides similar expressive result in music. The effect produces a sense of disorientation for one observing the work from a linear point of view. Yet, when understood as non-developmental progressions highlighting syntactical relationships, the works assume greater expressive range and elicit deeper personal meaning to the observer. Moreover, the analog found in poetry, which uses time as a reference to existence, and where the question of existence is threatened by the denial of time, can be immensely helpful in understanding artistic and musical works in which time is denied. Morgan's examination of 'spatial orientation in the music itself' reveals factors which 'share a common attempt to negate as much as possible the succession of temporal sequence as the principal path for establishing musical relationships'.²⁹ The factors include harmonic stasis, fragmentation resulting from crosscutting sectional divisions, multilayered textures, among others.

The wide melodic skips in *Octandre* defy linearity except as broken pieces of notes strung together in short motifs. Pollock's drips also fail to connect with their neighbors unless observed from a distance. As intricate details merge into one mass of color, the entirety, so do the elements of *Octandre* merge into a single statement bordered by an oboe solo. The disconnect between the three sections of *Safe in Shade*: the frozen first scene describing the old man and the boy, the whirling objectivity of the second section, and the unanswerable questions of the third section set the poem into three unrelated sections which are pulled together by the question posed by the final line of the poem.

Kramer's definition of multiply directed time (linear sections ordered in a manner which does not suggest logical continuity) can help explain how objects are ordered in Warren's poem *Safe in Shade*. Each section offers a linear sequence of events

but sections are not clearly linked together. The final section, two questions posed by the narrator, help define the narrator's 'self'. Without these questions, the poem might be three separate poems held together by a title. Warren resolves the implied connections between the first two sections with the final stanzas.

Taking non-linear form to the extreme, *Number One, 1950* fits the definition of moment time because it exists as a single formal entity, a mosaic consisting of diverse elements sharing a common space without apparent justification. Each element can be viewed as individual objects, 'something individual, independent, and centered in itself, capable of existing on its own.'³⁰ In art, music and poetry, the disruption of linear unfolding highlights the unique qualities, i.e. physical characteristics, of essential elements in a creative work. Non-linear time disrupts the traditional hierarchy of objects. In music, a non-developmental ordering of themes can make contextual relationships difficult to comprehend. Ancillary musical motifs, for example, become an essential part of the overall sonic picture even when they are not principle themes. Shape as an entity in a symmetrical visual pattern can be thematic in ways never possible in representational painting. Characters in a poem begin life as empty vessels waiting to be filled by the environment depicted by the poetry rather than starting out as a caricature of a person who exists in a specific time and place. The loss of a pre-defined history in a poem causes the reader to fill in the details of the character's past through a constructive process which, along with assumptions extracted from details provided by the work, may result in an interpretation which is quite different from the one intended by the poet. Finally, in all artistic expression, presencing defines the self and its history. When time ceases to exist, or when it is encapsulated into a 'frozen moment' the work can be viewed in its totality as a collection of events which present views from differing perspectives, a point of view which questions the identity of the observer and requires the observer to define his own space in which to view the work.

When one understands that the perception of time in an art form, as in life, affects the orientation of the viewer in relation to the work, and its relation to one's personal reality, the meaning of non-linear time constructs in an art form become clear. The viewer's loss of 'self' in Pollock's artwork, the listener's loss of 'self' in Varese's music, the reader's loss of 'self' in Warren's poetry, derive from the disruption of presencing which takes place in a work which diverges according to the three extases of time.

Endnotes

¹ See Riegler (1999).

² Botstein 2004 describes the movement as one which 'came to signify, in a positive sense, a revolutionary avant garde that rejected historical models and confronted directly the overwhelming character of the new in contemporary life by penetrating beyond the surface of modernity.'

³ See Stevens (1951): 25.

⁴ See Warren (1990): 39.

⁵ See Jackson (1988): 38-39.

⁶ See Warren, (1990): 39.

⁷ Excerpted from Warren (1980): 91.

⁸ See Kramer (1988): 384.

⁹ See Kramer (1985): 72-106.

¹⁰ Edward T. Cone suggests the terms 'stratification', 'interlocking' and 'synthesis' to describe three types of 'sudden breaks affecting almost every musical dimension' found in the music of Stravinsky. These can also be found in *Octandre* but do not function in similar ways. For example, Stravinsky alternates sections very frequently while Varese repeats almost

nothing. Therefore, the concepts of stratification and interlock exert a minimal effect on the piece. Hence, I will use the term the term 'recapitulation'. See Cone (1968): 156-64. This article focuses on Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* but also examines *Serenade in A* and *Canticum Sacrum*.

¹¹ See Kramer (1988): 58.

¹² See Stockhausen (1963): 189-210.

¹³ See Stockhausen (1963): 201.

¹⁴ See MacDonald (2003): 7.

¹⁵ Quoted from Stevens (1951): 25.

¹⁶ See Wilson (1992): 32.

¹⁷ See Wilson (1992): 138.

¹⁸ See Kramer (1988): 58.

¹⁹ See Kaprow (1958): 24-6.

²⁰ See Lewison (1999): 38.

²¹ See Heidegger (1972): 23.

²² See Jackson (1988): 102.

²³ Rosen (1980) provides the following definition: 'The recapitulation starts with the return of the first theme in the tonic. The rest of this section 'recapitulates' the exposition as it was first played, except that the second group and closing theme appear in the tonic, with the bridge passage suitably altered so that it no longer leads to the dominant but prepares what follows in the tonic. Longer works are rounded off by a coda.'

²⁴ See Morgan (1977): 148.

²⁵ See Rosen (1980): 284.

²⁶ See Stein (1980): 1395.

²⁷ See Krauss (1993): 246.

²⁸ See Altieri (1989): 48.

²⁹ See Morgan (1977): 148.

³⁰ See Stockhausen (1963): 201.

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