

Interarts Theory and Practice:

Sunday in the Park with George and Selected Poems of Frank O'Hara

By

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A Thesis

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for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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MICHAEL L. PHILLIPS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of how various art forms, chiefly visual, verbal and musical, relate to one another. Using the Stephen Sondheim/James Lapine musical *Sunday in the Park with George*, selected poetry and prose of Frank O'Hara and a variety of Interarts theory as examples, the basic premise is that new approaches to Interarts study are needed. The juxtaposition of a musical and a series of poems is a deliberate attempt to demonstrate the new insights that can come from juxtaposing what initially seem to be radically different artistic creations.

The first chapter documents how discussions of the arts have encoded political agendas, specifically those pertaining to gender biases: in particular, it charts the dangers of comparing the arts with the aim of differentiation. This chapter is designed not merely to deconstruct some old approaches, but also to enable the move to new ones, seemingly--but ultimately, not really--free from politics. The second chapter is about our response to art, and how that response is essentially Interarts in nature. The third chapter is primarily concerned with icons--ranging from pagan statues and Christian relics to modern art and celebrities--and how they function in an Interarts fashion. Because this chapter is also an examination of how icons are used both to maintain and subvert society, here politics reemerges, as it is inescapable. The thesis concludes that Interarts study has the potential to liberate marginalized art forms, but also to rejuvenate the study of art in general.

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I must, however, mention the enormous contribution Dr. Evelyn Hinz has made to this thesis. Her careful considerations and painstaking editing were indispensable in every step of the writing process, from the germination of ideas to the final draft. Perhaps I can best demonstrate her greatest gift to me, however, by quoting a Stephen Sondheim musical. In *Anyone Can Whistle* there is a song, "Everybody Says Don't," in which Sondheim writes about the negative forces in society:

Everybody says don't,
 Everybody says don't,
 Everybody says don't--It isn't
 right,
 Don't--It isn't nice!
 Everybody says don't,
 Everybody says don't,
 Everybody says don't walk on the
 grass,
 Don't disturb the peace,
 Don't skate on the ice. (Song 19)

In the end, most of all, I want to thank Dr. Hinz for always saying “do.”

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an investigation of how the arts relate to each other. Certainly, studies of the arts in relation to one another have been going on for thousands of years, but I wish to push such explorations further than before, and in new directions. In doing so, I do not, of course, pretend to be exhaustive; rather I hope to provide some suggestions of what can, and remains, to be done.

For the purposes of my discussion, several terms require definitions. In the broadest sense, "Interarts" is any consideration of two or more arts in juxtaposition, either by an artist in a work of art, or by a critic in a discussion. I will not attempt to define what "art" is because art is anything an individual says that it is. I classify the arts under three headings: verbal, visual and musical. Verbal refers to language, spoken or printed; visual refers to anything that can be seen; musical refers to combinations of tones produced by any source. The overlap between the three categories is hopelessly large. Sung lyrics, for example, are both verbal and music, and yet, if the same words are printed, they can also be considered to be visual. There are numerous instances of such overlap, proving that the distinctions between the arts are problematic. That there is such overlap is why Interarts study is important.

Not only do the categories into which art has been divided make Interarts study difficult, our language does so as well. Many of the words generally used in critical discourse become inappropriate in an Interarts context: “focus,” “illustrate,” “see,” “read,” “tell,” “echo,” and many others, are frequently used to explain understanding and perception. These terms, however, are not neutral in an Interarts context; for example, if one says “I will ‘focus’ on this topic,” he/she has privileged the visual. Avoiding such constructions is almost impossible, but the effort is educational, for it demonstrates how entrenched art theory is in our language, our lives.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter documents how discussions of the arts encode political agendas, specifically those pertaining to gender biases. This chapter is designed not merely to deconstruct some old approaches but also to enable the move to new ones, seemingly--but ultimately, not really--free from politics. The second chapter, designed as a bridge between the first and the last, is about our response to art, and how that response is essentially Interarts in nature. The third chapter is primarily concerned with icons: how they function in an Interarts context. Because this chapter is also an examination of how icons are used both to maintain and subvert society, here politics reemerges, as it is inescapable. In this way, it becomes evident that while it is easy to come to Interarts naïvely--expecting to find a place where the arts coexist peacefully in an aesthetic landscape--in reality Interarts continues to be a politically charged arena.

The creative works which I will use as concrete examples are the Stephen Sondheim/James Lapine musical *Sunday in the Park with George*, and selected poetry and

prose of Frank O'Hara. *Sunday in the Park* opened on Broadway in 1984, with music (song lyrics and score) by Sondheim and a book (dialogue and stage directions) by Lapine. Inspired by the Georges Seurat painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, and featuring many characters who appear in that painting, the musical examines many art issues, including creation, response, and art politics. Briefly, the play's first half is about George Seurat (distinct from the real Seurat by the missing "s") and his mistress Dot; the action occurs on several Sundays in the late nineteenth century, and follows the disintegration of their relationship. In the second half of the play, George and Dot's great-grandson, George, is an artist working in the nineteen-eighties, in New York. Primarily, I will be examining a printed text of the play, though my reading has been informed and enriched by the cast album, and the Broadway production that was broadcast on PBS.

Frank O'Hara, working in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, also wrote about art, but in poetry and essays, most of which are autobiographical in nature. When O'Hara's work is studied his life is almost always considered, and in the one O'Hara biography, Brad Gooch's *City Poet*, the poems are bound to the life. Therefore, the Interarts nature of his poetry might partially be explained by some biographical facts. Though he graduated from Harvard with an undergraduate degree in literature, he originally went to that university to study music, and with aspirations of becoming a musician. Subsequently, he was employed as an associate curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The poems under consideration here are primarily ones which are about visual art and music, as well as art issues in general.

Either *Sunday in the Park* or O'Hara's work would be a good candidate for Interarts study, but two things encourage bringing them together. First, O'Hara greatly appreciated *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* when he saw it in Chicago. Moreover, as Gooch explains, during a disastrous fire at the Museum of Modern Art, which destroyed a Monet and damaged many paintings, there was "cliff-hanging suspense about the fate of many of the pictures, especially those in a major Seurat exhibition, which included *La Grande Jatte* on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago"(304). Gooch also discusses how O'Hara "claimed to have personally helped rescue the canvas" (186). Second, in addition to helping save the canvas that would inspire Sondheim and Lapine, O'Hara is concerned with many of the issues that they consider in *Sunday in the Park*; they work in different media, but cover the same topics. Ultimately, however, the bringing together of a "popular" musical and a sophisticated series of poems is designed to suggest the new insights that can derive from juxtaposing what might seem to be radically different aesthetic creations and orientations.

My overall critical approach, finally, might best be stated in terms of a song from another Sondheim and Lapine production, *Into The Woods*. In this "fairy tale" musical, the Baker's Wife sings a song entitled "Moments in the Woods," in which she struggles to understand the often limiting nature of choices:

Must it all be either less or more,
 Either plain or grand?
 Is it always "or"?
 Is it never "and"? (Song 15)

In dealing with aesthetic issues, there has been a tendency to emphasize the "or": visual *or* verbal *or* music. I am attempting to take a respite from the "or" approach to the arts, and

trying to move towards a study of how the arts relate to one another. In other words, this is a study of the arts in the context of “and.”

CHAPTER ONE

Figures of Difference: The Politics of Interarts Comparison

While Interarts debate has seemingly moved beyond the old *ut pictura, poesis* formula, the new comparative approach is in many ways the direct heir to the old comparative approach, and perpetuates many of the problems that characterized the earlier way of discussing relations between the arts. One of the problems has been the tendency to resort to metaphors from other activities and modes of classification to define the nature and objectives of the various art forms. The consequence of such displacement is not merely that such discussions ultimately have tended to say little about aesthetic issues, but also that the arts become weaponry in a variety of ideological battles.

A related problem is the tendency to concentrate on the visual and verbal arts while ignoring other arts, particularly music, and furthermore, to restrict the visual and verbal arts to painting and poetry. In *Iconology* W.J.T. Mitchell writes that one reason why poetry and painting are so popular in Interarts theory is that “They are not merely *different* kinds of creatures, but *opposite* kinds” (47). Consequently, poetry and painting

are studied so often because they can be cast as binaries, which, of course, make for effective polarization.

Moreover, because the comparative method typically juxtaposes works from different artistic media, it is inevitable that differences are found. Similarities may also be found; in fact, there is another Interarts approach that does look for similarities--as in the Sister Arts tradition. In general, however, the differentiation of the arts is usually the *raison d'être* of comparison, and that is the approach that concerns me here. For although comparative approaches are often considered to be examinations of how the arts are related, frequently such discussions are not about "relationships" at all. Instead of being the site for beginning a discussion of how the arts can work together, the discussion of differences turns out to be the goal of the comparison.

Furthermore, discussions about difference might begin as "discussions," but they quickly become arguments. Mitchell, in considering why poetry and painting are the preferred subject matter for Interarts theory, observes:

Emerson once noted that the most fruitful conversations are always between two persons, not three. This principle may help to explain why the dialogue between poetry and painting has tended to dominate the general discussions of the arts, and why music has seemed something of an outsider to the conversation. All the arts may aspire to the condition of music, but when they set out to argue, poetry and painting hold the stage. (*Iconology* 47)

Not only does Mitchell note the process by which "conversations" turn into arguments, he also cleverly invokes a stage metaphor: traditionally, theatre has been based on conflict.

An argument need not be heated or violent, but it does require a pitting of ideas or theories against one another in an effort to reach a conclusion, that may or may not be

informative. Moreover, even if the conclusion puts an end to the conflict, this does not negate the method by which it was achieved, and what also needs to be considered is whether conflict and opposition are worth the price of the outcome. Perhaps it is not the most fruitful conversations that result from restricting the participants to two; more likely such a situation will result in the most heated fighting.

There are two levels on which comparison that searches for difference operates. The first is that of interpretation or distinguishing one thing from the other. The second level usually involves ranking: after comparisons have been made and differences have been found, there is a tendency to identify a winner and a loser. The two levels can operate simultaneously. If a person says, for example, "I like painting better than poetry," the two levels are in operation:

- 1) The person has perceived differences, which is a prerequisite for picking a favorite.
- 2) This perception of difference allows the person to create the hierarchy.

It is not that there is anything inherently wrong with making comparisons or picking a favorite, and on the first level, it does not seem suspicious. There is, however, a danger when differentiation dictates hierarchies, especially if those hierarchies are taken to extremes that allow art forms, or particular kinds of art, to be ignored, or worse, trivialized. Thus, while comparison and favorites may be a cultural tendency that cannot be shaken, we must be ever vigilant about their inherent dangers.

When comparison is the method of theorizing, not only are poetry and painting the preferred art forms, but also, extreme or "pure" examples of each art are usually chosen:

poetry that does not attempt to incorporate pictures or music, and conversely, paintings that do not incorporate words and which do not have strong pictorial narratives.

Composite art forms are rarely included in comparisons because the best differences are found between extremes, which, of course, make the best adversaries. This is another way that comparisons can be dangerous, for composite art forms are often relegated to the margins.

The differences that have been found between the arts have been represented in several ways. Often these differences are figured through metaphors, and usually these metaphors are ones of conflict. According to Mitchell, the figures of difference which cultures use to characterize the arts represent a “struggle between body and soul, world and mind, nature and culture” (*Iconology* 49). What is really being fought, in short, are not differences between art forms, but different value systems. Consider the nature and culture binary, for example which is one of the most fundamental and heated debates occurring today. What creates a person, nature or culture? Such debate is central to the gay rights movement, which hinges to a great extent on whether homosexuality is considered to be biological (nature) or environmental (culture). Such arguments are nearly impossible to win, but they persist. In addition, these arguments can be extremely abstract, and playing out the debate in terms of various arts is a way of making the arguments more accessible. Conversely, however, when we debate aesthetic issues we import both our experience of conflict and our positions on the nature-versus-culture issue. Thus, the process is circular.

Underlying the various kinds of binaries--sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly--is another, and perhaps the most fundamental, set: feminine and masculine. Though Mitchell often discusses gender, he does not include it in his trio of major binaries. This omission seems odd, because his binaries can neatly be grouped into gender categories:

<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>
Body	Soul
World	Mind
Nature	Culture

Gender is perhaps the most fundamental figure of difference that is applied to the arts; indeed, it provides the banner under which all the other binaries fight.

The precedents of gendering the arts are many, but a classic example occurs in Book X of Plato's *The Republic*. Plato does not have much tolerance for any form of representation, which is ironic because *The Republic* purports to be a literary representation of a Socratic dialogue. In *The Republic* Socrates says that nobility of soul should match beauty of form: good and beauty are aligned. Poetry is considered to be bad and ugly, but more importantly, is aligned with the female. In concluding his reasons for banishing poetry, Socrates clinches his argument by cautioning: "this argument [the one against poetry] of ours shall be a charm to us, which we will repeat to ourselves while we listen to her strains; that we may not fall away into the childish love of her which captivates the many" (379). More than merely cast poetry as female, Socrates characterizes her as a coquette, with the power to bewitch men.

The gender alignments of the arts are never static, however: alignments can, and regularly are, switched. Gotthold Ephram Lessing, in his *Laocoön*, for example, reverses

Socrates's parallels, and genders verbal art as masculine and visual art as feminine. That his gendering is implicit rather than explicit is even more dangerous, because it makes his arguments seem less ideological than they really are. Consider, however, his discussion of sculpture in his second chapter, in which he observes that certain ancient women "had been feasting their eyes upon the God during the day, and the bewildering dream suggested to them the image of the snake" (15). Images are aligned with women. In analyzing this section of Lessing's text, Mitchell concludes that in it: "Lessing has disclosed what is probably the most fundamental ideological basis for his laws of genre, namely the laws of gender" (*Iconology* 109). When one realizes that Lessing aligns verbal with masculine and visual with feminine, then his dictums about what the arts should do become less innocent than they might initially seem. In distinguishing between what is acceptable subject matter for visual and verbal art, for example, Lessing writes that verbal art can concentrate on the ugly, and may follow through to an emotional climax and its aftermath; visual art, however, must restrict itself to the beautiful and must "never present an action at its climax" (19). The ideological implication is that men should be active and vocal, but women should remain immobile, silent, and that women are valuable only when they are beautiful. Lessing's privileging of the verbal arts, in short, is a way of privileging the masculine gender.

Plato and Lessing are representative of the tradition of gendering the arts: there is no agreement on which art is masculine and which art is feminine. For this reason, gender labels are less informative about the arts, and more representative of the individual critics and cultures who employ such figures of difference. What does seem to remain constant

is the alliance of the masculine with what is good and the feminine with what is bad. Thus Plato allies poetry with the feminine and Lessing allies visual art with the feminine and for both the label signifies inferiority. In short, the act of gendering is ultimately more significant than the exact alignments of the sexes with various art forms.

At the risk of committing the very error I have identified, I would like--but only as a provisional strategy--to suggest that the act of gendering could be described as a masculine tendency and that critical approaches which are obsessive about differences between the arts could be described as a masculine form of Interarts study. An example of this masculine approach, as well as the components of the alternative method I wish to advance, may be found respectively in two essays that are featured in the recent MLA publication designed to provide directions for Interarts study: *Teaching Literature and Other Arts*. Significantly, the ordering in the title suggests that the verbal is the overall privileged art form of such discourse, just as the book itself consists of theorizing and descriptions of Interarts courses taught by prominent academics, most of whom come from literature/language departments.

One of the lead essays in the collection is entitled "The Comparative Study of the Arts," and in it Claus Clüver explicitly states what such study involves. As he puts it: "Studies of interrelations are based on comparison, therefore, concrete terms and methods are needed not only for analyzing the individual texts created in different sign systems, but also for comparing them, and criteria must be developed by which such comparisons may be judged" (16). After stating his intentions, Clüver, under separate headings, lists various paintings, literature and music that can be studied, along with some suggestions for

interpreting and comparing works within each type as a prerequisite for comparing the nature of various art forms. By including music, Clüver avoids the usual verbal/visual binary, and he also explains that he includes a few examples of composite art in the course he teaches on Interarts. Primarily, however, his course features “pure” works of art, which is the classic comparative method. Similarly, although Clüver emphasizes the need to respect the differences between various art forms, his emphasis on the value of different methodologies encodes notions of hierarchy.

In his contribution to *Teaching Literature and Other Arts*, Mitchell takes issue with the comparative method in his essay: “Against Comparison: Teaching Literature and the Visual Arts.” Mitchell’s own approach is somewhat problematic because of its obvious exclusion of music, but his alternative to traditional approaches makes amends for this exclusion. Comparative study leaves Mitchell asking “So what?” He explains that he begins his course by comparing Blake’s poetry and painting, but only in order to show that “the most important lesson we comparatists can learn from Blake’s mixed art is that comparison itself is not a necessary procedure in the study of image-text relations. The necessary subject matter is, rather, the whole ensemble of relations among media” (30). Accordingly Mitchell goes on to stress the importance of studying works that are inherently multi-media, and wherein the distinctions between the arts become blurred: comic books, poem paintings, and the like. Similarly, he returns to what have been considered purer texts and pictures, but only in order to show that they are not pure at all, and that pure texts have Interarts dimensions as well. The overall point that Mitchell makes is that the arts must be brought together in criticism rather than being divided, and

that at best to compare a poem and a painting might result in learning about the poem or painting, or about the artistic conventions that prevailed in the time during which they were created. Comparison, in short, may be the most effective way to understand individual art forms, but ultimately, such an approach does not help to explain how the arts “relate” to each other. Notably, in *Teaching Literature and Other Art*, few of the essays are in the vein of Mitchell’s relations model; most follow the comparative model. Thus, while my examples of Plato and Lessing are old ones, the comparative approach is alive and well.

If “masculine,” therefore, is an appropriate term to describe the comparative method exemplified by Clüver, “feminine” is the term one might apply to the kind of relationship approach encouraged by Mitchell. Whereas the masculine/comparative approach usually involves difference and ranking, the feminine/relationship approach works toward mutuality and collaboration. Accordingly, I do not mean to imply that the comparative approach is without value; on the contrary it can work as a component of Interarts discussion. Similarly, my primary purpose in invoking a gender binary has simply been to suggest that there are alternatives to comparative approaches. Ultimately, the ideal Interarts approach would be androgynous, seamlessly combining aspects of both masculine and feminine perspectives. Thus, I now wish generally to dispense both with these gender labels and further contrasts between critical approaches. Instead, because it is the approach that has been given the least attention, I now wish to move on to an exploration of how the relationship model can function, and the thesis I am now advancing is that the most instructive material for such a purpose is creative art which is itself

concerned with the ways that the arts relate to each other. The Stephen Sondheim/James Lapine musical *Sunday in the Park with George* and the poetry of Frank O'Hara are ideal cases in point.

With respect to *Sunday in the Park*, perhaps the first thing to consider in general is why musicals tend to be ignored in academic discourses. The academy, with its disciplinary distinctions, would understandably have trouble placing the study of musicals in any department, or even a faculty. The score of a musical would seem to belong in a school of music, but the visual spectacle--including actors and sets--which is more pronounced in musicals than in regular drama, seems right for a school of art, but should not the costumes go to a department of fashion design? And should not the text of a musical--especially in its book form--belong in a language/literature department? In short, if it is the multi-media nature of a musical that makes it difficult to place, the situation also suggests the extent to which academic institutions are structured in accordance with a comparative attitude towards the arts. Conversely, it is because a musical is resistant to binaries that this art form provides an essential site for exploring the Interarts dynamic.

Within *Sunday in the Park* itself, the plot and characterization function first to distinguish between the arts but then to effect a symbolic union between them. In the play George Seurat is presented as an artist, and his visual orientation is established by both his actions and by several dialogue references. For example, he tells his lover Dot: "I am not hiding behind my canvas--I am living in it" (76). Similarly, in the eloquent song "Finishing the Hat" George expresses melancholy at the time he is compelled to spend observing and

drawing images, while people and relationships drift in and out of his life. George's alignment with the visual arts, however, is more subtly suggested by the way that he is cast as an anti-word person. His dialogue is stilted and short, demonstrated in the song "Color and Light," where he repeats words like "red" and "blue" over and over again, as well as non-words like "Bumbum bum bumbumbum / Bumbum bum" (34). After George's death, the Boatman, who observes and comments about much in the play, states that people hated George, in part, "because he only spoke when he absolutely had to" (133). An example of this chosen silence occurs when George would rather look at his painting than discuss it with his colleague, Jules.

At the same time--and in keeping with Sondheim's long history of showing that everything is relative and absolutely nothing is absolute--the play undercuts the notion that George is a pure symbol of visual art. For example, his mocking of Dot because she is illiterate implies that he places some value on the verbal arts. In addition, the question of the nature and value of words is explicitly addressed in the song "We Do Not Belong Together":

George: Then there's nothing I can say,
Is there?

Dot: Yes, George, there is!

You could tell me not to go.
Say it to me,
Tell me not to go.
Tell me that you're hurt,
Tell me you're relieved,
Tell me that you're bored--
Anything, but don't assume I know.
Tell me what you feel! (74)

To her pleas for him to articulate, George responds: "Why do you insist / You must hear the words / When you know I cannot give you words?" As much as he seems to lack verbal facility, however, he goes on to suggest that the issue is more complex in his next line: "Not the ones you need" (75). It is not that he is incapable of all words, just some of them. There is a difference between being unable to use the verbal as a media and being unable to say certain things.

The exchanges in "We Do Not Belong Together," in turn, also seem at first firmly to ally Dot with the verbal. Similarly when Yvonne asks Dot why she is so cool to her, Dot replies: "maybe it is the way you speak" (70). Words are, of course, the main agency by which people relate to one another, and thus another way that Dot is allied with the verbal is her willingness to do what is necessary to maintain human relationships (including settling for Louis the Baker).

Nevertheless, as in the case of George, Dot's complete association with a single art form is subverted. First, Dot is George's artistic model, which allies her with the visual arts; she uses her body as a visual medium, in order to be represented in another visual medium, painting. In addition, as George and Dot sing "Color and Light" both are producing visual art. Working on his canvas, George sings: "Red red orange / Orange pick up blue / Pick up red" (37). At the same time, Dot paints her face and does her nails. George himself, moreover, comments on Dot's concern with visuals, wondering about why she is "Forever with that mirror. What does she see?" (39). Finally, it is by having George sing: "Dut dut dut /Dot Dot sitting / Dot Dot waiting" (37), that Sondheim connects her to Seurat's pointillism, the technique of painting with small dots of colour

that, when viewed together, create images. In this way, the play not only subverts a total alliance of Dot with verbal art, but also suggests that cosmetics are a visual art form which should not be devalued in opposition to painting.

George and Dot, furthermore, are not the only characters in Act I of *Sunday in the Park*. There is also Louis the Baker. In "Everybody Loves Louis," Dot explicitly characterizes Louis as an artist when she sings: "Louis' really an artist: / Louis cakes are an art" (59). A question that might be raised here is whether baking should be considered to be a pictorial art or a temporal art, but the more important point is that the inclusion of Louis the Baker as an artist not only undercuts the verbal/visual binary, but also raises questions about aesthetic hierarchies. Baking has not been considered an art because of the bias towards "high" art, but Dot realizes the value of actually being able to sell your creations. Thus, she sings:

Everybody loves Louis,
Him as well as his cakes.
Everybody loves Louis,
Me included, George.
Not afraid to be gooey,
Louis sells what he makes. (60)

The marketability of baking is valued by Dot because it creates an income for the artist, but also because it demonstrates that the public appreciates your art, and, yes, has an appetite for it.

Another issue raised in *Sunday in the Park*, in turn, is the question of "taste" and whether aesthetic response and artistic ability is innate or acquired. When George asks Dot how her study is progressing, she replies: "My writing is improving. I even keep

notes in the back of the book" (48). When Dot meets twentieth-century George at the end of the play, he mentions that her notes in the back of the book are difficult to understand, to which she replies: "well, I was teaching myself. My writing got much better. I worked very hard. I made certain Marie [her daughter] learned right away" (167). George Seurat is also always studying: hats, light and brush strokes. At one point, he quizzes Jules about pointillism, causing Jules to exclaim: "Is this a school exam, George?" (71). Both art forms, verbal and visual, are shown to be learned skills rather than essential ones. It is also notable that when Dot returns at the end of the play, she tells twentieth-century George, thinking he is her George, that he "Opened up my eyes, / Taught me how to see" (169). The fact that George taught Dot to see stresses that aesthetic response is a learned skill.

That George, a man, paints, and Dot, a woman, writes in her book, is thus shown to be a matter of education, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of gendering art forms. The characterization of George and Dot, moreover, deliberately challenges gender stereotyping. Dot, as a woman, exhibits what are conventionally thought of as masculine traits: she is independent, and as her daughter sings: "Mama did things / No one had done" (162). Dot leaves France, displaying ambition and drive. George Seurat, in contrast, seems to lack these characteristics and has what might be thought of as a feminine component: commenting on him and his painting, the Boatman complains: "you call that work? You smug goddam holier-than-thou shitty little men in your fancy clothes--born with pens and pencils, not pricks!" (46). Of course this is the opinion of an aggressively macho character, but it does suggest a conventional attitude towards those in the creative

arts, and in the process, it also furthers the deconstruction of any sexual stereotyping and gendering of the arts in the play. Of course, Louis's baking also subverts the gender binary at the same time that it points to the way that gender biases can limit the exercise of a particular art: baking is an art created by both sexes, but generally women's baking is restricted to the home whereas professional cooks tend to be men.

This notion of feminine/private art and masculine/public art is also explored in the treatment of Dot's red grammar book and Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* in the twentieth-century episodes of the play. The painting, on public display in the gallery, is clearly the legacy left by George Seurat; what is valuable, it would seem, is the visual artifact, produced by a man. In contrast, Dot's book is private and considered to be commercially valueless. On the level of human importance, however, the painting and the book are equal. When Marie refers to the painting, she tells her grandson George:

This is our family--
This is the lot.
After I go, this is
All that you've got, honey. (162)

Marie knows that George Seurat was her father and that the woman in the painting (on the right hand side, wearing the bustle and holding the monkey's leash) is Dot, her mother. Consequently, Marie symbolically leaves the painting to her grandson, George, as his paternal legacy. (Her gesture is symbolic, of course, because she does not own *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*.) Nevertheless, at the same time, she leaves him Dot's book, which Marie refers to as "a family legacy" (159). More than having

merely this restricted value, furthermore, Dot's words, written in the back of the book and sung in "Lesson #8," are art themselves, beautiful and poetic:

George looks within:
 George is adrift.
 George goes by guessing.
 George looks behind:
 He had a gift.
 When did it fade? (166)

By giving Dot these poignant lines, Sondheim not only encourages us to realize that she is a poet, but also that her poetry stems from a compassionate response to art and the artist.

One of Dot's functions in the play, therefore, is to demonstrate that women can produce art in their own right, and not merely give birth to men who will become artists.

Moreover, it is Dot's book which serves as documentation that George Seurat was indeed George's great-grandfather. Thus, the book and the painting are a pair, and achieve their greatest worth when they exist together: a synthesis of the arts.

The theme of "Children and Art" is specifically addressed in the song by that title and according to Marie, the point is that "there are only two worthwhile things to leave behind when you depart the world: children and art" (159). The art that George and Dot leave behind is the painting and the red book; the children they leave take the form of a series of descendents that culminates in another artist. Their daughter Marie has a son named Henry, who has a son named George. What is played out in this way seems to be the logical goal of gendering verbal and visual art as feminine and masculine: an art form which conjoins the arts, specifically "Chromolume #7."

George says that his chromolume is sometimes referred to as sculpture, but it also features a plaque with words on its side. In addition, the stage directions state that

George and Marie, with the chromolume, create “a coordinated performance of music, text [read from index cards by *George* and *Marie*] film projections of the images referred to, and light emissions from the machine” (134). In this performance there is a combination of sculpture, images, light, film, text and music: a supreme Interarts achievement that becomes further Interarts by being incorporated into the Sondheim/Lapine musical itself. The nineteenth-century characters Dot and George produce a book and a painting, but their twentieth-century descendent creates art that integrates many art forms.

As a way of highlighting the fusion of the arts, prior to the unveiling of the chromolume, the song “Putting It Together” is performed. The song criticizes those who do not truly appreciate modern art and object to it because, as one of the art patrons, Harriet, sings: “You can’t divide art today / Into categories neatly” (140). Harriet’s complaint, however, can be applied positively to both the chromolume and *Sunday in the Park* itself, just as it can be interpreted as an ironic commentary on Interarts criticism that stresses differences between the arts. When art cannot be put into categories neatly, figures of difference approaches are nearly impossible.

In this respect, it should also be noted that *Sunday in the Park*, unlike most drama, does not have a plot that is based on conflict, or that is goal oriented. The most universal plot of musical theatre is one where a man and a woman meet, but are kept apart by an infinite number of possible problems until the end of the show, when there is resolution: such a plot has justly been classified as masculine because of the way its rising action, climax and quick conclusion reflect masculine erotics. In *Sunday in the Park*, in contrast,

the main conflict is resolved in Act I when George and Dot decide that they will separate. Though there are a few examples in musical theater where the two leads are not united (like *The King and I* or *West Side Story*) that situation usually comes at the end of the play, and it is usually the result of circumstances beyond the control of the characters. In the case of *Sunday in the Park*, however, it is in Act I that Dot realizes that she and George “do not belong together” (75). Although the implication would seem to be that the poet and the painter, and therefore, the arts, should be separate, Dot goes on to sing that they “should have belonged together” (76), and in effect, they separate only after they have been together, at least long enough to conceive a child. At the same time, there is also a positive aspect to Dot’s decision to separate from George, for in the nineteenth century women in relationships often succumbed to men; thus her struggle for independence demonstrates the struggle of the feminine to remain autonomous. In Interarts discourses, the art that is labeled “feminine” is often subjected, and marginalized: Dot, the female, represents the struggle of the “feminine” arts to remain proud and strong.

Moreover, although Dot and George do separate, the art forms that constitute the genre in which they appear do not. One reason for this has to do with the third art that is involved. In musicals both verbal (words spoken by the characters) and visual (everything on stage) might be perceived as being in competition for the audience’s attention, but actually, the two art forms are brought together because of music. Music itself, furthermore, does not fit into the traditional temporal/spatial binary because, while it exists in time, it is also configured or directional. Additionally, in the case of musicals, music itself does not compete with the other art forms because it is incidental, primarily

accompanying singers (verbal) and dancers (visual). Music, in short, acts as moderator. In *Image/Music/Text*, Roland Barthes writes that most art requires that the viewer/reader depict a tableau in his mind: "[in the] scene, the picture, the shot, the cut-out rectangle, here we have the very *condition* that allows us to conceive theatre, painting, cinema, literature, all the arts, that is, other than music and which could be called *dioptric arts*" (70). By "dioptric" Barthes is presumably referring to light which passes through the lens of the eye: in other words, arts that can be seen, or in the case of literature, visualized. Music is the exception because we cannot make a visual image for it. Thus, if two tableaux, one verbal and one visual, compete in the viewer's mind, music as a non-tableau, can moderate between them. Our perception of conflict can be lessened by the music that accompanies both verbal and visual tableaux simultaneously. That music affects this moderation is shown by George Seurat's singing. Though he is often characterized as having poor verbal skills, sometimes he is eloquent in song; in effect, therefore, music heightens his verbal ability, perhaps to a level comparable to his visual skills. The conventions of musical theatre require that characters express themselves in many ways, one of which is song, and which is also--when performed--the place where the visual, verbal and music arts intersect.

Significantly, there is also an example of musical theatre contained within *Sunday in the Park*: one of Dot's desires is to go to watch, and even be a performer in, the Follies. (Incidentally, Sondheim, of course, wrote another musical specifically about the musical form, *Follies*.) In the song "Color and Light" Dot sings about how, to be in the Follies, she would need to be improved visually: "If my waist was thinner"; she also uses a tactile

term to suggest the verbal talent that would be required: "If my voice was warm." Dot sings "Color and Light" at her vanity, and the stage direction says that "her feet start to can-can under the table" (35). This moment in the musical is a play within a play; Dot wishes to go to an Interarts performance, and in the process she herself provides a miniature Interarts performance for the audience of *Sunday in the Park*.

The idea that visual, music and verbal can unite in drama is, of course, not a new idea. In the late nineteenth century, Richard Wagner proposed his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which would conjoin dance (gesture and movement, not dancing per se), tone (music), and poetry (95). The arts, he writes, are "ever themselves and ever for each other, severing in richest contrast and re-uniting in most blissful harmony" (96). For Wagner, opera is the best multi-media art form, and the musical may be considered to be its modern heir. There are, moreover, two aspects that make musicals truer to Wagner's theories than Wagner's own art. First, as Jack M. Stein notes in *Richard Wagner & The Synthesis of the Arts*: "Wagner's out line [of his composite art] would seem to require the use of spoken dialog at times during the drama" (65). Musicals have dialogue. As well, Wagner himself writes that "The true drama is only conceivable as proceeding from a *common urgency of every art* towards a more direct appeal to a *common public*" (184). Wagner wants art for the masses rather than art for the elite, which opera today no longer provides but which modern musicals clearly do.

There is one segment in *Sunday in the Park* that is particularly demonstrative of how the three art forms can work together. At the end of the play, twentieth-century George chants the evocative words: "'Design' / 'Tension' / 'Composition' / 'Balance' /

‘Light’” (172). As these words are recited, the other characters assume the positions of the figures in Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. At the same time that George’s words and the actors compete for the audience’s attention, the “Sunday” music plays. Verbal (George’s words), visual (the characters on stage) and the music all work together. As the tableau is nearing completion, Dot says the word “‘Harmony’” (173). It is a consummate word to comment on the way that what might be perceived as oppositions has become a pleasing agreement. That “harmony” is a music term is especially fitting.

In creating their musical, finally, Sondheim and Lapine would seem to be aware of Georges Seurat’s own artistic theories. Seurat wrote that

Art is Harmony.

Harmony is the analogy of opposites, the analogy of similarities of *tone, of time, of line* taking account of a domain and under the influence of the lighting, in combinations that are gay, calm or sad. (qtd. in Eisman 278)

In its own way this harmonious combination of similarities and opposites is effectively dramatized in *Sunday in the Park*. Similarly, the play would seem to accord with Seurat’s visual techniques. As Wendy Steiner explains, Seurat “systematically switches between symbolic and iconic semiosis, thus making us switch our viewing strategies, as in *La Grand Jatte*” (146). By iconic Steiner means images in the painting where the dots themselves are meant to be what they represent, while symbolic refers to images that become recognizable only when many dots are viewed together. The correlative of iconic in the play would be the actors, who resemble the people they portray; the correlative of symbolic would be the language that the actors use, for language is an arbitrary sign system. Iconic and symbolic achieve harmony in both the painting and the play. It is also

worth noting that Sondheim, as a composer, is known more for his harmonies than his melodies, just as Seurat's technique (the underworkings, the pointillism, that is similar to harmony) is considered to be far more important than his subjects (which are similar to melodies). Sondheim himself has said that his melodies come from his harmonies, unlike the more common practice where harmonies are created to accompany a melody. Thus, just as Seurat strove for harmony in his paintings, so Sondheim strives for harmony both in his music and in *Sunday in the Park* as a whole.

By subverting binaries and uniting art forms--in both its content and genre--*Sunday in the Park* is thus a work that offers an alternative interpretation of how the arts relate to each other. Frank O'Hara is an artist who presents a similar approach to Interarts, except that he does so in a body of poems rather than in a single work. Rarely taught or written about, O'Hara's work has been ignored by the academy (even by most Interarts critics); and here excuses for this neglect are harder to hypothesize than for *Sunday in the Park*, for while the institutionalized separation of the arts into specific disciplines and schools may explain why the genre of the musical itself is not studied, poems are a central component of literary study. There could be several possibilities for his neglect, but my suspicion is that O'Hara's work collectively combines too many arts, and furthermore, does not present the binaries and conflict that have been so desirable. A related factor may be O'Hara's indepth knowledge of so many art forms and the extent to which his art is about art.

To understand how all of this might cause opposition, one should bear in mind how frequently art in itself has been considered to be subversive. It is easy to think of

examples of art being mocked, attacked and destroyed: Savonarolla, the Puritans, contemporary politicians. Bashing books or paintings or music is common enough, and even in the academy, the study of art is marginalized in terms of the respect and funding it is given. For a myriad of reasons, the production and study of art is regarded with suspicion. Part of the fear of art must be attributed to its coded messages which can be difficult to understand, and if “pure” art can be feared, then composite art must be even more feared. If a poem involves a painting, for example, the fear is doubled; not only must one contend with a verbal art, but also a represented visual one. Perhaps the fear of double coding is why Interarts literature is so often excluded by the academy.

Not all Interarts literature has been excluded by the academy, however, and thus my hypothesis that O’Hara has been neglected because of his Interarts orientation must contend with the enthusiastic study of ekphrastic works like John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” To address this issue we should note first of all that the poem compares sculpture and poetry, which makes a convenient visual/verbal binary. (Though the poem includes music, this element is often forgotten.) In turn, we should note the critical tendencies to rank the visual/verbal binary. The traditional theory proposes that Keats privileges the urn, a spatial art, over his own poetry, a temporal art, while a more recent, more progressive approach argues that after exploring the abilities of various art forms, Keats decides that poetry is the most encompassing (Teunissen and Hinz). Either way, the belief is that Keats puts the various arts in competition, and that there is a winner. In his brief analysis of the poem, Mitchell pursues a different tac, stating that we must abandon any “preconceived notion that the ekphrastic poem is to be *compared* to the painting it

describes” simply because it is the poet who constructs the painting. Coming close to the realization that looking for competition in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is pointless, Mitchell’s strategy, however, is essentially to remove the other: “The poem and any real or imaginary urn are, strictly speaking, incomparable; the whole point of the text is to place the urn beyond comparison” (“Against” 35). Perhaps Interarts works like “Ode on a Grecian Urn” are given critical attention because, by reason of an assumed binary, scholars can find hierarchy, whether it is present or not.

Therefore, it is not a coincidence that one of the few O’Hara poems that has been given critical attention seems to be in the tradition of Keats’s Ode: “Why I am Not a Painter” (*Collected* 261). The implication of the title is that O’Hara will be defining what he does in opposition to something that he does not do. Though the title does not mention poetry at all, one assumes that poetry will play a part in the poem for two reasons: first, painting and poetry are the traditional binary, and second, poetry is O’Hara’s artistic medium. Given this situation, one might also expect that the poem will privilege poetry over painting, but the opening stanza quickly deflates this expectation: “I am not a painter, I am a poet. / Why? I think I would rather be / a painter, but I am not” (1-3). What one expects in turn is that the rest of the poem will elaborate this point. In the second stanza, O’Hara explains that his friend Mike Goldberg is painting a picture which includes “Sardines,” but which in the final version are replaced by merely the word. In the third stanza, O’Hara explains that he himself is inspired by the colour orange, and writes a poem, which he titles “Oranges” but in which there is no mention of “orange”. In the concluding lines he explains that Goldberg’s painting is now hanging in a gallery and is

entitled "Sardines." "Why I am Not a Painter" thus seems to feature a juxtaposition of painting and poetry with O'Hara expressing a hierarchical preference for the painter's vocation.

As Marjorie Perloff justly observes, however, it is a mistake to "assume that O'Hara is stressing differences." The tone of the poem, she feels, is one of jest, and O'Hara's point is that he is a poet just because he is; moreover, "in the final analysis SARDINES and ORANGES are one" (112). What Perloff fails to consider, however, are the political implications of O'Hara's subversion of expectations and his refusal to rank the arts; what does it mean that the painting and the poem are "one"? Thus although she is insightful in realizing that it is a mistake to assume that O'Hara is stressing differences, we also need to consider why the mistake is a predictable one: namely the way we have been conditioned to look for opposition. Accordingly, what we need to consider is the way that comparisons, and searches for difference, are done by the reader, not O'Hara. Actually the poem's second and third stanzas generally present painting and poetry respectively without placing them in direct juxtaposition. Nor does O'Hara figure the arts as masculine and feminine, and even if the genders of the artists are considered to be significant, their genders are the same, rather than different. It is in the last two lines of the poem that any juxtaposition only of the arts occurs. O'Hara explains that his poem "is twelve poems. I call it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery / I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES" (28-29). One of the differences "Why I am Not a Painter" discerns is that verbal art tends toward multiplication while visual art works towards reduction. Neither art, however, is

privileged over the other, and the poem ends without an answer being given to the question posed by the title, for ultimately such questions are shown not to matter.

A final Interarts aspect of "Why I am Not a Painter," therefore, lies in the way that it emphasizes the artistic process rather than the artistic artifact. A concept inspires Goldberg, and it becomes his painting's title; a colour (which is visual) inspires O'Hara, but the word representing what the eye perceives becomes his poem's title. "Why I am Not a Painter" demonstrates that visual and verbal artists both create their works from complex inspirations: Goldberg from a word, O'Hara from a colour. According to Perloff, the poem shows that "Art does not tolerate divisions; it must be viewed as a process, and not a product" (112). As she considers it, all art stems from similar inspiration which is coded into different sign systems; when the art is complete, that which was inspiring can be discarded.

Besides being a poet, Frank O'Hara was a sensitive art critic, and many of his writings about visual works also emphasize the mutuality of the arts. In *Art Chronicles*, a collection of his commentaries about art, there is a piece called "5 Participants in a Hearsay Panel," which records a conversation between a group of people, including O'Hara and Mike Goldberg. Quoting Harold Rosenberg--"artists read paintings and look at books" (150)--O'Hara seems to be saying that visual art has narrative that can be read, and verbal art has a visual quality that can be seen; for O'Hara the boundaries between artist and writer, painting and literature, viewing and reading, are not distinct at all.

Just as O'Hara varies the conventional distinctions between the arts, so he also varies the art he represents from poem to poem. If "Why I am Not a Painter" is notable

for its lack of comparisons between verbal and visual art, "Statue" (*Collected* 235) is notable for its symbolic union of the arts, and particularly for its consideration of two arts that are not usually placed in juxtaposition: music and sculpture. O'Hara begins the poem: "Alone in the dusk with you / while music by Ravel washes over us" (1-2). The inclusion of music is common in O'Hara's poetry, but here we should note his use of a visual expression --"washes"--to describe its effect and presence. Whereas Barthes argues that music does not make a tableau in the mind, for O'Hara, music can be imagined. In the poem the narrator--it is always O'Hara---is with a loved one who is presented as a piece of sculpture, or conversely, a sculpture that is the object of his love. In "Statue," the lover's "cool white plaster face" (4) becomes "warm against my [O'Hara's] stubbled cheek" (5), with intercourse thus functioning as a metaphor for a union between the arts.

Yet although O'Hara is identified as masculine by his stubbled cheek, the gender of the loved one is ambiguous. The loved one has a "white plaster face" which could indicate a woman's visage, or that of a clean-shaven man. Similarly, in their conversation they speak of "artistic modesty"(10) which could refer to either a female nude, or to a non-erect penis on a male nude. The subsequent reference to the lover's "waist," rather than to what is above or below it further confuses the gender: is the statue female or male? O'Hara, himself male and aligned with the verbal, does not make it clear how visual art is gendered, leading us to ask whether the fusion of the arts is a heterosexual or homosexual one. The point, however, is that the genders are not important. When we read literature with sexual ambiguity, we obsess about gender and sexual orientation; O'Hara's strategy

is to keep us guessing, and in this way, he encourages us to consider what lies behind the gendering of the arts.

The indeterminacy of gender and sexuality in "Statue" is similar to the shifting nature of the art form with which O'Hara aligns himself. On one level, as a poet he is allied with the verbal arts, but within the poem he presents himself as a sculptor. His relationship to the lover/statue, accordingly, is like that of Pygmalion. In the myth--as told by Ovid in his book of changes, *The Metamorphoses*--Pygmalion, who has difficulty relating to people, sculpts a perfect statue of a woman, with which he falls in love; eventually Venus brings the statue to life (323-24). O'Hara's poem similarly begins with a piece of sculpture, which also changes when the "cool" plaster face becomes "warm" and the arms begin to "tremble." There are, however, two interesting differences between the Pygmalion myth and the situation in O'Hara's poem. First, in O'Hara's version the statue/lover is not gendered; second, in O'Hara's version not only does the statue change--become alive--but O'Hara himself changes, as it were, from a poet (verbal artist) to a sculptor (visual artist).

In a double sense, therefore, "Statue" can be read as a union of the visual and verbal arts, although O'Hara suggests that the two are unable fully to unite: "Your [the loved one's] waist feels rough, / rough as the skin that keeps us apart from each other" (10-12). Skin is a barrier that helps to keep the pair separate. O'Hara writes, however, that "I shall be nude / against you, close as we can come" (12-13). Removing societal conventions--clothing--gets them closer to each other, and perhaps these conventions can also be interpreted as the conventions that keep the arts separate. The conventions also

involve the binary of visual and verbal art, and in turn we should note that what facilitates the union of the binaries in the poem: music “washes” over them, and the “things we have heard together.” It is listening to sound--to another art form--that brings the visual and verbal arts together.

On the same day that O'Hara composed “Statue” (3 Saturday 1955), he wrote another poem entitled “Radio” (*Collected* 234). As in “Statue,” this poem features music, but again suggesting O'Hara's multifaceted and flexible approach to Interarts issues, “Radio” is primarily concerned with art reception. In “Radio,” O'Hara presents himself as a worker in a museum who, after working all week with visual artifacts, wants inspiring music. On the weekend, he wants music that will serve as a “reminder of immortal energy” (4). In the second stanza of the poem, O'Hara explains to the radio that while he is working in silence at the museum: “you spill your miracles of Grieg / and Honegger on shut-ins” (8-9). Music, however, is also described in visual imagery: in “Statue” it “washes,” here, it spills. In the third stanza of the poem O'Hara is not happy with the music his radio produces, and he consoles himself with the fact that he has his “beautiful de Kooning / to aspire to. I think it has an orange / bed in it, more than the ear can hold” (13-15).

Aside from evoking Keats's paradoxical rationale--“Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter”--two points seem to be made in the poem: one is that there are many kinds of music and that not all types have the same effect; the second is that visual art can be as stimulating as music. In both cases, the emphasis is ultimately on the similarity of response that the various arts can evoke. According to his biographer,

O'Hara actually did have that de Kooning canvas in his apartment, but the orange bed was really a couch (Gooch 227). Not only is such a substitution in keeping with the way the O'Hara changes reality, but the change from a couch to a bed also helps to further the Interarts concerns of the poem, by allying art with both physical and aesthetic needs. Equally, the sexual connotations of a bed draw attention to the fusion of the arts that can be achieved through "love."

When examining the arts it is common to write about either the creative process or about art objects or about the response to the arts. Though there is always some overlap, a critic like Lessing tends to concentrate on what techniques artists should employ; Jean Hagstrum's primary concern in *The Sister Arts* is various kinds of art objects; Mitchell is mainly instructive in how we interpret arts and ideas. Artist and critic, Frank O'Hara attempts to address all three issues. "Why I am Not a Painter" is primarily about the artistic process; "Statue" is mainly about kinds of art and their fusion; and "Radio" is about interpretation. Besides being versatile in approach, O'Hara switches the way he represents and juxtaposes the various arts from poem to poem. O'Hara is often referred to as an ekphrastic poet, but this label ignores the fact that music that appears in his poetry almost as often as visual art does. What these O'Hara poems seem to have in common is their autobiographical nature, which in turn draws our attention to a new dimension of Interarts that needs further exploration: such an investigation might also address the question of how the sexual orientation of the artist might play a role in his/her attitudes toward a fusion of the arts. For the moment, however, I wish to emphasize that what

characterizes O'Hara's work is the view that the arts are equal, but not the same, and that they can have relationships that are not based on conflict.

The plot of *Sunday in the Park* equally works to subvert binaries and moves towards a union of the arts. In a way, Sondheim and Lapine have the easier task, for the musical itself is a multi-media genre, while O'Hara has only ink and paper with which to play out the relationships between the arts. In both cases, however, we are led to realize that Interarts theory is what we have made it, and that there is an alternative to the comparative approach.

CHAPTER TWO

“Inter”-pretation: Interarts and Aesthetic Response

Just as the study of any art form ultimately involves questions about its reception, so a central issue that needs to be addressed in Interarts discussion is the nature of aesthetic response. Indeed, I wish to suggest that it is primarily by way of viewer/reader/listener response that art becomes “inter.” After all, in themselves the arts do not actively engage in any dialogue with each other; the relationship between them is a result of the way we--the receivers--perceive and coordinate them. Mary Ann Caws, in her essay “Perception in Literature and Art,” explains:

what we see in visual and verbal texts may depend on what we know, or suspect, of the attitudes of their creators or producers, as well as on what we intuit from our previous knowledge, dependent as it is on our frame of vision. Our major presupposition is that the eye of the observer remakes what it is seeing, so that its own vision is as important as the object reconstructed. (25)

Thus, the contribution of the perceiver is fundamental in the study of art.

To demonstrate this dynamic, it will be best to begin with visual art, since this is the art form which often seems the most “pure” and to require the least amount of processing: the conventional assumption is that there is a direct connection between what

is given and how it is registered by the recipient. *Sunday in the Park with George* is a good work for discussing this issue, not only because it is centrally concerned with a painting, but also because the play is a brilliant example of theorizing about visual perception. The play presents many concepts about the reception of visual art and images and although it must be remembered that, principally, *Sunday in the Park* features a Neo-Impressionist painting, a specific style, the concepts in the play are general enough to be applied to all painting. When Sondheim and Lapine present ideas about visual art interpretation, it is usually the viewer's response that is paramount; significantly, this response is also related to the artistic process involved in the creation of art.

In Act I of *Sunday in the Park*, George Seurat recounts how, in childhood, he could see shadows on his bedroom wall, and that those "images were not rich in detail, so my mind's eye filled in the shapes to bring them to life" (130). George took images and transformed them in his mind, altering them to fit the conventions of what it means to be alive. The term "mind's eye" is important because it stresses that the eye and the mind are a team--collaborators--and that seeing is not separate from thinking. During the singing of "Beautiful," George shares some thoughts with his mother, one of which is: "You watch / While I revise the world" (78). George is not a naturalistic painter, and perhaps the point being made is that there is no such thing. *Sunday in the Park* is a reminder that painting is always an artist's representation of the world rather than a true document of it in an empirical sense.

That what is beautiful is also a question of perception is, in turn, the point made in the song by that title, in which George sings:

Pretty isn't beautiful, Mother

Pretty is what changes.
 What the eye arranges
 Is what is beautiful. (78)

Pretty is what is fashionable, or currently popular, but styles change and as they change, what is pretty changes. As well, “pretty” has a condescending quality, and is not as complimentary as “beautiful.” George believes that what the eye does with images, including how the mind processes what the eye takes in, is what creates beauty. Moreover, just as George revises the world in order to paint it, viewers reconstruct the art that they see, as other parts of the play demonstrate.

The Boatman, despite the fact that he has little patience with artists or art, also offers several provocative ideas about aesthetic response. In “The Day Off,” a song that exists in musical fragments rather than as a complete unit, the Boatman sings, to George: “You don’t know me! / Go on drawing, / Since you’re only drawing what you want to see.” The Boatman stresses that the artist chooses what to see, and does not necessarily paint whatever lies before his vision. Wearing a patch over one eye, the Boatman sings: “One eye, no illusions-- / That you get with two.” He continues, pointing to George’s eye:

One for what is true.
 (Points to the other)
 One for what suits you.
 Draw your wrong conclusion,
 All you artists do. (57)

The suggestion is that when a person has two eyes, as most people do, there is an ability to alter reality, which is actually accurate. Anyone who has worn an eye patch for even a short period of time knows that two eyes are necessary to perceive perspective; in this

way vision does change according to whether a person has one or two eyes. In the Boatman's opinion, those with only one eye, like himself, can see the truth, and this suggests not only his own bias, but also the fact that most people believe that what they see is the truth. It is, therefore, from his single perspective that the Boatman criticizes the manipulation of images, whereas other characters, like George, consider this reconstruction to be positive. In this way, in turn, Sondheim and Lapine create a multitude of critical positions, so that ultimately, it is the viewer of the play who must decide which is most true.

Ideas about aesthetic response are also present in the second half of *Sunday in the Park*. Twentieth-century George sings about artistic creation, and how "If no one gets to see it, / It's as good as dead" (146). Art has life, and exists only if a viewer processes it. How that audience sees, though, is a learned skill. To perceive perspective is natural and biological, but viewing art is a skill which involves perceptions shaped by culture. At the end of *Sunday in the Park*, in the song "Move On," Dot, who thinks that twentieth-century George is her George, tells him what she has learned from him:

Look at all the things you've done for me
Opened up my eyes,
Taught me how to see,
Notice every tree-- (169)

In this way, Sondheim reminds us that seeing and perception are learned skills, which, moreover, are also necessary to see the natural world.

Although Dot is taught how to see, not all the characters in the play are capable of such learning. Jules is unable to take visual impressions and make them his own, and thus

when he scrutinizes *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jatte*, George must explain to him: “your eye is perceiving both red and blue *and* violet. Only eleven colours--no black--divided, not mixed on the palette, mixed by the eye. Can’t you see the shimmering?” (71). Rather than the artist mixing colours on the palette, it is the viewer who mixes them in his mind; this involvement in the artistic process means that the viewer is co-artist. Later, speaking of Jules, George tells the painting: “He does not understand or appreciate you. He can only see you as everyone else does. Afraid to take you apart and put you back together again for himself” (72). Jules is a painter, but he is rather ignorant about the dynamics of vision, and consequently, about art interpretation. In contrast, twentieth-century George, like his ancestor, stresses the importance of appreciating technique when he says that Seurat “found by painting tiny particles, color next to color, that at a certain distance the eye would fuse the specks optically, giving them greater intensity than any mixed pigment” (135). In short, what makes an artistic work powerful is that way that it engages the viewer in the reconstruction process.

As much as the viewer of a painting, however, the reader of a literary text is involved in the construction of aesthetic experience. In the case of reader response, of course, Wolfgang Iser has already written extensively. What makes Iser’s work so provocative for Interarts discussion, however, is not merely the way that his theories about reception can be applied to the other arts but, ironically, his emphasis on how the literary text differs from the pictorial artifact. What also makes his critical discourse so instructive is his recurrent recourse to visual terminology. In the Preface to *The Act of*

Reading, for example, he explains that his concern is “to devise a *framework* for *mapping* out and guiding empirical studies of reader reaction” (x, emphasis mine).

Iser identifies two poles in the literary work: “the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author’s text, and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader.” Iser does not privilege either the artistic or the aesthetic, but rather, argues that the actualization of the text is “clearly the result of an interaction between the two” (21). The text exists only when we reconstitute it in our minds, but of course, that reconstitution is dependent on the frame that the text provides.

The subtitle of *The Act of Reading* is *A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, and by not using the term “reader response,” Iser opens his theory to parallels with other arts. Curiously, however, he resists this notion, always explaining that in these other cases we “stand outside the given object, whereas we are inside the literary text. The relation between text and reader is therefore quite different from that between object and observer” (109). Certainly, Iser’s emphasis on this distinction is accurate in that one does go inside a text, but stands outside a painting. Still, the premise that aesthetic response is what truly produces art can be applied to other arts. Although the response to text and object may not be identical, there are similarities, especially because both exist only through participation; that is, a book exists only when it is read, and a painting truly exists only when it is seen. Moreover, a book as much as a painting is a physical object, and to exist aesthetically--i.e., as artistic works rather than mere objects--both require a sentient subject.

Possibly, however, the third major art form--music-- is most demonstrative of the artist-artifact-recipient dynamic. Even more so than literary texts or visual art, music requires interpretation or performance in order to become aesthetic. Even more so than visual art or literature, music exists only when it is heard. Here more than anywhere the old philosophical riddle about the “tree falling in the forest” applies: without a listener or performer, music is unable to make a sound. It is also with music that we can most clearly appreciate the Interarts nature of aesthetic response: our typical response to music is to visualize a setting or to construct a narrative.

Significantly, this tendency of music to evoke visuals is the major point made in one of the few works to discuss music in an Interarts context. In *Music and Image* Richard Leppert explores how artists in the eighteenth century were inspired by the broad concept of music and attempted to visualize it in their paintings. Leppert is interested in the ways that “music functioned as a visualized activity, but not in the literal sense of ‘how it looked.’ Instead, it is how it was *made to look in art* that draws my attention” (4). Leppert’s book contains many examples of “musical” paintings, but his discussion of the Joseph Nollekens painting *A Musical Party* is particularly relevant to my concerns. Leppert remarks that Nollekens’s English house scene is symbolically theatre, and that the painting “is simultaneously about space, time and artifice, and the relation between all three with music as the central metaphor” (201). Music inspires a visual response, but Leppert’s mention of “time” in the painting hints at narrative, and his reference to theatre suggests a multi-media enactment. In addition, Leppert explains that the painting, circa 1735, was inspired by, and depicts, Baroque music: “Music here is not just sound; it is

order, an imposed harmony whose very decorum has a feared and despised opposite” (204). In the painting, the controlled, ordered nature of Baroque music is manifested in the images of “proper” aristocrats.

A contemporary classic example of music being represented visually, and with narrative, is the Walt Disney cartoon *Fantasia*. As the narrator tells us at the beginning of the film, we are going to see designs, pictures and stories that music inspired. He goes on to say that there are three kinds of music: that which tells a story, that which has no plot but paints pictures, and absolute music. The first episode of the movie, again as the narrator tells us, was inspired by absolute music, a Bach Toccata and Fugue. Despite the fact that it is presumably “absolute,” we are to see the images that we might create for ourselves. Although there is no mention of narrative, the fact that the segment is introduced by a narrator gives it some element of story. And in any case, the viewer of the film can construct narrative, as the visuals do seem to tell an implicit story in the Bach sequence. The other six episodes of the movie, however, were not inspired by absolute music, and have visuals with strong narratives. One example is the sequence which the Stravinsky ballet *Rite of Spring* inspired: as the narrator explains, the music has been visualized as a pageant, and it is the story of the growth of life: in pictures, we are told the story of the creation of the universe, and the evolution of life on earth. *Fantasia* is an animated film that is a manifestation of how individuals at the Disney studios responded to music with visuals and narrative, and suggests that we too might respond to music in such a manner.

For a more a more sophisticated and literary treatment of issues concerned with response to music, the poetry of Frank O'Hara provides a number of examples, of which "Lines During Certain Pieces of Music" (*Collected* 383-84) is particularly rich in insights. This poem features an sexual encounter that enables O'Hara to explore the conventional association of passion and music and the way that titles of musical works reflect the literary genres associated with erotic narrative.

In the opening lines of the poem the narrator, presumably O'Hara, evokes a painful incident: "A faint trace of pain and then a tornado / you smile and a drop of blood trickles down" (1-2). Although the situation and nature of the pain is not at all clear, a few lines later O'Hara writes:

I have at last experienced something like
hearing in Weimar Liszt play the *Romance in C major*
when actually someone has just pulled the ring
out of my ear. (4-7)

That the pain is physical is now clear, but the earlier reference to "tornado" suggests a sado-masochistic sexual encounter. Also, O'Hara writes "I don't / care about the blood dripping onto your shoulder" (8-9). If O'Hara's ear is bleeding onto the lover's shoulder it is because they are embracing, or are at least in close proximity.

What is also brought into proximity by virtue of the bleeding ear is the art form associated with hearing. That is, the sado-masochistic act is likened to hearing Liszt play the *Romance in C major* in Weimar, which was a town where Liszt spent several years in the middle of the nineteenth century; *Romance in C* is one of Schumann's most famous works. However, the point that O'Hara is making is at first a bit unclear. On one hand,

he seems to be saying that during the liaison, he did not actually hear the Schumann, but rather that the act is like hearing music. On the other hand, when he writes that “you will never again hear Schumann / without that nervous twitch of your left arm” (7-8), the implication seems to be that during the encounter, the pair listened to a recording of Schumann’s *Romance in C*, though they could not possibly have heard Liszt’s own interpretation. The point, in any case, is that music informs the experience and the poem, and that music can elicit feelings of pain.

Still in the first section of the poem, O’Hara goes on to write:

I’m glad because you are so meaningless
to think that ever under a streetlamp that smile
meant more to me than an exciting excursion
into another life a life more peculiar than precious. (10-13)

Although meeting under a street lamp is a typical romantic scenario, here the suggestion is that the lover is rough trade, which is reinforced by the way O’Hara feels that the smile, synecdoche for the person, means less than the rough “peculiar” sex that he can provide. O’Hara ends the first section of the poem with “I know that I need never have heard the *Romance in C* / I’m hysterical from the change from that, from lust” (14-15). The implication would seem to be that rough sex can elicit romantic feelings equal to or greater than powerful music, and that in the end, our response to art, particularly music, is why it exists at all. O’Hara seems to be using the erotic encounter to demonstrate the emotive nature of music.

In keeping with the way that O’Hara’s poetry often works to undercut itself the second section of “Lines During Certain Pieces of Music” puts the ideas of the first section into question. O’Hara writes: “how horrible those octaves / when I feel no

intensity" (16-17). Without the feelings that the listener brings, music has no effect.

Then, however, he ends the section: "anyway it was the *Fantasia in C major* / I've made a mistake all along the line" (19-20). Whenever it was that O'Hara listened to Schumann--who is known for both his *Romance* and *Fantasia in C*--he made a mistake, but a significant mistake. The identification of the piece as fantasy suggests that earlier O'Hara had romanticized rough sex, and that this romanticization was a fantasy. As much as he was mistaken about the title of the Schumann score, so he was mistaken into thinking that sado-masochism is romantic. The point is that the title of a piece of music can condition our response to what we hear, but that mistaking a title does not matter as much as the response does. Like hearing Liszt play, which is impossible, sado-masochism is not romantic; O'Hara was mistaken.

As with the body of the poem, several Interarts issues are suggested by the title "Lines During Certain Pieces of Music." The word "During" implies that the poem (the lines) was written while O'Hara was listening to music. In the second section, however, O'Hara writes that "it was the *Fantasia in C major*" (19). The past tense, "was," seems to suggest that what inspired him was the music during the liaison. Nevertheless, the "was" could also imply a reference to another time when O'Hara merely heard the music. Or it may be that the music was played during the liaison, but O'Hara heard the music again at a later date, at which time he wrote the poem. The Interarts point, however, of analysing the erotic encounter, and the confusion about when O'Hara wrote the poem, is that O'Hara's response to music is a poem that has a narrative--or perhaps "narratives" is the better word--and many evocative images: like the sado-masochistic act and the

meeting under the streetlamp; O'Hara's response to music is to create a highly visualized verbal art. If we consider that "Lines During Certain Pieces of Music" is verbal art, in turn, we can also understand how its own musical component shapes our response. We may not remember exactly what Schumann sounds like, but a general sense of what Romantic music sounds like informs our reading. Similarly, in order to enter the text, we must visualize the images that O'Hara presents.

Even the academy sanctions such Interarts responses. Literature classes, for example, spend great amounts of time studying images, representations, the appearances of characters and other visuals in texts. Art-history classes, conversely, frequently create a variety of narratives for visual art: the story of the studied period, the artists's lives, and how art fits into history. To return to Leppert's discussion of the Nollekens painting *A Musical Party* for a moment, we might note the way that theorizing about art has an Interarts nature. In hypothesizing about the music in the painting, Leppert creates a narrative about class and politics. Thus it would seem that in order fully to appreciate any art form we need to import elements from the other arts. We want some visual, some verbal, and maybe even some music components. When we are given art that does not combine all three arts, we create the missing ones for ourselves, thus becoming collaborators in the artistic process.

Actually, the theory that the arts need each other has long been recognized by critics, and the theory is implicit even in works which seem most concerned with distinguishing between the arts. In *Laocoön*, for example, Lessing argues that the painter should choose "that point or moment which the beholder not so much sees as adds in his

imagination" (20). According to Lessing, therefore, the role of the viewer is an essential component of a work of art and the response of the viewer should take the form of adding a narrative or verbal component of the visual work. Lessing's major criticism in turn, was levelled at visual artists who attempted to preempt the viewer's function by trying to depict narrative, just as he was also critical of verbal artists who attempted to encroach on the painter's province--and to preempt the visualizing faculty of the reader--by attempting to provide descriptive detail. Lessing's primary concern was thus with pure art, and to a certain extent this is also the concern I have been using thus far: O'Hara's basic medium is words, and in the case of *Sunday in the Park* I have concentrated on the visual component. Although such consideration is helpful in demonstrating that--by reason of the Interarts response of readers/viewers/ listeners--no art is truly pure, what remains to be considered is how response operates in works which are themselves multi-media projects and which involve not merely artists and recipients but also performers. Theatre is one example of this kind of art, and to explore how participation functions in such works we can return to *Sunday in the Park*.

In the first place we might consider the significance of Dot's role as George's model and the way the modelling is both an art in its own right and a form of collaboration. More than that, modeling is also a form of live performance, which paradoxically, consists in an arrest of the immediate moment. Thus, at the end of the musical, Dot tries to explain what she learned from George: "You taught me about concentration. At first I thought that just meant being still, but I was to understand it meant much more. You meant to tell me to be where I was--not some place in the past or

future" (168). Modeling is therefore something like Lessing's pregnant moment, but unlike a book, painting or record, live performance cannot be re-visited. A second point is made at the beginning of the play, where Dot sings "Sunday in the Park with George" as she models for George. Not only is he oblivious of her performance, but he also cannot perceive her as a person. The stage direction during that song says that George goes over to Dot, "and rearranges her a bit, as if she were an object" (22-23). What he does to her is precisely what he does with visual art--remember, he believes that it is what the eye arranges is what is beautiful. It is also because he treats her as an aesthetic object that their relationship falls apart. The lesson, if there is one, seems to be that just as the arts depend on each other, so neither must claim priority, or ignore the independence of the other, and the related point seems to be that life itself is an art of living.

I began this study by exploring the way that reception destabilizes the concept of "pure" art because our response "fills in the blanks"; we add other arts to complement the art that we are given; this process has an Interarts aspect, for what we create in our minds is multi-media art. Response to theatre equally confirms the active role played by the recipient, but in a paradoxical way. Audiences process what they are given, but because theatre is already an Interarts medium, it is not necessary to "fill in the blanks," so the response often becomes one of considering how the different arts work together, or sometimes, expressing preferences and identifying differences between the presented arts. Aristotle's *Poetics* is one example of such a response, and another can be found in Brecht's comments on theatre. Nevertheless, the main point I wish to make is that

regardless of the medium one examines, ultimately we respond to all art in a manner that has Interarts implications.

CHAPTER THREE

Graven Images: Icons and Interarts

Icons are so prevalent in our society that we tend to accept them merely as simple, neutral signs, or we tend not even to realize that they are icons: advertisement logos like the ∞ of the House of Chanel, traffic signs, and even the “picture” characters on computer programs. Similarly, although Mitchell has emphasized the importance of “iconology,” generally discussions of icons have been absent from current Interarts debate, or the word itself has been misused and confused with “image.” An image is not necessarily an icon: an icon is where image meets word; an icon is an image that has a narrative, a story, associated with it. A related basic quality of icons, therefore, is that they are referential. Icons are representations of something, and this plays a large factor in their ability to evoke a story. Traditionally, icons have also had a three-dimensional quality, and because of their object aspect, they can and often were/are moved from place to place.

Perhaps the most important trait of icons, however, is that they have spiritual associations, and often, function in a religious context. Here, I am using “spiritual” and “religious” in a neutral sense to refer to anything that is revered, or invested with some

sort of emotional affect. There are a multitude of official religions, and any can use icons. Images and words can be conjoined, but if they are not invested with some sort of sacred significance, they cannot be icons. Image/word/sacred become conflated in icons because it is through the story-telling process that the visual image becomes revered. The textual component of an icon (the story of what the icon represents) always involves something beyond the purely material. Ralph Waldo Emerson captured this aspect of the icon when he argued that all language has both a visual and a transcendental component, and that through symbolic language, we are able to see that “the world is a temple whose walls are covered with emblems” (17). “Emblems,” indeed, are a type of icon, and discussions of emblems constitute an early kind of Interarts debate.

One reason that icons are associated with the otherworldly is that they traditionally have been considered to be physical manifestations of gods (or near-gods). Because the abstract notion of gods, and descriptions of their attributes, can be difficult to conceptualize, early religions often represented the gods in visible form, and in human shape. By representing divinities in man-made art, icons not only conjoin image and word, but also, they conjoin the human and the divine, and the secular and the sacred. In *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, Mircea Eliade writes, about art intended for sacred use: “Through the mediation of artistic expression the attributes of a religious abstraction are revealed, so to speak, for it is presented in visible form. Hence, it may be said that sacred art seeks to represent the invisible by means of the visible” (55). Icons, as a sacred art, are an attempt for humans to connect with the divine, to bring the spiritual world into the physical world. A distinction must be made, however, between a fetish and an icon. A

fetish is an object that is itself considered sacred, while an icon is a representation of something sacred: it is what the icon represents that gives it a religious dimension.

In order to understand how icons can function, it is helpful to look at examples from Classical Greek and Christian religions, not because they are more valid than other forms of worship, but because they are part of our Western cultural heritage. In ancient Greece, gods and goddesses were represented in sculptures throughout the cities, but the most impressive, surely, were the colossal cult statues that were housed in the temples. Neil Hammond, in *A History of Greece*, writes that “the Athena Parthenos standing in the inner shrine of her own temple [the Parthenon] and holding victory in her hand received the offerings of her citizens and her allies” (334). Although her posture itself was iconic, her meaning was elaborated in the many stories told about her, and these narratives also functioned as the means whereby her image could be stored in memory, and also transported.

Another key feature of Greek civilization and religion was drama, and here we can see the way that the concept of icons can be expanded from the notion of an object to any art form with a multi-media character. In an essay entitled “Greek Drama,” Peter Levi explains that the “most important feature of early Greek tragedy that we should notice apart from its extreme formality in performance and its slow, controlled progression like that of music (and determined in fact by music and ritual dancing) is that tragedy is a substitute for Homer” (151). What enabled tragedy to substitute for Homer, at least in part, is the overlapping nature of drama and epic, of which the primary overlap would seem to be the central role played by divinities, or the religious component of each.

Another similarity, of course, is the way that both media have an auditory element, for here we should remember that in classical Greece, epics were transmitted orally. More specifically, music enters the equation through the structuring of the plot, just as drama enters the musical area by way of its association with dancing.

Long before Levi, moreover, other critics had noted the Interarts nature of ancient Greek drama. Percy Shelley regarded Athenian tragedy as the consummate art form for this very reason:

For the Athenians employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institutions, to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power; each division in the art was made perfect in its kind by artists of the most consummate skill and was disciplined into a beautiful proportion and unity, one towards the other. (1077)

The religious element that Shelley noted was also emphasized by Friedrich Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Not only did Nietzsche argue that ancient Greek tragedy emerged out of religious rituals, however, he also particularly stressed the musical component: “The tragic art of the Greeks was really born of the spirit of music” (129). Shelley and Nietzsche help us to realize, in short, the extent to which ancient tragedy was an enactment of the multi-media dynamics of the icon, or more accurately, when its religious component is considered, that it was itself a macrocosmic iconic form.

There are also many examples of icons in the Christian religion. In *The Icon in the Life of the Church*, George Galavaris includes reproductions of Christian icons from the sixth to the nineteenth century, and provides a brief summary of how icons have been used in Christianity. His objective is to suggest that in Christianity: “Image, words and actions are not contrasted, the use of one emerges into the use of another,” and that the “icon

must be envisaged as a whole” (Foreword). The image of an icon is always connected to its story, and, of course, a major part of Christianity has been instructive narratives that feature important figures, many of which have been represented visually. Galavaris, however, also emphasizes a third component--actions--and one of these actions pertains to the way that on the feast days that were held for important figures: “the icon [was] carried in procession through the city or from one church to the next” (8). Such actions indicate that icons frequently had a transportable aspect, just as the public and spectacle aspect of processions allies such actions with the theatre: indeed such processions have their roots in the pagan ritual dances out of which classical tragedy developed. Finally, Galavaris also draws attention to the association of icons with music. In fact, he derives some of his information about icons from a song: “the ‘kontakin’ sung at the festival of the restoration of the images, Sunday of Orthodoxy, gives us the entire significance of the Icon” (3).

As much as pagan religion and Christianity, therefore, both furnish examples of the Interarts nature of icons, so does the struggle between them suggest a further dimension: the political. When Christianity came onto the scene, it needed to overcome established pagan religions, and one of the fields on which the battle was fought was the nature and use of icons. As Mitchell points out, the origins of this struggle had to do with the Judaic heritage of Christianity and the biblical injunction against “graven images.” In turn, the success of Christianity lies to a great extent in the way that it was able to incorporate the pagan practice of using icons. As Galavaris writes: “Christianity yielded to the power of representation early enough, despite the hesitation or even the opposition of certain early writers” (1). At the same time, the suspicion of icons has continued to persist, particularly

in the West where the resistance can be seen in the privileging of the verbal, rather than the visual, component of the iconic complex.

In order to understand the politics that underlies responses to icons, it is helpful to look at the concept of iconoclasm. *The Oxford English Dictionary* calls iconoclasm “the breaking or destroying of images; esp. the destruction of images and pictures set up as objects of veneration . . . the attacking or overthrow of venerated institutions and cherished beliefs, regarded as fallacious or superstitious” (VII. 609). Certainly, this definition is accurate, but what it omits is the way that denouncing the icons of others usually involves advancing one’s own. According to Mitchell, the “iconoclast prefers to think that he worships no images of any sort, but when pressed, he is generally content with the rather different claim that his images are purer or truer than those of mere idolaters” (*Iconology* 198). Iconoclasm is not merely about attacking icons and what they represent: it is also about setting up your own icons. Christianity, for example used the pagan icons it denounced in the construction of its own. As Eliade explains: “A large number of dragon-slaying Gods or Heroes became St. Georges; storm Gods were transformed into St. Eliases; the countless fertility Goddesses were assimilated to the Virgin or to female Saints” (*Sacred* 37). Dismissing the icons of others involves a replacement process, where new icons become a reconstructed version of the opposition one is facing.

On the literary scene, this kind of iconoclasm also constitutes the dynamic of ekphrastic poetry. Because it conjoins word with image, ekphrastic poetry demonstrates the multi-media aspects of icons itself, but in contrast to traditional icon-objects--where an

image exists, and the narrative must be constructed to accompany it--with ekphrastic poetry the narrative exists, and the image must be visualized by the reader of the poem. The situation is further complicated by the fact that ekphrastic poetry tends to depict iconic art, i.e. art that conjoins image and word. Moreover, ekphrastic poetry, by reconstructing images in words, can be considered to be a reconstruction of the Other. In an essay entitled "Ekphrasis and the Other," Mitchell writes that with ekphrastic poetry there is a subtle power struggle in operation, and that "Like the masses, the colonized, the powerless and voiceless everywhere, visual representation cannot represent itself; it must be represented by discourse" (*Picture Theory* 157). Mitchell's examples are of male writers who depict visual art, which is characterized as female: in such works, the power lies with the poet, and not with the depicted object. Reconstructing the Other is empowering, for the person doing the reconstructing may do with the Other what they wish.

There is, however, a more positive way in which the reconstruction of icons can be considered: as a regeneration process of replacing defunct objects of reverence with new and vital ones. Thus, just as pagan icons were replaced by, or reconstructed into, Christian icons, so today, new icons have replaced these earlier religious ones. Today, we look to celebrities for guidance and example. Many celebrities, indeed, are called "icons"--Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley, Barbra Streisand--but in many respects, Audrey Hepburn fits the role best. First, Hepburn appeared in films, an Interarts medium that conjoins image, text and music, and which, like ancient drama, demonstrates the multi-media aspect

of icons. Only a very few film stars achieve full-fledged icon status, however, for becoming an icon also involves the way that a star enters the public consciousness.

In the case of Audrey Hepburn, we have magnificent images from her movies--such as *Roman Holiday* and *My Fair Lady*--plus the portraits done by the leading photographers of her day, like Richard Avedon or Cecil Beaton. Such images in themselves, however, are not enough, and even the great Avedon, as often as he tried, felt inadequate to the task of capturing the essence of Audrey Hepburn: "I couldn't lift her to greater heights. She was already there. I could only record. I could not interpret her. There was no going further than who she was. She paralyzed me. She had achieved in herself the ultimate portrait" (qtd. in Harris 140). A central problem with representations of divinities is that the divine, by definition, is beyond the means of humans, as Avedon seems to imply about Hepburn. The images that we have of Hepburn, however, are accompanied by music: who can forget the way Hepburn sounded when she spoke or sang? Cecil Beaton said that her voice was "peculiarly personal. With its singsong cadence that develops into a flat drawl ending in a childlike query, it has a quality of heartbreak" (qtd. in Karney 121). Her image forever will be connected, in particular, to the Henry Mancini/Johnny Mercer song "Moon River". In addition to these images and sounds, there are stories. Most obviously, there are the narratives of her movies, but just as importantly, there is the story of her life: the story of how she was born into the Dutch aristocracy, the horrors of the Nazi occupation of Holland, her "discovery" by the French novelist Colette, her unparalleled rise to stardom of the first magnitude, and finally, the dedication of her final years to the world's needy children. There is something

mythological about the rise of film stars: in fact their stories are among the epic myths of our time. Hepburn herself recounted an experience during World War II that suggests this heroic quality:

My aunt said to us, "Tomorrow we'll have nothing to eat, so we'd better stay in bed and conserve our energy." That very night, a member of the underground brought us food--flour, jam, oatmeal, even butter. I believe that my prayers had something to do with it. I don't want to sound pompous, but from childhood I always had this faith that things somehow work out. I've had black moments, but when I hit rock-bottom, there's always something there for me. (qtd. in Harris 46)

Hepburn's way of expressing herself, and so much of what has been written and said about her, cast her as otherworldly: it is this ethereal quality, when connected to the multi-media aspects, that truly makes Audrey Hepburn an icon.

Traditionally, attempts to define a spirit or divine power took the form of associating it with attributes and giving it a story. With a celebrity, there is a similar scenario. The true Audrey Hepburn can never be known, but we have a mental image and a story for her, and she has come to be associated with things that we appreciate: style, class, charity, sacrifice. In *Cosmos and History*, Eliade asks: "What does living mean for a man who belongs to a traditional culture? Above all, it means living in accordance with extrahuman models, in conformity with archetypes. Hence it means living at the heart of the *real* since . . . there is nothing truly real except the archetypes" (95). Archetypes are constantly reconfigured; thus, they continue, because they are fundamental to cultures and people. Icons, especially their religious component, represent archetypes, and correlate an individual with an eternal model; they also serve to constellate a group, which means that they have a public, popular or institutional aspect. In fact, the mechanisms that allow

society to run smoothly are aided by icons: government is an example of such a mechanism, which in Great Britain resorts to the iconology of the Royal Family. Yet there is a certain paradox; institutions that control society use icons, but sub-groups can subvert this control with their own icons.

Because icons can be used by both sides, because they can be employed to uphold as well as to subvert those in power, it is natural to be wary of icons. Nevertheless, this only partially explains why we fear icons; another reason is their multi-media aspect. With the multi-media nature of icons, we cannot in good conscience divide word from image; we must confront both arts at once. This dual aspect is frightening both because of the indeterminacy that is entailed, but also because, in essence, it requires us to be proficient in both art forms. Ultimately, however, the fearful quality of icons can be traced to the way that the visual/verbal binary they conjoin can be understood as representing ourselves and the Other. The multi-media component of icons makes it impossible to ignore the Other: whichever aspect is considered to be the Other, and whatever features we ascribe to the Other, does not matter. By including the Other, icons make us face the Other(s) that define us.

Besides being used by dominant political institutions, like church and state, icons are used by sub-groups of society, and here, I wish to centre my discussion more directly on aesthetic issues, and specifically on the implications of Frank O'Hara's championing of abstract painting. According to Mitchell, in his essay "Ut Pictura Theoria," abstract art is so purely visual that it demands narrative from viewers, and he also argues that these narratives take the form of theorizing (*Picture* 222, 234). Therefore, it is not surprising

that O'Hara responds to abstract painting with essays that conjoin verbal art and theory. O'Hara's article on Robert Motherwell is representative, for in it, Motherwell's own paintings seem secondary; rather, O'Hara creates a narrative for Motherwell, Motherwell's art, and the abstract movement. O'Hara invests abstract painting with what appeals to him. And what does appeal to him? In his Motherwell essay, O'Hara writes that "Modern artists ideologically, as the Jew racially, were the chosen enemies of the authoritarian states because their values were the most in opposition" (*Art* 69). O'Hara casts modern art (specifically abstract art) in a way that has political implications: the art with which he identifies is itself the Other, in the sense that it is the art form which is most ridiculed by traditionalists but also the art form which is Other to the medium in which O'Hara works. Therefore, it is a marginalized art form, which makes it analogous to marginalized political groups, like Jews, or many other examples. In his interpretation of a Motherwell painting, *At Five in the Afternoon*, O'Hara concludes that "Motherwell creates the structure that opposes him, the domination of which he must overcome to remain an artist" (*Art* 76). Here, O'Hara casts the visual artist as Other, struggling against domination in the only way possible: a pictorial reconstruction of the political structures with which he is in conflict. O'Hara himself, through his art criticism and ekphrastic poetry, also struggles against such political structures.

There is a long tradition of struggling against political structures with images. In "Image and Ideology," David B. Downing and Susan Bazargam write: "the possibilities for emancipation from dominant images of oppression and victimization lie in the struggles of individuals to create and sustain alternative images of particular and local histories

which may compete with the one-sidedness of monological History” (24). When individuals use images to create alternative stories, if the process is successful, then the images will constellate a group. Downing and Bazargam, by writing about images and ideologies, are dealing with iconic theories, both in the multi-media sense, and in the religious sense of how icons can be used to unite groups. Thus, the scenario that O’Hara scripts for abstract art is itself about the struggle to sustain alternative images.

In emphasizing the political nature of O’Hara’s essay on Motherwell, however, my purpose is neither to defend nor to discredit his interpretation of Motherwell’s art, but rather, to emphasize that in reality, the abstract paintings are merely splotches of paint on canvas. Any interpretation is possible, so that finally, the interpretation is about the interpreter and not the art. It is fair to suggest that abstract art became iconic for O’Hara because of the narrative that he wrote for it: O’Hara’s narrative not only conjoins the visual and the verbal, but in doing so makes abstract art reverential. Any image, therefore, any painting, can become iconic if we invest it with our beliefs, and thus narrative. O’Hara invests Motherwell’s paintings with a narrative about domination and submission, casting visual art as the Other with whom he identifies.

Though O’Hara writes about secular icons with great frequency in his poetry, one poem that is particularly effective in demonstrating the multi-media aspects of icons, and how they are invested with cultural significance, is “To the Film Industry in Crisis” (*Collected* 232). Although the title seems to imply that O’Hara is coming to the aid of something in distress, the poem makes it evident that the opposite situation is involved. The crisis in the poem lies with O’Hara: “In times of crisis, we must all decide again and

again whom we love" (8). It is the time period in general that is in a precarious situation. Actually, the industry is presented as functioning very well, and it is O'Hara who is living in a collapsing world, and must choose something with which to associate himself, something to sustain him. Traditionally, sustenance has been found in family, church or state, but for O'Hara, today it is the motion picture industry that provides such sustenance.

In the first stanza of the poem, before identifying film as his favorite, O'Hara mentions three other art forms: "lean quarterlies and swarthy periodicals," "experimental theatre" or "promenading Grand Opera" (1,3,5). The art forms progress from least likely to be iconic to most likely. Any of the four can, of course, conjoin text and image, but they vary in their ability to constellate a group. Periodicals and experimental theatre may coordinate small groups; opera is a bit more comprehensive. None of these, however, has enthralled twentieth-century culture in the way that film has: cinema touches a huge number of people in a significant way. In this respect, film nears the ability of traditional religion to constellate people. O'Hara ranks the other art forms as less valuable not because he dislikes them--in fact, he says that opera is close to his heart--but because he needs to find sustenance in what has influenced him most. Moreover, in identifying the art forms that are of less immediate importance, O'Hara remains general, which suggests that he does not have a bias against any specific example.

In the second stanza, however, when O'Hara shifts from art forms to institutions, he is quite specific about those he dislikes:

my starched nurse, who taught me
how to be bad and not bad rather than good (and has lately availed
herself of this information), not to the Catholic Church

which is at best an oversolemn introduction to cosmic entertainment not to the American Legion, which hates everybody. (9-13)

The institutions he criticizes are traditional ones, and here the progression is from those that are least objectionable to those he dislikes most. All three institutions have in common their contribution to a person's early development and socialization. The nurse helps to raise a child, the Catholic Church inculcates values, and the American Legion teaches patriotism. The progression is from intimate childhood bonds (the nurse) to a particular section of society (the Church) to America as a whole (the Legion): such progression is meant to take a child from home to the larger society. To a gay man like O'Hara, however, instruction from these institutions would not be helpful in preparing him to live in his sub-group; on the contrary such institutions are designed to teach conformity. As socializing mechanisms, moreover, all these institutions are characterized by a negative attitude towards life. The family (the nurse) is less concerned with good examples than bad--and here it is significant that in the original poem, O'Hara had "mother," which he later crossed out and substituted with the more clinical word "nurse" (editor's note, *Collected* 536); the Church is "oversolemn" and reserves "cosmic entertainment" for the after life; the American Legion is composed of those who have been trained to fight and kill others.

When O'Hara introduces these institutions, it is with the objective of determining what deserves "credit," and the various meanings of the term explain why he rules these institutions out, and finally, why he feels that the film industry is meritorious. First, credit comes from the Latin *credere*, to believe; family, church and state have today lost their "credibility" whereas film increasingly attracts followers. Second, "credit" has monetary

connotations; it involves materialistic values at the same time that it is based on “good faith.” Film, more than traditional institutions, exhibits this religious/secular dynamic. Third, “credit” is a term that has become firmly identified with the film industry: not only do movies conclude with a list of “credits” but the list of participants has steadily increased.

When O’Hara goes on to specify the attractions of the film industry, he begins by emphasizing its cosmic scope and colossal power:

glorious Silver Screen, tragic Technicolor, amorous Cinemascope
stretching Vistavision and startling Stereophonic Sound, with all
your heavenly dimensions and reverberations and iconoclasm! (14-16)

The apostrophic nature of his exclamation serves both to deify film and to suggest its personal appeal: film is like a divine lover who both awes and invites the viewer into its embrace. Film encompasses the range of emotions--from amorous to tragic--and its “glorious” features and “heavenly dimensions” are more inspiring than the ceremonies of the Church. O’Hara also emphasizes the multi-media nature of film--its appeal to both the visual and the auditory--and in aesthetic terms this refusal to be a “pure” art constitutes its iconoclasm. In religious-political terms, of course, film is iconoclastic because it replaces the old objects of reverence with new and seeming secular icons.

Consequently, after his apostrophe to the film industry, O’Hara continues by listing great celebrities from film; that he devotes the bulk of the poem to invoking celebrities suggests that the industry itself is not as important as the icons it produces. This mid-section resembles an epic role call of heroes, and in describing the various film stars, O’Hara makes them analogous to the deities and cultural figures that the ancients depicted

in their art and literature. Primarily, the stars he eulogizes were in their prime in the nineteen-thirties, when O'Hara was a child, and if we remember that he begins the stanza by searching for what deserves credit in shaping a child, his point seems to be that it was the great film stars of his childhood that influenced him most.

O'Hara usually introduces film stars in the form of the classical epithet: a name conjoined with a visual evocation of attributes. Thus, he gives us: "Ginger Rogers with her pageboy bob like a sausage on her shuffling shoulders," "peach-melba-voiced Fred Astaire of the feet" and "Jean Harlow reclining and wiggling" (20, 21, 34). The reader is given a tidbit of information and is encouraged to construct the multi-media aspect of the icon by conjoining the visual image with a narrative. In imagining these stories, a recollection of a specific movie may be involved and frequently O'Hara plants clues. When he invokes "Mae West in a furry sled, / her bordello radiance and bland remarks" (24-25), for example, we may recall one of taunting remarks that characterize the roles in which she performed. Similarly, we may envision what we know of her life; working her way into show business from a lowly background, her jail time and her fall into obscurity. We can still respond, however, even if we do not know anything of the stars, for what O'Hara taps into are cultural myths or the epic narratives of the rise to stardom.

Another star O'Hara invokes is Elizabeth Taylor, "blossoming" (36). Though O'Hara wrote the poem in 1955, when Taylor had been married only a few times, her name has become synonymous with unhappy love affairs, divorce, widowhood, beauty, jewellery, Academy Awards, near-death experiences, weight problems, chemical dependency, and perfume. When we visualize Elizabeth Taylor, these are the things that

come to mind because these are the components of the myths of our time. My related point is that anything we know about the stars can be used in our reconstructions of them. Or perhaps the point is the extent to which film stars reflect collective myths which we in turn use when we visualize them.

In the last stanza of "To the Film Industry in Crisis," O'Hara becomes explicit in transforming film stars into deities:

under the kleig lights with your faces
in packs for our edifications, the way the clouds come often at night
but the heavens operate on the star system. It is a divine precedent
you perpetuate! Roll on, reels of celluloid, as the great earth rolls on!
(42-45)

Here the film stars are called upon to provide the moral uplift that was formerly the task of family, church and state. Their iconic aspect is also emphasized by O'Hara's concentration on their faces, for traditionally, this aspect of the body is the one most featured in edifying depictions of the gods. In this way, what film perpetuates is "divine precedent," which suggests that as much as film stars constitute new icons, so much is the process one that is divinely sanctioned. As Eliade stresses, archetypes are continually reconfigured; the essence of divinity is always with us and continually reappears in different forms. Just as the Catholic Church produced its icons, so the studio system produced the great stars about which O'Hara writes. One industry, the Church, has been replaced by another, film, but divinities and icons persist; in the "reels of celluloid" the cyclical nature of time and revolution is encoded; the movie "star system" replicates the astrological one.

For these reasons, O'Hara prays: "may the money of the world glitteringly cover you / as you rest after a long day" (41-42). Film stars deserve "credit" in monetary terms precisely because they provide something that is of more than materialistic value. O'Hara also encourages us to reconsider the biblical admonition: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (St. Mark 12.17). In the case of film stars, the glitter of their faces under the "kleig lights" entitles them to the glitter of coins: church and state belong together.

The religious aspect of O'Hara's iconoclasm brings together his championing of abstract art and his deification of film stars. According to Eliade: "The two specific characteristics of modern art, namely the destruction of traditional forms and the fascination for the formless, for the elementary modes of matter, are susceptible to religious interpretation" (83). The religious aspect, he explains, derives from the fact that "in these vast demolitions one can always read like a watermark the hope of creating a new universe, more viable because it is more true, that is, more adequate to the actual situation of man" (*Sacred* 84). For many in the nineteen-fifties and early sixties--and particularly for a gay man--life was nothing like the stereotypical Eisenhower model. O'Hara champions modern art and celebrities in the interest of discovering icons that are more appropriate to the world of today.

Sunday in the Park with George is also concerned with how images become entrenched and the role of art in subverting established norms and value systems. In the nineteenth-century section of the play, for example, there is tension between what Jules

and Yvonne believe is proper to represent in painting, and what George chooses to paint.

In "No Life" Jules sings:

It's neither pastoral
Nor lyrical.

Yvonne (Giggling): You don't suppose that it's satirical?

(They laugh heartily)

Jules: Just density
Without intensity--

Yvonne: No life.

(speaks)

Boys with their clothes off--

Jules (mocking): *I must paint a factory next!* (28-29)

Jules, a painter of the established nineteenth-century tradition, objects to the commonness of George's subjects. According to Yvonne, they "might be in some dreary / Socialistic periodical" (29).

As Yvonne's comment suggests, behind these seemingly aesthetic objections there are more ideological reasons, which become clearer when Jules angrily says to George: "always changing! Why keep changing?" (56). George has abandoned the traditional images to which Jules still clings, and Jules is rightly nervous about the way he might be clinging to what is on the way out. According to John Canaday, in *Mainstreams of Modern Art*, the real Georges Seurat "insisted always upon the contemporary, everyday subjects of impressionism as opposed to the idealism of conventional classical themes" (315). Seurat, the historical person, and the artist depicted in *Sunday in the Park*, moves

to new images. In *Sunday in the Park*, Jules's fears about being supplanted amount to hysteria when he tells Yvonne: "There's a move on to include his [George's] work in the next group show," to which she replies: "Never!" (44). There is a need to maintain your own icons when new images are encroaching. Towards the end of Act I, Dot tells Yvonne: "Jules is jealous of George now" (70). In short, more than presenting a shift from nineteenth-century styles, represented by Jules, to twentieth-century modernism, represented by George, the play dramatizes a shift in value systems. The art represented by Jules is for the elite, and about the elite; George represents art for the proletariat. This shift in ideologies is represented by changes in pictorial styles and interpretation, and it is this conjunction of the verbal, visual and ideological that creates icons and gives them their cultural significance.

When George first paints his monkeys or boatmen or dogs, however, they are images and not icons. Although George's paintings serve to dethrone previous icons, what he himself paints has not yet achieved that status. When speaking about the attitudes others have towards George, the Boatman says: "they hated him because they knew he would always be around" (133). George's images are not icons at the time he produces them, but eventually, they acquire iconic status, a sign of which is their longevity.

Twentieth-century George has many of the same problems as his great-grandfather, as evidenced in the song "Putting it Together," in which people at the art gallery express their response to George's art:

Naomi: I like the images.

Alex: Some.

Betty: Come on.

You had your moment.
Now it's George's turn-- (41)

Alex continues to resist until Betty finally tells him: "It's just your jealousy of George's work" (157). Now it is twentieth-century George's images that are feared, and Alex replaces Jules as the one who is jealous.

By the time the twentieth-century George is creating, the work of his great-grandfather is revered, and in part the iconic status of Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* is signaled by its transportability: painted in France, the canvas turns up in New York City. Like the icons that were carried in processions long ago, the great icons of modern art are carried around on touring exhibitions. Like the icons of the past, furthermore, the painting is located in a sacred space, which in the modern world is an art gallery. According to Eliade, sacred space is where "man is able to communicate with the other world, the world of divine beings or ancestors. Every consecrated space represents an opening towards the transcendent" (*Sacred* 107-08). Art galleries are similarly the place where we communicate with the past, through art, and--again through art--where we can find transcendence. In the past people went to important churches and temples to see the greatest art man could produce, and while we still go to churches and temples, today we are just as likely to go art galleries for this purpose.

There are a few other points about Seurat that help to explain why *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* was particularly well-suited to Sondheim and Lapine's concern with icons. Georges Seurat, along with a handful of others, created the basis for twentieth-century art. According to Canaday, the "art of Seurat and Cezanne led the way for the abstract geometrical schools of the twentieth century such as cubism,

which completed the transformation of the gods and heroes into the simplest Euclidean rectangles" (343). Although Seurat continued to depict human figures in recognizable settings, his experiments with technique allowed abstract expressionists to take his optical strategies to the extreme, whereby painters, like Motherwell, could completely abandon traditional subjects. The debate about which Impressionist or Postimpressionist painter, or which particular painting, was the watershed of modernism is interesting, but for my purposes the important point is that *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* has had an inspirational and liberating effect that few works of art can hope to approximate. My particular case in point, of course, is the Sondheim/Lapine play, and the way that their love of the painting took the iconic form of conjoining its visual images with verbal and musical art and thereby both reconstructing the painting and bringing it to life.

The precedents of loving works of art are many, but perhaps none is more archetypal than that of Pygmalion. As told by Ovid, Pygmalion sculpts his statue because he dislikes women who spend "their days in wickedness"; because of his horror at their vices he "lived celibate and long / Lacked the companionship of married love" (232). Except for their depiction of George Seurat as a loner who is too committed to his painting to give Dot the attention she needs, and who is more concerned with her value as a model than her needs as a person, Sondheim and Lapine have little interest in this aspect of the myth. About the statue, however, Ovid writes: "It seemed to be alive / Its face to be a real girl's, a girl / Who wished to move" (232-233). In *Sunday in the Park*, Dot also has this desire when she is required to maintain a fixed pose in her modeling for George, and although Sondheim and Lapine did not actually create the art object that they love--

they did not create the painting--their objective is equally to enable the figures in the work to "move." At the outset of Act II, the characters are presented in the positions that they have in the painting, and the stage direction says that "The audience should feel the tension" (123). The tension is broken when the characters begin to move, and although they resume the poses at the end of the play, they also ultimately exit from the stage, creating the impression that they have been truly liberated into life.

There is also a degree of similarity between Pygmalion's technique and that of Seurat. In describing the naturalism of Pygmalion's statue, Ovid writes: "Such art his art concealed" (233). *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* is a painting, not sculpture, and it is an important step towards non-representational art. Yet Seurat's ability is such that the dots in his paintings cease to be dots; they fool the eye and become images. Both artists are illusionists: Pygmalion's naturalism and Seurat's pointillism are meant to make the viewer forget, respectively, that the sculpture is art, and that the painting is dots.

To a great extent, the artifice employed by Sondheim and Lapine in bringing Seurat's painting to life involves a conjunction of visual, verbal and musical art. For this purpose, it is also essential that the arts be shown to need each other, and this is a point that is emphasized during the singing of "It's Hot up Here." The stage direction says that "we see everyone in the tableau" (123). The characters are clothed and posed as the figures in the painting. Dot and Jules, for example, are the prominent couple in the far right of the painting. As well, certain elements of the painting--such as the trees, certain figures, the dog and the monkey--are presented as painted cut-outs, and not as real trees,

people or animals. Although the characters speak, moreover, they are also conscious of being in a painting. Jules sings: "I am completely out of proportion" (123). He also sings, to Dot: "I trust my cigar is not bothering you-- / unfortunately, it never goes out" (125).

The entire cast sings:

It's hot up here
And strange up here,
No change up here,
Forever.

How still it is. (126)

Though they know that they are frozen in time and that the cigar will always be lit, there is also the suggestion that there will be change; as Dot sings: "They'll argue till they fade" (127). If the suggestion here is that visual art is not ultimately beyond time, the related point is that the verbal arts (arguing) are the means whereby change can take place.

This need for the verbal, moreover, is something that Seurat himself recognized. According to Wendy Steiner, "divisionism in Seurat leads logically and inexorably toward narrativity" (145). Steiner believes that Seurat's technique means to elicit a verbal response from the viewer. She also points out the way that the figures of the woman in the hat in *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* are repeated, and the way that repeated figures strengthen narrativity. Emphasizing this point, and identifying the woman in the hat as Dot, Marie sings;

There she is--
(pointing to different figures)
There she is, there she is, there she is--
Mama is everywhere. (161)

The inherent narrativity of the painting is a condition that helps Sondheim and Lapine create the plot and dialogue of their play. The narrative that Sondheim and Lapine create, however, is complex and not merely an attempt to present what the figures in the painting might say to each other; it also provides a history of the genesis of the painting and its fortunes, and dramatizes the lives of the characters, and their descendents.

If *Sunday in the Park* is iconic by reason of its conjunction of visual and verbal art, another iconic feature is the way that music functions in it. Notably, in Act I, when George Seurat is setting up the blocking for the song "Sunday," the stage direction says: "The music becomes calm, stately triumphant. *George* turns front. The promenade begins. Throughout the song, *George* is moving about setting trees, cut-outs, and figures--making a perfect picture" (87). The ceremonial nature of this situation is repeated in Act II when twentieth-century George explains why he created his "Chromolume #7": "I was commissioned by this museum to create an art piece commemorating Georges Seurat's painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*" (133).

This ritualistic aspect of *Sunday in the Park*, finally, takes us to religion and the cultural issues addressed in both the painting and the play. The primary directive here, of course, is the day of the week that is emphasized in both: "Sunday." In the case of the painting, however, there are no elements which would suggest a Christian element or holy day. The implication would seem to be that traditional religious values have lost their importance and that the secular component of society has won. Similarly, in the play, although the action of the nineteenth-century episodes occurs in France "on a series of Sundays" (14), there is no mention of Christianity or institutionalized religion, which one

might expect, given the extent to which France was a predominantly Catholic country. Instead, in the song "The Day Off," Sunday is presented as a day to get away from the city for rest and relaxation. At one point Jules tells George: "Working on Sunday again? You should give yourself a day off" (55). George uses Sunday for work; Jules uses it for rest. "Sunday," however, was also the day on which the Christian God rested after creating the world, and thus the use of this day as the time featured in the painting and play seems the means whereby art is defined as the new site of the sacred and the new passport to immortality.

In a fascinating coincidence, Frank O'Hara was also inspired by *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, creating the poem "On Looking at *La Grande Jatte*, the Czar Wept Anew" (*Collected* 63-64). Like *Sunday in the Park*, O'Hara's poem attempts to reconstruct images from the painting, and to conjoin these with narrative in an iconic fashion. Much the same interpretive response is encoded in the poem itself, where the czar of the title constructs a fantasy about Seurat's painting. In the opening lines of the poem, the czar:

paces the blue rug. It is the end of summer,
the end of his excursions in the sun. He
may now close his eyes as if they were tired flowers
and feel no sense of duty towards the corridor. (1-4)

The situation seems to be one in which the czar has both ceased his administrative tasks and is nearing the end of his life.

In his despondent and agitated mood, the czar gazes at the Seurat painting and cries because:

Only a few feet away the grass is green, the rug
he sees is grass; and people fetch each other in

and out of shadows there, chuckling and symmetrical. (7-9)

The Seurat canvas represents beauty and vivacity, things that the czar no longer knows in his life. In contrast to the “blue rug” on which he had been pacing, the painting’s “rug” is green grass. In addition to the green grass, what particularly attracts the czar’s attention are the “shadows” and “symmetrical” nature of the painting. Significantly these are also the elements emphasized in *Sunday in the Park*. In the song “Sunday,” the characters in the play describe the painting that they are in:

On the soft
Green elliptical grass
As we pass
Through arrangements of shadows. (88)

Making this connection is not to imply that Sondheim read O’Hara’s poem, but rather that the nature of a multi-media iconic work is to elicit this kind of recurrent response.

Not only does the czar admire the painting, he wants to walk into it and join the figures that are in it. He wonders if, “when the music is over,” he should not:

join his friends
out there near the lake, right here beside the lake!
“O friends of my heart!” and they will welcome him
with open umbrellas, fig bars, handmade catapults! (17-20)

To the extent that the finale of a piece of music is frequently considered to be a metaphor for the end of one’s life, the implication is that entering a work of art should be like entering the world of the eternal.

In the second stanza of the poem, the czar tries to forget the painting and concentrate on his own lacklustre life. He plans a dinner, and “the steam rising from his Pullman kitchen / fogs up all memories of Seurat, the lake, / the summer” (26-28). But

the forgetting cannot be sustained, for quickly, he remembers "the lake and the voices!" (35). Although a painting cannot "speak," iconic visual art is characterized by the way that it encourages viewers to "hear."

By the third stanza, however, the czar has resigned himself to a barren, frozen world. He plans to send a telegram that will explain:

There could only be a stranger wandering
in this landscape, cold, unfortunate, himself
frozen in wintry eyes. (45-47)

It is difficult to determine exactly what point O'Hara is trying to make in these concluding lines, but considering that the end of the czars in Russia led to a political regime which banished religion, the message might be the bleakness of a life without a belief in a life beyond. The related issue might be the role of art in compensating for this loss. In turn, by illustrating that it was through a secular painting like Seurat's that the czar finds a moment of transcendence, O'Hara might be emphasizing that art does not need to depict religious subjects in order to provide spiritual sustenance.

This "Sunday" aspect of secular art, of course, was also the message encoded in the Sondheim/Lapine play, which like O'Hara's poem, demonstrates the kind of art work which best performs this religious function: art which conjoins various media in an iconic fashion. For these reasons, accordingly, the study of icons needs a central place in Interarts debate, just as such study needs to go beyond purely text/image discussions. Not only are icons revealing examples of the connection of various art forms, they also demonstrate the way that this conjunction goes hand-in-hand with another: that of the religious and the political. More than any other art form, icons draw our attention to the

way that aesthetic discussions are ultimately ideologically coded. Finally, through a study of the history and evolution of icons, we also realize that they do not need to be limited to “objects”: iconicity, in all its various dimensions, is a feature that can be found in poems and plays, both short works and full-scale compositions, and in the present as well as the past.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the greatest value of Interarts study is the way that it enables us to appreciate works of quality which have been ignored because they do not accord with the conventional divisions into aesthetic disciplines, of which the relatively little attention given to works like *Sunday in the Park With George* and O'Hara's poems seems to attest. In addition, as critics like Mitchell have noted, Interarts study has the potential to bring marginalized art forms into academic discourse. Comic books, popular culture artifacts, and multi-media video production are his primary examples, but I would also mention fashion, cosmetics and celebrity promotion, and in particular the illustrated magazines that feature these topics. Moreover, as our culture becomes one that is truly multi-media, we must be prepared and equipped to study art forms that challenge conventional boundaries and disciplines--or else our aesthetic discourses are destined to become irrelevant from the art that is actually part of our day-to-day lives.

Interarts study, however, has tended to be impeded by the lack of an adequate vocabulary and theoretical framework. We have critical terminology and rationales for discussing verbal and visual art and music, but few terms to describe the dynamics of conjunctive art forms, and most of the theorizing to date has been characterized by

adherence to the ancient *ut pictura, poesis* formula. Thus in the same way that deconstructionists and feminists or proponents of other “new” approaches have worked to create language and ideology appropriate to their subjects, so a major component of Interarts study must be the attempt to devise a vocabulary and articulate a philosophy for this kind of research. My thesis has been designed with this objective in mind, and the contribution I hope to have made lies in my emphasis on the way that certain art works provide not merely “good examples” of composite art but also instructive directions about the issues that need addressing and the “love” that needs to impel such discourse.

Continuing with this emphasis, I would like to return again to *Into the Woods* to suggest the way that a final value of Interarts study is the way that it enables us not merely to appreciate the new and the marginalized but also to re-juvenate traditional subjects of aesthetic discourse. That is why in my Introduction I invoked the words of the Baker’s Wife and said that my thesis is a study of the arts, not in the context of “or” but rather in the context of “and.” What I would now note is that after having a moment of “and,” the Baker’s Wife goes on to sing:

Let the moment go...
 Don’t forget it for a moment, though
 Just remembering you’ve had an “and,”
 When you’re back to “or,”
 Makes the “or” mean more
 Than it did before. (Song 15)

Interarts study has the potential to make the texts and pictures that have long been favorites mean more than they did before, and mainly because Interarts study encourages us to realize the extent to which such works are more composite than we might have hitherto realized. Similarly, Interarts study has the potential to remind us that a

conjunction of art forms characterized the early days of Western culture and constitutes its legacy to us. Thus, as much as Interarts study participates in the postmodernist deconstruction of tradition, so much does it also serve to establish continuity between the past and the present. Nothing, in short, needs to be thrown away when one employs an Interarts approach, and everything is to be gained.

APPENDIX

Illustrations

It would be remiss to present an Interarts thesis that featured only words. Technological factors prevent the inclusion of music, but some images can be presented that complement the text.

Figure 1 is a reproduction of Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. The painting that launched thousands of words, and even some music, is impressive even in an inferior reproduction, and inspires one to wish for a trip to Chicago, where the actual canvas is located.

Figure 2 is a photograph of the New York cast of *Sunday in the Park with George*. The characters are being arranged, by George, in the positions of the figures in the Seurat canvas. Studying the Seurat painting and the cast photograph in conjunction is a rewarding endeavor, demonstrating how the painting is visually reconstructed in the musical.

Figure 3 is a photograph of Audrey Hepburn. This promotional picture from *Sabrina* displays Hepburn's ethereal quality that set her above her contemporaries. While

not the most immediately beautiful star, Hepburn projects a composure that is greater than the sum of her individual features; her essence is an inner beauty that shone through in every gesture, every word.

I do not wish to write too much here about these images, preferring instead to encourage the reader to engage in Interarts response by relating them to my discussion. That conjoining is perhaps the most important memory to take away from this thesis--for it has the potential to make the thesis, in its own little way, iconic.

Figure 1. *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. 1884-86.

Georges Seurat. The Chicago Art Institute. *Seurat*, Fig. 21.

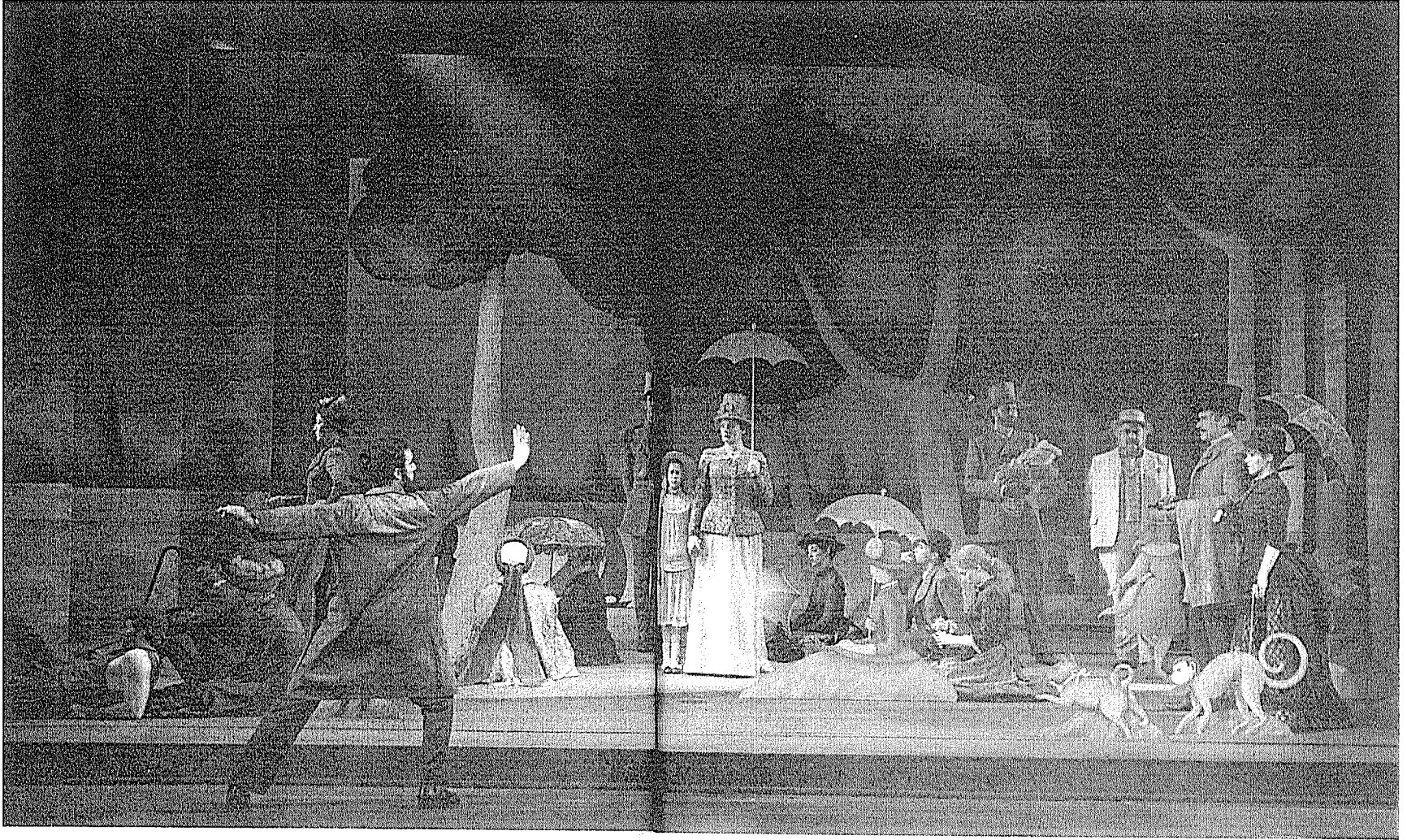
Figure 2. Photograph of the Broadway cast of *Sunday in the Park with George*.

1984? Martha Swope. Sondheim, Stephen, and James Lapine. *Sunday in the Park with George* (book), 110-11.

Figure 3. Photograph of Audrey Hepburn. 1953. The Kobal Collection, London.

Semach, Klaus-Jürgen. *Audrey Hepburn: Photographies*, 45.







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