An Unreleased Laocoon: The First Draft of Clement Greenberg's "Towards a Newer Laocoon"

Camilla Froio

The essay "Towards a Newer Laocoon" by Clement Greenberg was published in the July–August 1940 issue of *Partisan Review* a little less than a year after his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" had appeared in the same magazine (fig. 1).[1] "Towards a Newer Laocoon," however, faced a more complex and tormented editorial process than had the earlier essay. Greenberg's private correspondence reveals that he wrote and corrected several drafts between December 1939 and June 1940. In a letter to his friend Harold Lazarus, the critic declares that the editors of the magazine had forced him to cut and modify the text in, as he put it, an outrageous manner. This statement suggests that there were earlier drafts of the essay that were different from the only version known to date.

The aim of this contribution is to shed new light on the origin and editing process of Greenberg's "Laocoon," using unpublished documents from his personal archive, conserved in the special collections of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. By way of a metanarrative—an interrelation between information found in the correspondence and the archival documents—it is possible to define the character and chronology of the drafts and, in particular, to trace the birth and development of Greenberg's argument. More generally, it allows us to redraw the youthful profile of one of the greatest American art critics of the twentieth century and to redefine the sources of his thought with greater precision.

According to the letters, Greenberg started to work on his "Laocoon" essay following the publication and success of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"—in other words, sometime around the end of 1939 and beginning of 1940. In a letter of 20 March 1940, he informed Lazarus that he had almost completed "the first installment of my next piece which will come out, if O.K., in the next PR."[2]

Greenberg had great expectations and foresaw the publication of his essay in the spring of that year. On 5 April he wrote to his friend that the draft will probably be accepted by the review and printed in the next number together with an unpublished poem by T. S. Eliot.[3] In reality, as the dates prove, the publication of "Laocoon" was held up for at least two months. On 24 June, Greenberg could finally announce, "The P.R. is running my article in the next number," but it was at the cost of a radical revision of its

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Fig. 1. Passport photo of the young Clement Greenberg (1909–94), taken before his journey to Europe in April–May 1939. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 950085, ADDS, box 2. By permission of Sarah Greenberg Morse for the estate of Clement Greenberg. © Sarah Greenberg Morse.

content—"They forced me to cut it outrageously."[4] The agonizing saga of "Towards a Newer Laocoon" ended in July–August 1940, when the essay appeared in the new number of *Partisan Review* (fig. 2).

The correlation between the information contained in the letters and the material found in the archive made it possible to follow the editing process of three distinct drafts.[5] One, most likely the first, was finished by 20 March, as indicated in the letter of that date to Lazarus, and we can hypothesize that the message of 5 April, stating that the essay was ready to be published together with T. S. Eliot's poem, referred to this draft. Over the course of about two and a half months, from April to the end of June, Greenberg probably worked on two further drafts, following the repeated refusals and corrections made by editor Dwight Macdonald (1906–82).

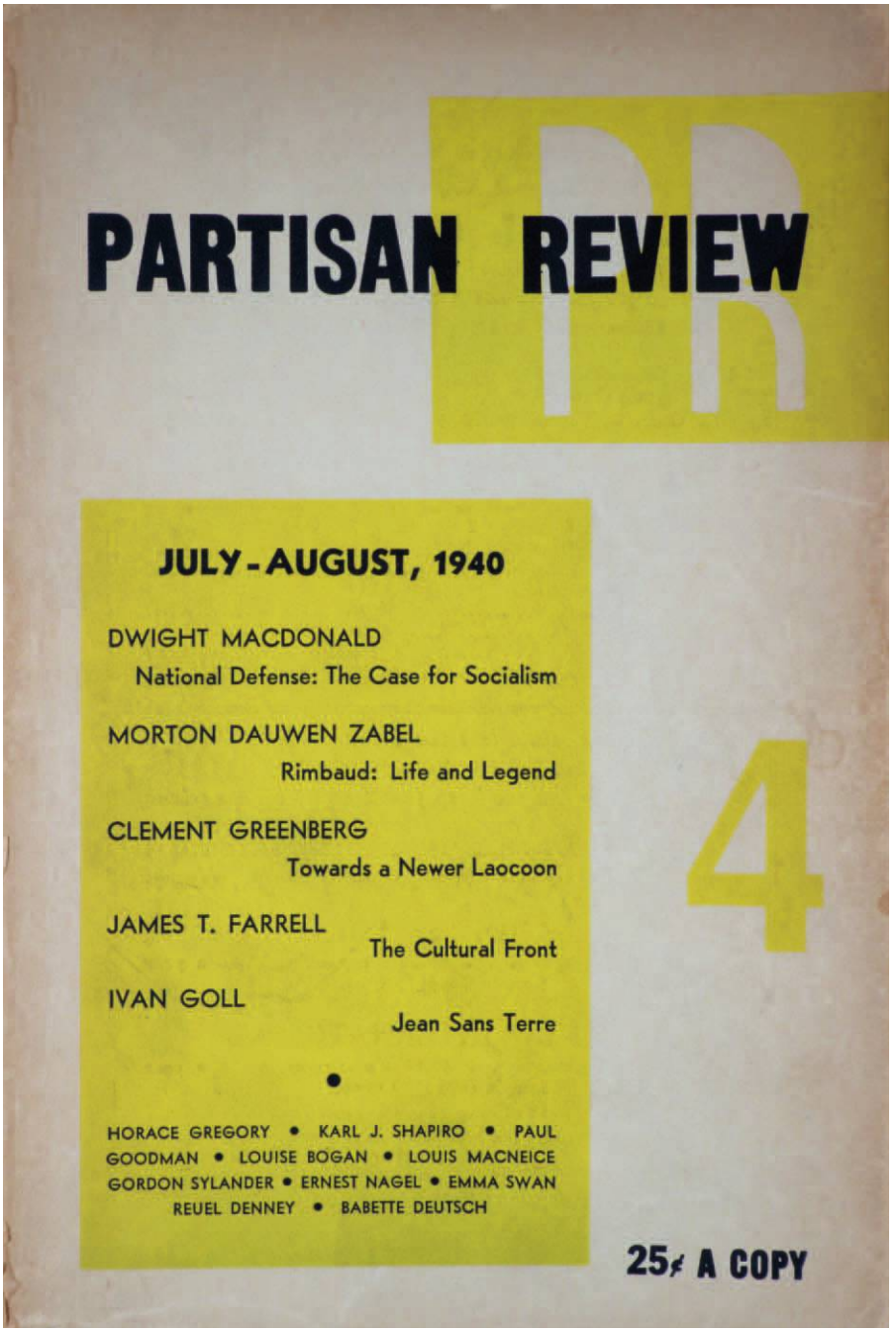


Fig. 2. ***Partisan Review,*** **July–August 1940, cover listing contents to include Greenberg's article.** Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 950085, box 25, folder 3.

A typescript that already carries the title "Towards a Newer Laocoon" is probably the original version, the one that Greenberg felt the most confident about (fig. 3). The text begins with a quote from Paul Valéry's *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* (1923), which introduces the reader to the main argument, the ontological essence of nonfigurative painting and the process of human perception:

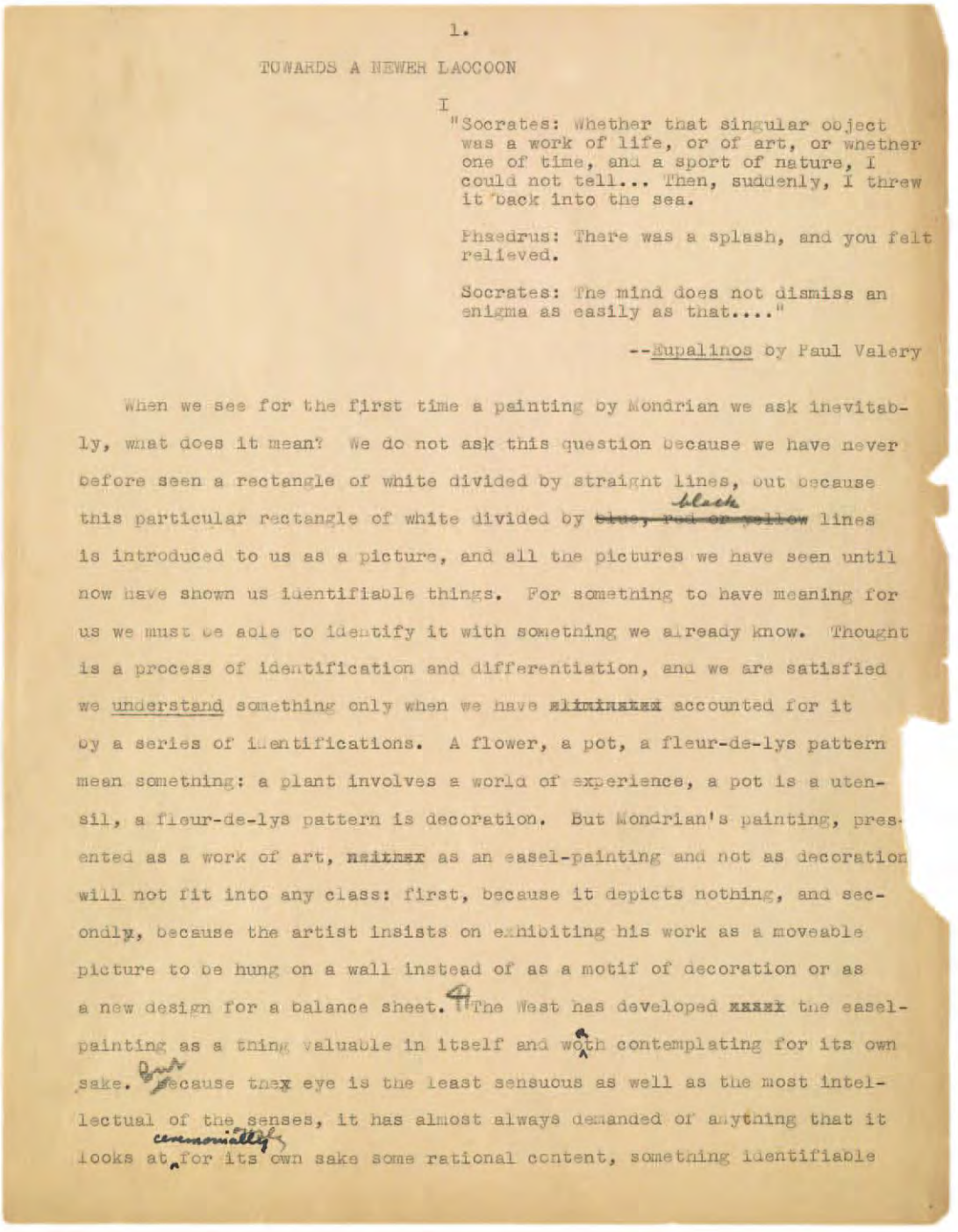
> Socrates: Whether that singular object was a work of life, or of art, or whether one of time, and a sport of nature, I could not tell. . . . Then, suddenly, I threw it back into the sea.
> Phaedrus: There was a splash, and you felt relieved.
> Socrates: The mind does not dismiss an enigma as easily as that.

The quote anticipates the purpose of the essay in a veiled manner and implies that at the center of the discussion will be the comprehension of the identity of an enigmatic subject, which, as Greenberg soon reveals, is the ambiguous and separate existence of the abstract work of art. He introduces the argument with the following question:

> When we see for the first time a painting by Mondrian we ask inevitably, what does it mean? We do not ask this question because we have never before seen a rectangle of white divided by straight lines, but because this particular rectangle of white divided by black lines is introduced to us as a picture, and all the pictures we have seen until now have shown us identifiable things. For something to have meaning for us we must be able to identify it with some thing we already know. Thought is a process of identification and differentiation, and we are satisfied we understand something only when we have accounted for it by a series of identifications. . . . But Mondrian's painting, presented as a work of art, as an easel-painting and not a decoration will not fit into any class.[6]

As Greenberg indicates, the presence of an identifiable subject stimulates the human mind to work out its relationship to a known reality. Our consciousness is stimulated and the intellect is asked to make associations with everyday experiences. But the case with abstract art is completely different—mental and subconscious associations are suppressed and sight becomes the only point of reference, while the perception of the work is transformed into a purely physical and aesthetic experience. The mind is required to focus on the perception of what in a figurative painting is considered to be entirely optional and subordinate to the subject: the support, the pigment, and the line.

Immediately, in the very first pages, Greenberg differentiates between figurative and abstract painting, a distinction that is parallel to a second one, between literature and the visual arts. As the essay's title indicates, Greenberg's vision is aligned with the aesthetic principles in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's essay *Laocoön* (1766), which established that the plastic and verbal disciplines had to be separate because of the differences of their respective languages. According to Greenberg, literature is an exclusively associative art, since it aims to convey an emotion stimulating the association with reality;



1.

TOWARDS A NEWER LAOCOON

I

"Socrates: Whether that singular object was a work of life, or of art, or whether one of time, and a sport of nature, I could not tell... Then, suddenly, I threw it back into the sea.

Phaedrus: There was a splash, and you felt relieved.

Socrates: The mind does not dismiss an enigma as easily as that...."

--Eupalinos by Paul Valery

When we see for the first time a painting by Mondrian we ask inevitably, what does it mean? We do not ask this question because we have never before seen a rectangle of white divided by straight lines, but because this particular rectangle of white divided by ~~blue, red or yellow~~ black lines is introduced to us as a picture, and all the pictures we have seen until now have shown us identifiable things. For something to have meaning for us we must be able to identify it with something we already know. Thought is a process of identification and differentiation, and we are satisfied we understand something only when we have ~~eliminated~~ accounted for it by a series of identifications. A flower, a pot, a fleur-de-lys pattern mean something: a plant involves a world of experience, a pot is a utensil, a fleur-de-lys pattern is decoration. But Mondrian's painting, presented as a work of art, ~~neither~~ as an easel-painting and not as decoration will not fit into any class: first, because it depicts nothing, and secondly, because the artist insists on exhibiting his work as a moveable picture to be hung on a wall instead of as a motif of decoration or as a new design for a balance sheet. The West has developed ~~the~~ the easel-painting as a thing valuable in itself and worth contemplating for its own sake. Because the eye is the least sensuous as well as the most intellectual of the senses, it has almost always demanded of anything that it looks at ceremonially for its own sake some rational content, something identifiable

Fig. 3. First page of the original draft of "Towards a Newer Laocoon" with epigraph from Paul Valéry's *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* (1923). Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 950085, box 25, folder 1. By permission of Sarah Greenberg Morse for the estate of Clement Greenberg. © Sarah Greenberg Morse.

painting, on the other hand, deals only with sensory perception, namely sight. In spite of their opposing natures, the two arts have always been interrelated, producing, as Greenberg declares following Lessing's argument, a contradiction in terms and an irresolvable conflict. The practice of merging verbal and visual disciplines, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was traditionally encouraged, but in time it corrupted the true nature of painting. Over the centuries, the support was flattened and the illusion of perspective and shading were used to transmit the artist's perceptions and impressions. Pictorial narration, imitating literary narration, had to take place linearly, going beyond the narrow limits imposed by the medium's two-dimensionality.

In his essay, Greenberg expounds on a confrontation between the cultural changes and the evolution of the bourgeoisie occurring over some three hundred years, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. According to his point of view, figurative art and realism dominated the nineteenth century, since they reflected the desire of the middle class to distance itself from materialism and move toward a more spiritual way of life. Art reacted by negating its physical qualities and attributing sole preeminence to the subject and the illusion of an alternative reality. According to Greenberg, a reaction to the tradition of realism on the threshold of the next century gave life to an entirely new and experimental artistic phase: the culture of the avant-garde and the evolution leading to abstraction, signifying the beginning of a gradual progress toward the conquest of aesthetic purity. The negation of realism amounts to a refutation of the supremacy of literature, that is, of the associative functionality of the intellect. Painting, by now having reached autonomy, can be perceived by the senses in an independent and exclusive manner. This new condition of purity will attain completion with the future realization of a socialist state, when the democratization of culture and the sharing of knowledge reach their apex. By definitively abandoning the figurative subject, the aesthetic emotion will not be confined to the circle of the elite bourgeoisie but become accessible even to the masses.

Greenberg's theory of the aesthetic emotion, in the sense of an emotion aroused by a particular combination of lines and colors dissociated from a figurative subject, evidently refers to the theories of art developed by Clive Bell and Roger Fry. In particular, the last two pages of the draft (pages 6 and 7), brusquely cut off from the missing remainder, confirm that Greenberg's theory of art is firmly anchored in the British formalist current. Although a vast and authoritative body of criticism has always agreed that the theories of Bell and Fry had a determining influence on the formulation of the core principles of Greenberg's modernism, up to now we lacked the elements to document and establish this intellectual connection textually. Thus it is in the context of Fry's and Bell's aesthetic theories that the initial concept of "Towards a Newer Laocoon" matured. Greenberg was influenced in particular by the aesthetic principle of the "significant form," which was the main subject of Bell's book *Art,* published in London in 1914. Bell, like Greenberg in his essay, establishes the existence of a distinction "between works of art and all other objects," and tries to define the essence of the former.[7] For Bell, as later for Greenberg,

the painting defines its aesthetic quality in an exclusively formal way. The attention is shifted to specific aspects of the pictorial language—the lines and colors—and on the results of their combination. For "significant form," Bell thus means a set of relationships that are visually discernible and significant, common to all works of art, of all times from everywhere.[8] The evaluation of a painting does not respond, therefore, to any other criteria other than the emotion aroused by the relation of form to color and by the perception of three-dimensionality. This, for Bell, serves as the only criterion of praise and appreciation of the painting.

The connection between Greenberg's draft and the principal arguments of the British formalist aesthetic is confirmed by a second source, Greenberg's notebook, also preserved at the GRI.[9] An inscription in Greenberg's hand on the first page indicates the notebook was compiled between the winter of 1939–40 and spring of 1940. This period corresponds to the months during which he composed the first draft of the essay, as indicated in the letter to Lazarus, sent on 20 March 1940, where the critic states that he had almost "finished the first installment of the essay."[10] In the notebook, Greenberg gathers and elaborates ideas and concepts with extreme spontaneity, following the stream of his thoughts. Besides summarizing what would become the core theory of his essay, it reveals the critical sources that he consulted throughout this early phase. During the winter of 1939–40 and the following spring, Greenberg's attention is concentrated on a circumscribed short list of authors whose names are scattered throughout the notebook: Paul Valéry, Oswald Spengler, art critic Max Raphael, and Irving Babbitt, author of *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910), which was the principal point of reference for Greenberg's "Laocoon" of 1940. Roger Fry's name appears only once, in an apparently casual manner, accompanied by a laconic quote, the phrase "delighted equilibrium." The expression is taken from Fry's brief article "Art and Science," published in *The Athenaeum* in June 1919 and reprinted in the anthology *Vision and Design*. If we compare Fry's text with Greenberg's essay, the quote turns out to be fitting.[11] In "Art and Science," besides comparing the methods of science and the visual arts, Fry discusses the interaction between the faculty of the intellect and that of perception during the observation of a painting. Fry writes that the presence of a historical or literary content to decipher and understand often requires sight to be assisted by knowledge and memory, but their intervention obstructs the continuity of the process of perception and negatively influences the quality of the aesthetic experience. Fry nurtures the idea that a work of art must aspire to the condition of "delighted equilibrium," that is, possessing self-sufficiency and visual unity, relying exclusively on the quality and significance of its own formal components.[12] In the first draft of his "Laocoon," Greenberg seems to take up and continue the discussion begun by Fry. He in fact writes that the aesthetic emotion can be apprehended by the contemplation of a painting in which every component is abstracted from the contingent reality. The presence of elements of reference that lead to mnemonic or psychological association would interrupt the perception of the forms because it would require, besides the use of sight, the intervention of the intellect.

Next to the names of Bell and Fry, whose theories of art provided the basis of the future "Laocoon" and, broadly speaking, of Greenberg's modernism, Irving Babbitt is mentioned several times in the notebook. Certainly "Towards a Newer Laocoon" is an overt tribute to Babbitt's *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts,* published when its author was already a professor at Harvard College. According to Babbitt's theory, clearly based on Lessing's treatise, a state of confusion between the visual and verbal arts persisted, which he interpreted as symptomatic of the survival of Romantic aesthetic and literary conceptions. At the basis of Babbitt's treatise was the conviction that, in spite of Lessing's effort in 1766, the inclination toward artistic hybridism had not yet sprouted the offshoot that would be the emergence and spread of Romanticism, the highest celebration of aesthetic syncretism. At the threshold of the twentieth century, strengthened by his own historic and cultural understanding, Babbitt decided to write *The New Laokoon* with the ambition of renewing Lessing's ancient canons regarding the correct distinction between the painting and poetry based on each art's individual character. In addition, Babbitt was interested in recasting the eighteenth-century treatise according to an ethical paradigm inspired by Puritanism. The arts should respect their reciprocal limits and aim to educate man to show regard for values such as grace and balance.[13]

In the course of his *Laokoon,* Babbitt reinterprets the evolution of art according to a fixed scheme, based on the antithesis between classicism and Romanticism. He interprets the former as the tendency to respect a canon codified by tradition, as opposed to the latter, as the inclination to break the rules and allow the free expression of sentiment. Greenberg confesses in his notebook that he had already arrived at the same conclusions about modern art and about the persistence of this essential opposition before having studied Babbitt's treatise. "My argument seems to be the same as Babbitt's in the *New Laokoon,* but my ideas were developed before I ever read the book. In a sense I can presume to say that I am bringing Babbitt's ideas up to date."[14] Greenberg keeps the classicism–Romanticism dichotomy but reformulates it according to a different vocabulary and content, bringing Babbitt's original polarity up to date. He notes, "Another definition of classicism—Romanticism antithesis[:] art that recognize[s] limitations of its medium x [versus] art that does not."[15] The classicism–Romanticism antithesis, in both the jargon and context of modernism, is reconfigured as the opposition between an art that respects the rules of its medium and an art of a different character, hybrid and irregular. Modernizing Babbitt's *Laokoon,* bringing it "up to date," signifies, in the final analysis, adapting the treatise to the modernist vocabulary, updating it with respect not only to content and method but also to lexicology and morphology. If for Babbitt the rules of art depended on a codified system of ethical norms, for Greenberg the modernist discussion cannot be based on an extra-aesthetic law but must depend on the unique essence of the work, its medium.

Already in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg uses the term *medium* to indicate an aesthetic quality possessed by the painting or avant-garde sculpture, which is defined as a work in which the physicality of its support and its components is not only respected

but also emphasized. The origin of the term, as well as its meaning, can be traced to a cycle of public lectures held by German teacher and painter Hans Hofmann (1880–1966) at his art school on 8th Street in New York during the winter of 1938–39.[16] According to a letter of 1 February 1944 to Erle Loran, associate professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of *Cézanne's Composition: Analysis of His Forms with Diagrams and Photographs of His Motifs* (1943), Greenberg went to four of Hofmann's lectures with lively interest even though his attendance was a bit hit-or-miss. In the letter, Greenberg claims that they inspired him to write an essay that appeared in *Partisan Review* in the winter of 1940: "I have had no special training in the theory of plastic organization aside from my own efforts to draw and paint. I did attend four lectures by Hans Hofmann in 1939, however, and they helped me considerably at the time—really more than I can say—not so much by what was actually said as by the emphasis and tendency. I consider Hofmann himself to be a first-rate painter. An article I published in *Partisan Review* in the winter of 1940 I owe to his inspiration."[17] Regardless of the undoubtedly wrong date, since Greenberg did not publish anything in the winter of 1940, this unnamed essay is probably "Towards a Newer Laocoon," published in the summer of that year.[18] Yet the letter documents Greenberg's dependence on Hofmann, which is already evident in the comparison between Hofmann's lectures and some of the points in Greenberg's essay. The lectures helped Greenberg shape a comprehensive theoretical attitude that raised medium to an autonomous aesthetic category and ritualized the two-dimensionality of the cubist space. When his personal reworking of Hofmann's theories had reached a more advanced stage, Greenberg turned these principles into the center of his aesthetic model.

Greenberg's theory of art, as first expressed in the "Laocoon" of 1940, can be considered one of the most fruitful revisions of the new concept regarding the two-dimensionality of the picture plane that was imported by Hofmann from Europe. As a historic figure, Hofmann found himself teaching and painting during the crucial years of the formation of a modernist artistic conscience in America. His ideas were among the main driving forces of a change in the perception and understanding of abstractionism as well as in the theoretical field of art, that is, in the formulation of a more specific aesthetic lexicon, mostly based on the Cézannesque and cubist vocabulary that was readily absorbed by the new generation of American intellectuals—first and foremost, Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg.

The Greenberg archive contains a typewritten file identified in Greenberg's hand as the "Hofmann 1938–39 Lectures."[19] Divided into six sections corresponding to the six lectures, the file consists of duplicated lecture notes, which have survived in three copies, the other two conserved at the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C.[20] The transcriptions are invaluable given the lack of other documents for a comparison between Greenberg's earliest essays and the aesthetic principles taught at the art school on 8th Street. In particular, Greenberg was profoundly conditioned by both Hofmann's vocabulary and his conception of the space of the picture plane. Already in the first lectures, Hofmann had established that with regard to

the plastic arts it was necessary to consider the existence of formal laws dictated by the chosen medium to which the painter had to adhere. In his notebook, and later in the process of drafting his essay, Greenberg remained faithful to this principle and based his discussion of art on the identity of the artistic support. From Hofmann's lectures Greenberg learned that painting must not escape its boundaries: the two-dimensionality of the medium and the margins of the frame mark it as an art limited by the materiality of its support.

During the winter and spring of 1940, Greenberg pursued many lines of thought, which he summarized in his "Laocoon." He aimed to recuperate and reaffirm the hypotheses of both Lessing's and Babbitt's *Laokoon* discussions, translating them into the vocabulary of the avant-garde, which is a synthesis of the principles of British formalism and Hofmann's conception of the picture plane. In the course of drafting his essay, Greenberg reinforces Lessing's arguments regarding the necessary semantic distinction between the arts, unconsciously laying the foundation for the theory of modernism based on the linguistic canon of the medium. As Greenberg himself states in the final draft of the essay, avant-garde art must not only recover the logic of the *Laocoön* but also intensify its normativity. In addition to the distinction between the literary and plastic and visual fields, Greenberg envisaged a distinction within the latter, that is, between the experience of painting and that of sculpture. The prospect of no communication between painting and sculpture was justified by the natural incompatibility of their respective supports by the different ways in which they are perceived. Painting had to necessarily stop with the sense of sight, while sculpture took advantage of joining sight with touch and, in a few cases, also movement, thus giving form to a multisensory experience. Finally, the opposite relation of the two arts to space intensified this difference. Sculpture, immersed in the surrounding space and existing in the viewer's reality, is defined as three-dimensional art; painting, because of its support, is an art that can be perceived only in the two-dimensional sense (fig. 4).

The existence of two drafts of "Towards a Newer Laocoon," to which Greenberg refers in the letter to Lazarus, is proof of Greenberg's requirement to revise the first draft and probably a second. This period coincides with the writing of a new draft, a typescript of twenty-four pages, which is sprinkled with deletions by Greenberg as well as notes in a different hand.[21] A comparison of the handwriting shows that the notes were by Dwight Macdonald and not, as one might suppose, by George L. K. Morris, art critic of *Partisan Review* and therefore surely involved in editing the essay. On the other hand, the method of writing and subsequent revision of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," published a year earlier, constitute a precedent that leaves little doubt regarding Macdonald's intervention on this second occasion. As a few letters to Lazarus show, Macdonald was personally involved in reading and correcting the drafts, guiding the young Greenberg in the organization of his arguments.[22]

Although Greenberg had made changes to the structure and length of the "Laocoon," it is evident that this second draft had not entirely satisfied Macdonald. The

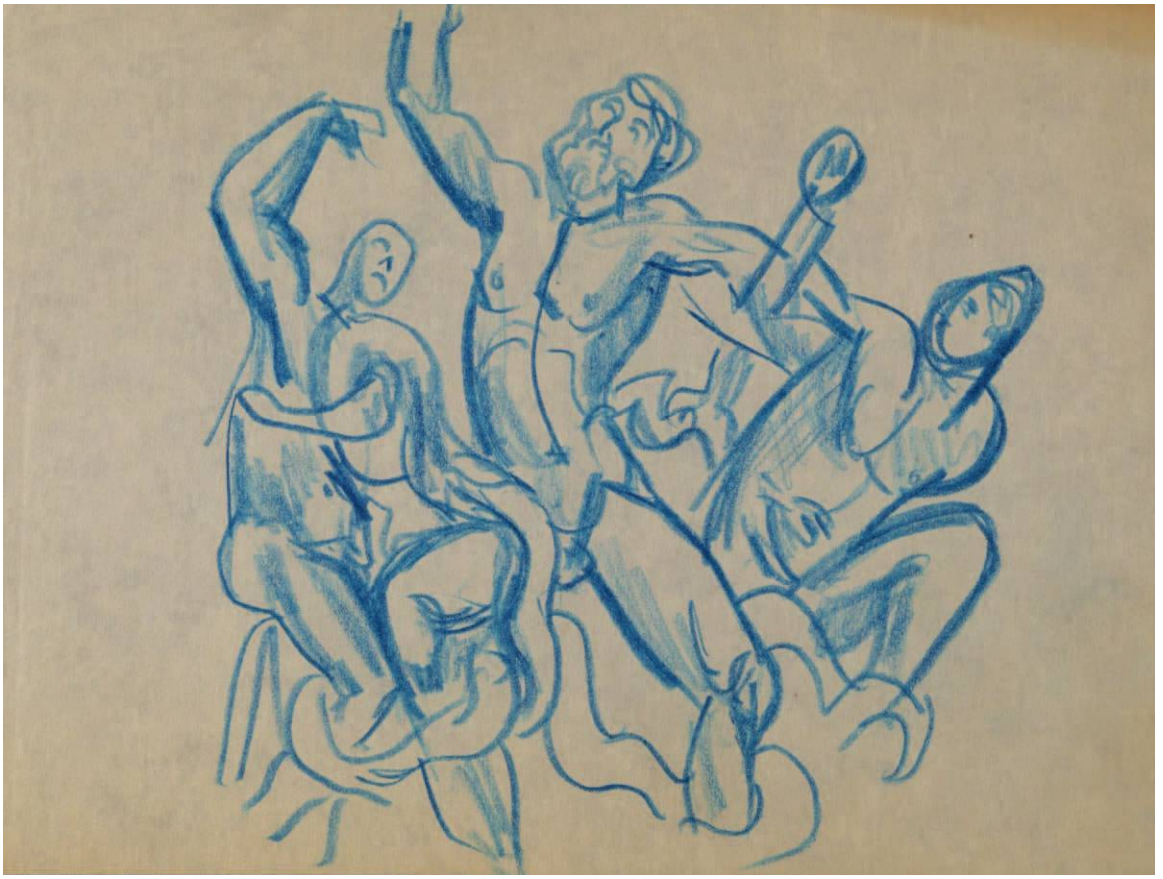


Fig. 4. Sketch by Clement Greenberg of the Laocoön sculpture. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 950085, ADDS, box 1, folder 15. By permission of Sarah Greenberg Morse for the estate of Clement Greenberg. © Sarah Greenberg Morse.

number and content of the notes in the margins show that in his opinion the essay still lacked fluidity, clarity, and coherence. The second version revises and paraphrases the main topics of the preceding draft and synthesizes them. The first eight pages of the new "Laocoon" reformulate arguments already dealt with, such as the uniqueness of the perceptual experience produced by the vision of abstract forms, and the social and cultural changes that accompanied the transition from figurative art to the pursuit of the avant-garde. Besides underlining Greenberg's excessive redundancy and speciousness, Macdonald's criticisms also touch on his choice of content. In fact, he urges Greenberg to abandon literary digressions such as those dealing with Lessing's *Laocoön,* and to elaborate the more political and sociological aspects of his arguments.

An exemplary case is the comparison Greenberg makes between abstractionism and Giotto's painting, more precisely between the different reactions that the observation of the two provokes in the spectator. Greenberg had already made this comparison in the first draft and decided to keep it in the second version. Notwithstanding his

belief that the intensity of aesthetic emotion was on par with the degree of purity of a work of art, in the sense of the greater or lesser degree of plastic abstraction, Greenberg questions why the aesthetic experience aroused by a painting by Giotto, even if representational, seems no less intense than that produced by an abstract work of Piet Mondrian.[23] For Greenberg, the context in which the individual works were created and viewed could not be underestimated: consideration was to be given not only to formal comparisons but also to the outcome of the complex process of artistic evolution separating Giotto's art from abstract art. Greenberg observes that at the time when Giotto painted, it would have been difficult for his art to contain ambivalent meanings or to be ambiguous, since the cultural background was shared by the entire community, who had assimilated a substantial patrimony of religious and secular beliefs. But in modern times, those in which Mondrian lived and worked, the subject necessarily becomes tendentious because of the more advanced society and culture's incoherence and complexity. In this way, the artistic subject is less flexible than in the past: it opposes resistance to the supremacy of form, presenting itself as inexorably plurivocal and destined to an interpretation that is no longer collective but individual. Although evaluated positively by Macdonald, the passage is inexplicably deleted from the final version of the essay. The entire question of perception, which is the keystone of the discourse of the first two drafts, is suppressed to give preeminence to other lines of argument that will converge in the definitive draft.

Macdonald had evidently not expected to find himself dealing with a predominantly literary essay that did not satisfy the requisites of the Trotskyist review. Greenberg had placed much emphasis on the subject of Lessing's *Laocoön* and on Babbitt's intuitions, leaving little space for observations of a more political and sociological nature, distancing the essay from the themes of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." Thus the basic theoretical framework of Greenberg's new contribution only partly satisfied the expectations of the editors of *Partisan Review:* deeply unsettled by the events of a world war, they asked Greenberg for a text that was not isolated in the ivory tower of literary speculation but open to the study of current cultural and political dynamics.

The final passage between Greenberg's first draft and the definitive version of "Towards a Newer Laocoon" is provided by a third and most likely final draft.[24] The essay's structure is simplified and reduced, and the literary passages, especially those dealing with Lessing and Babbitt, are progressively streamlined, almost deleted. These changes led not to the evolution but rather to the inevitable distortion of the "Laocoon" into a more fluid and coherent yet at the same time impoverished version, deprived of its original intellectual brilliance. The most radical change overall is at the beginning of the first draft, which linked different directions of thought, from Marxist criticism to British formalism, by way of Babbitt's New Humanism. Ultimately, Greenberg was forced to renounce his early aspirations. The final draft bears signs of the compromise with Macdonald, which were resolved, as the document shows, in the radical scaling-down of the young Greenberg's original and ambitious project.

After about six months of work, the editorial saga of Greenberg's "Laocoon" came to an end. In a letter of 24 June 1940 to his friend Lazarus, Greenberg confirms the forthcoming publication of the essay and expresses his delusions regarding a text that had lost both character and authenticity.[25] Originally conceived as the sequel to "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," "Towards a Newer Laocoon" was far less successful. From that moment on, Greenberg tended to dissociate himself from the essay that had been born as a fascinating intellectual exercise but which turned into an unsuccessful compromise and the uncertain product of an exhausting negotiation.[26]

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Notes This essay was translated from the Italian by Sabine Eiche. The author thanks the Getty Research Institute, Sarah Greenberg Morse for the estate of Clement Greenberg, and the Wylie Agency LLC for granting permission to use previously unpublished material.

1. Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review* 7, no. 4 (July–August 1940): 296–310. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" had come out a year earlier: Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6, no. 6 (Fall 1939): 34–49. On Greenberg's first years as a contributor to *Partisan Review,* see Camilla Froio, *Verso un Laocoonte Modernista: Temi, Immagini e Contesti del Laocoonte di Clement Greenberg* (Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli, forthcoming).

2. Clement Greenberg, *The Harold Letters, 1928–1943: The Making of an American Intellectual,* ed. Janice Van Horne (New York: Counterpoint, 2003), 214. The original letters, mostly handwritten, are preserved in the Clement Greenberg papers, 1928–1995, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (GRI), 950085. The majority were published by Greenberg's widow, Janice Van Horne, in 2000.

3. Greenberg, *The Harold Letters,* 215. T. S. Eliot's poem "East Coker" was published in *Partisan Review* in May–June 1940.

4. Greenberg, *The Harold Letters,* 215.

5. The three drafts are in the Greenberg papers, GRI, 950085, box 25, folders 1, 2. Alice Goldfarb Marquis, Greenberg's biographer, had already indicated the existence of other drafts of the text. Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Art Czar: The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2006), 62–63.

6. Clement Greenberg, "Towards a New Laocoon," first draft, typescript, p. 1, Greenberg papers, GRI, box 25, folder 1.

7. Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914), V.

8. Bell, *Art,* 7–8.

9. Clement Greenberg's notebook, 1939–40, Greenberg papers, GRI, box 14, folder 10.

10. Greenberg, *The Harold Letters,* 214.

11. *Vision and Design* is the first collection of Fry's writings on art and was published in London in 1920. Among the essays that best illustrate his thinking is "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909), a true manifesto of his formalist aesthetic: Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (New York: Dover, 1981), 12–27. The essay was first published in the *New Quarterly* 2 (April 1909): 171–90. Among the most important studies is Christopher Reed, ed., *A Roger Fry Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). See also the recent publication by Sam Rose, *Art and Form: From Roger Fry to Global Modernism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

12. See "Art and Science," in Fry, *Vision and Design,* 56.

13. Irving Babbitt is considered the father of the cultural movement known as New Humanism, which promoted Puritan values such as moderation, self-control, and decorum, in life and art. The New Humanism group of academics, including Paul Elmer More, was opposed to Romanticism as well as modernism. Michael Leja was the first to compare Babbitt's aesthetics and Greenberg's essay and underline some fundamental similarities between the two artistic visions: Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism. Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 222–25.

14. Greenberg's notebook, 1939–40, Greenberg papers, GRI, box 14, folder 10.

15. Greenberg's notebook, Greenberg papers, GRI.

16. Susan Noyes-Platt has emphasized the connection between Greenberg's first essays and Hofmann's lectures; see Susan Noyes-Platt, "Clement Greenberg in the 1930s: A New Perspective on His Criticism," *Art Criticism* 5 (Spring 1989): 50–51. A painting teacher as well as an artist, Hofmann is famous for the art school he opened at 444 Madison Avenue in 1933, which in 1938 moved to 52 West 8th Street, in Greenwich Village. Founded in 1915 as Schule für Bildende Kunst in the Georgenstrasse in Schwabing, the famous artistic quarter of Munich, in New York the school was known as the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts. From its first years in America, Hofmann's school distinguished itself as the center of an artistic community that was an alternative to institutional or state programs such as the Work Projects Administration. The school aligned itself with similarly independent undertakings, such as Eugene Gallatin's Gallery of Living Art, which had opened on 8th Street a few years earlier (1927). On Hofmann, see Cynthia Goodman, *Hans Hofmann* (New York: Abbeville, 1986), and Dawn V. Rogala, *Hans Hofmann: The Artist's Materials* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2016), with bibliography. For Hofmann's career as a teacher, see Irving Sandler, "Hans Hofmann: The Pedagogical Master," *Art in America* 61 (May–June 1973): 48–55.

17. Erle Loran Papers, 1912–1999, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., series II, correspondence, box 1, folder 56. Greenberg officially paid tribute to Hofmann's teachings in a review of his exhibition at the 67 Gallery in 1945. See Clement Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Hans Hofmann and a Reconsideration of Mondrian's Theories," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949,* ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 18–19. A further reference to Hofmann's school is found in the essay "The Late Thirties in New York," an account of the New York art scene before the beginning of World War II. See Clement Greenberg, "The Late Thirties in New York," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 230–35.

18. In 1940, Greenberg also published another essay, "An American View," *Horizon* 9 (September 1940): 76–83. In an interview with Trish Evans and Charles Harrison (20 November 1983), Greenberg dated his "Laocoon" to 1942. See Clement Greenberg, "A Conversation with Clement Greenberg in Three Parts," in *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 177.

19. Transcript of six lectures given by Hans Hofmann, Greenberg papers, GRI, box 26, folder 10.

20. There are at least two other copies of the transcribed lecture notes besides the one contained in the Greenberg papers. The first is in the archive of the painter Lenita Manry (Lenita Manry papers, 1931–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Microfilm roll 151), the second with the papers of Karl Knaths, painter and typographer (Karl Knaths papers, 1890–1973, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., series III, writings, box 2, folder 63).

21. Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," second draft, typescript with handwritten corrections by Dwight Macdonald, Greenberg papers, GRI, box 25, folders 2 (pp. 1–8), 1 (pp. 9–24).

22. Greenberg complained about Macdonald's corrections to the content and form of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in two letters to Harold Lazarus, the first one dated 18 April 1939 and the second one 27 June 1939: Greenberg, *The Harold Letters,* 200, 203.

23. Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," second draft, p. 4.

24. Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," third draft, typescript with handwritten notes and erasure marks by Greenberg, Greenberg papers, GRI, box 25, folder 2.

25. Greenberg, *The Harold Letters*, 215.

26. See, for example, the interview conducted by Trish Evans and Charles Harrison in which Greenberg dissociated himself from the excessively Marxist and ideological perspective of the essay: Greenberg, "A Conversation with Clement Greenberg," 177–78.