ON THE SUBSTANCE OF ABSENCE: FILLING THE HISTORICAL VOID

Samantha Krukowski ©1994

The Catalog

First there is the cover--a yellowed, printed page announcing an exhibition of sculpture by Alberto Giacometti at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York in early 1948. The page is relatively plain in its proclamation. At the top it reads EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURES in large print, followed in smaller letters underneath by PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS which further explain the content of the show. The host gallery identifies itself at the bottom of the page where the dates of the event are also indicated. Slightly above this insignia are two items which appear to underscore the importance of the exhibition. The introduction for this American exhibition is written by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, and Giacometti himself contributes a letter to the catalog.

While this heraldic sheet may seem traditional enough, at least in terms of the information it means to convey, it reveals a single image which intimates a narrative far more expansive than that generated by the apparent facts[1] of the event. In the center of the cover there is a thin, vertical perforation which exposes a light figure against a dark background. This figure shows through from the page underneath where it appears similarly truncated but silhouetted against a dark, rectangular frame which is the same size as the puncture in the cover. The second page is divided in half by this populated, geometricized shape so that two outlines are created--that of the figure against its border and that of the border against the stark, white field of paper. The only element that disturbs this symmetrical construction is Giacometti's signature, which appears at the bottom of the page. The figure is not fully visible as one of Giacometti's sculptures until the third page of the catalog where it is illustrated in the context of the artist's studio and titled "Study for the 'Tall Figure', plaster, 1917."

From the beginning of the catalog, then, Giacometti's work is presented in a series of removes. The catalog cover reveals a figure that is not immediately recognizable as the work of a contemporary sculptor. Cut off at the shoulders and feet and denied a context that indicates its size, it bears a strange resemblance to a Cycladic idol. The void through which it peers only intensifies its displacement, and no text on the cover clarifies that the exhibition is devoted to Giacometti's sculptures (the included letter by Giacometti seems an afterthought.) Only on the second page, where the framed figure is accompanied by Giacometti's signature, can the artist's name be connected to the form which appears above it. This association is, as yet, fragile since Giacometti is signing an image which conceals the full form of the sculpture (more so than the average photograph) and which presents it within an obvious frame. When the sculpture finally appears on the third page with a title, it is not marked by Giacometti's name, but it is positioned in his studio and in its entirety, clearly manifests itself as one of the artist's works.

The format of the catalog reveals much about the way Giacometti, and sculpture of the period, is being positioned and perceived. What may appear to be a series of design decisions is actually the physical description of certain kinds of historical, philosophical and artistic methodologies of the post-war era. It is no accident that the cover of the exhibition--its facing page--is defined as much by print as by a void or that this void reveals a totemic, seemingly ancient figurine. It is not coincidental that on the second page, Giacometti's sculpture is framed in a vertical strip which suggests an undefinable, shadowy space beyond. Nor is it unintentional that when Giacometti's sculpture is finally, fully shown, it is carefully positioned in the environment of his studio. It is also important that the catalog introduction for this American exhibition is written by a French author who is not known for his art

criticism. These observations are actually clues into how history, art history, sculpture, painting, artistic media, the role of the artist and the role of the spectator are being considered in the later 1940's.

Sartre's introduction is certainly a source which clarifies some of the issues raised by the format of the catalog in which it is included. An analysis of his article alone, however, might only offer an insular reading since it is part of the exhibition at issue. Another article from 1949 by the American art critic Clement Greenberg entitled "The New Sculpture" bears a striking ideological similarity (though not a linguistic one) to Sartre's essay, and I compare the two so that the catalog and Sartre's essay may be understood as particular points in a much larger, even international, field.[2]

The Void

"...the frozen objects hesitate as at the beginning of the world."[3]

The catalog cover to Giacometti's exhibition introduces the substance of Giacometti's work and of the catalog contents through an absence. The central, vertical cut may reveal something behind it, but it is in itself an empty form that depends on something else to fill it. It is a vacuous beginning, undefined in terms of content despite its definite shape. The void prefigures something else which will eventually define its character.

If one were to imagine the shape of the beginning of history, it would be similarly devoid of content. In Biblical terms, even those forms which are first created out of nothing are formless, for "in the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth, and the earth was without form and void." A glance at the essays by Greenberg and Sartre reveals that they both begin their essays with remarks about history: While Greenberg proposes an evolutionary model that charts the progress of historical concerns, Sartre literally positions Giacometti at the beginning of history and the world itself. This coincidence can be understood in terms of a generalized desire on the part of artists and writers to lay the foundation for a new history after the Second World War by carefully studying, reformulating or even negating the circumstances which led to it.

Greenberg treats history as a framework--an uninhabited architecture--which, when inhabited, defines the character of events and productions. He traces ideological and cultural developments from the middle ages through the nineteenth century in order to illustrate that artworks reflect the concerns of their particular milieu. "Art and literature," he says, "seem usually to seek their frames of reference wherever the social mind or sensibility of the given historical moment finds its surest truth."[4] By briefly describing the character of historical periods, from those structured by religion to others governed by empiricism, Greenberg is able to locate a shift of sensibility away from illusion or fiction towards an "increasingly literal order."[5] This shift becomes visible in the realm of aesthetics, where objects refer to, rather than outside of themselves so that they can "communicate that sense of concretely felt, irreducible experience in which our sensibility finds its fundamental certainty."[6] For Greenberg, historical progress is moving not only towards literalism but certainty as well. By making his "literal order" an inevitable result of the passage of time, he proposes a fundamental and stabilizing concept in an era of great uncertainty.

When Greenberg suggests that art objects are becoming increasingly self-referential in the face of historical development, he manages to explain the appearance of art through history even as he divorces art from it. A self-interested art object which does not look to history for inspiration but to itself is encapsulated in a separate world--the world of the catalog's second page and not the historical emptiness of its cover. Sartre's discussion of history and art mirrors this treatment. He

attempts to separate the artist from history altogether, and suggests that Giacometti "does not recognize such a thing as Progress in the fine arts, he does not consider himself more 'advanced' than his contemporaries by preference, the man of Eyzies, the man of Altamira."[7] Giacometti is placed in (and according to Sartre chooses to inhabit) that undefined space before history which is populated by primitive cave dwellers and ignorant of cultural values. This is a place of novelty, a "drastic youthfulness of nature and of men, (where) neither the beautiful nor the ugly yet exist(s), neither taste nor people possessing it; and there (is) no criticism: all this (is) still in the future."[8] Sartre sets the artist and art apart from any previous cultural models; he treats Giacometti as the envoy of a new revolution where ideas about culture have yet to be introduced.

The Effigy

"...he speaks as the first man spoke and paints as if no one had ever painted before..."[9]

The void in the catalog cover is filled by an object which comes to it from elsewhere, an object which is physically, three dimensionally outlined in white even while it is situated within its own black space. Greenberg's historical frame is filled, as is Sartre's empty beginning, by a human form and a human's representation which resembles an ancient, totemic, figurine. The image which shows through recalls the origins of artistic creation.

Both Greenberg and Sartre take as their second preoccupation the history of art and relate contemporary artistic forms to their earliest predecessors. If any history is a salutory bedrock for an emerging art, it is the history that is so removed that it is unknown: a history of myth and of concrete, if undefined substance (someone made ancient idols, and the idols exist to prove this.) When Greenberg introduces the idea of art's self-referentiality, he also proposes the notion that the artistic medium is the essential character of an artwork. This "essence" seems mythical and ahistorical. While Greenberg's infamous dogma, that the medium is the subject matter of modern art and that mimetic representation is irrelevent to its aims, is historically grounded in his belief that the material evidence of historical progress is evolving towards a "literal order," locating the meaning of an artwork in its medium is a denotation of its timelessness. Art is "irreducible", "certain" and "concrete" only when it is reduced "to the means by which (it attains) virtuality as art, to the literal essence [emphasis mine] of (its) medium."[10]If art is moving towards a state of purity by rejecting fiction and illusion, it is also returning to a materiality that it has always had. Art is returning to the fountainhead of its anatomy.

For Sartre the man[11], not the medium, is the site of artistic origination. Man is the maker and the model at once, "the indissoluble unity and the absolute source of his movements."[12] Sartre's language, particularly his use of the words "indissoluble" and "absolute", clearly recall Greenberg's application of terms like "irreducible", "certain", "literal" and "concrete". Sartre carefully distinguishes man from things (man from the matter which he will use to shape his art) and clarifies that things are related to goals while man is tied to causes. A berry, Sartre postulates, is meant to be picked and a tree branch can wave in the wind without causing the whole tree to wave. But a man's fist is his own gesture and one that always refers back to his own form--the fist cannot be conceived separately from the body of which it is a part. To Sartre, man is the source of his own symbols, and he must write them into his medium.

Whereas for Greenberg the medium itself is the foundation of the artwork, Sartre sees man in this capacity--man uses media to express the fact of his existence. Throughout his essay, Sartre allows man and his medium to become indistinguishable so that each becomes a part of the other. Giacometti's challenge is literally to "make a man; he has to write movement into the total immobility, unity into

the infinite multiplicity, the absolute into the purely relative, the future into the eternally present, the chatter of signs into the obstinate silence of things."[13] Stating that man's form is the basis of artistic creation is not enough, for Sartre notes that art's originary moves are conceptual. Art begins when man gets an idea, "the idea (of) one man to sculpt another in a block of stone."[14] Man has not only his body but his mind, and these facts are the structure of his art. The medium is the channel through which man will remake man, reforming him in his most primal image.

The Figure Framed

"Words do not look like the things they designate; and a picture is not a trompe-l'oeilˆ."[15]

The second page in the catalog clarifies the nature of the image which shows through the cover. No longer is the figure externally bound, but now it appears as part of another figuration in the form of a black rectangle. The figure, its background and its frame coexist in one constructed image. It seems a sculpture and a painting at once, perhaps a mark of an increasing exchange of ideas between the three dimensional and the two dimensional, the ancestral and contemporary. The darkly framed sculpture, still reminiscent of a Cycladic idol but enveloped in an abstract and minimal outline, is a sign-laden indicator of the colors and density of the world that Greenberg and Sartre share.

The relationship between painting and sculpture is considered by both authors as integral to an understanding of new artistic forms and concerns, specifically those within the realm of sculpture. To Greenberg and Sartre, while sculpture pre-dates painting as a mode of artistic expression, it is eventually superseded by it. They both attempt to place post-war sculpture in the superior position that painting is understood to occupy. Their efforts are essentially defined by the image on the second page of the catalog. The figure looks like a sculpture that is a predecessor to painting, yet it is set within a shape that defines the canvases of the painter Barnett Newman. Here is the literal clash of sculpture and painting, past and present, three and two-dimensionality. The appearance of an idol within one of Newman's zips recalls that artist's preoccupations with original man and defining a new vision for modern art. Newman's ideas resonate when they are placed next to those of Greenberg and Sartre; in the late 1940's his writing is punctuated by references to absolutism, purity and sublimity.[16]

Greenberg sets the stage for sculpture's recovery and takeover by citing painting's shortcomings, criticizing sculpture of the past but recognizing its previous limitations as its present strengths, and acknowledging the work of sculptors which suggests new possibilities for sculptural expression. According to Greenberg, painting will no longer be able to visually order experience for two reasons. The first is that since painting recognizes mimetic representation as a fiction and sees itself as colors placed on a two-dimensional surface, it runs the risk of being merely decorative. The second is that the medium of painting is not, at base, as literal or concrete as that of sculpture, and this gives sculpture the upper hand. Sculpture is closer to the objects of its imitation, and actually more dense than painting, since it moves from and to the three-dimensional, whereas painting requires more abstraction in its shift from the three-dimensional to the two-dimensional. Greenberg faults historical sculpture for relying on the form of the monolith and the Graeco-Roman tradition of carving and modeling. Neither of these approaches take into account the inanimate or the immobile but insist on representing the human torso and head. Greenberg's difficulty with such representation is not only that it is illusionistic, but that it fails to capitalize on the full range of possibilities that are intrinsic to sculptural media.

Greenberg posits a break between the old sculpture and the new by discussing the work of Auguste Rodin and Constantin Brancusi. Whereas Rodin takes his cues from impressionism, Brancusi is

influenced by African sculpture and the lessons of cubism. By "dissolving stone forms into light and air"[17], Rodin is able to move away from the mass and solidity that characterize the monolith while Brancusi "push(es) the monolith to such an extreme, reduce(s) it to such archetypal simplicity, that it is exhausted more or less as a principle of form."[18] This simplicity is derived from African sculpture because such work is not massive or restricted to human and animal forms. And despite the complicated appearance of cubist works, cubism provides a precedent for Brancusi's work because it replaces the illusionary with the real and introduces collage as a way to physically move objects off of the picture plane. From this increasing mediumistic and objective reality, then, comes an "archetypal simplicity." It is somewhat ironic that Greenberg sees the rebirth of sculpture as connected to the picture plane and painting. While painting is disadvantaged by its rich history, a history that it is never able to shake, Greenberg insists that the new sculpture "has almost no historical associations whatsoever...which endows it with a virginality that compels the artist's boldness and invites him to tell everything without fear of censorship by tradition."[19] By linking the new sculpture to cubism, Greenberg makes paradoxical his own argument that contemporary sculpture is without a prototype.

Sartre describes the relationship between painting and sculpture in similar terms and to similar ends--he concludes that Giacometti's work (like Greenberg's new sculpture) is indebted to no predecessors. Both are reconfiguring the artist in history. Sartre's language is more poetic than Greenberg's; he expands the arguments that Greenberg presents and takes them to a different level. Whereas Greenberg remains concerned with the evolution of the medium and sculpture's connection to reality through it, Sartre further investigates the problems of mimetic representation and denigrates illusionism not by citing its irrelevance but by describing its impossibility. Sartre's observations are structured entirely around Giacometti, and it should come as no surprise that the second page of the catalog appears as it does and bears Giacometti's signature. That image re-presents Giacometti's sculpture as if it is an illusion. It is the sculpture, but not entirely. It is somewhere, but its location is unclear. Giacometti's signature graces the unreality of this image in a way that supports Sartre's ideas--we are presented with an anomaly, and it is this, rather than his work, that Giacometti signs.

Whereas Greenberg speaks about painting and sculpture by opposing illusion and the medium, Sartre discusses both in terms of their relationship to reality. Sartre demonstrates that unreality is a given in painting--since painting is not three dimensional (and therefore close to reality as it is perceived), the two dimensions that compose it are understood to be unreal. Even with an illusionistic painting that seems particularly believable, Sartre indicates that a viewer can never get closer to the figures on the canvas, but only to the canvas itself. Sculpture has tended to deny this unreality more than painting since the fact that it physically occupies space obscures its medium. Yet sculpture is as unreal as painting in its attempts to concretely depict an object because its source is an unstable image. Sartre writes:

> At ten paces, I form a certain image of that nude woman; if I approach her, and regard her from up close, I no longer recognize her: these craters, tunnels, cracks, this rough black hair, these smooth shiny surfaces, this whole lunar orography: how could all these qualities go to compose the sleek fresh skin that I admired from far off? Which is it then that the sculptor ought to imitate? However close he comes to this face, one can approach closer still. Thus the statue will never truly resemble what the model is or what the sculptor sees; one must construct it in accordance with certain rather contradictory conventions, imagining certain details which are not visible from so far off, under the pretext that they exist, and neglecting certain others which exist just the same, under the pretext that one does not see them.[20]

This long quote does much to dispel the idea that illusionism is a worthwhile pursuit, since its aim is to

represent reality while it is only capable of representing certain parts of it. Sartre's difficulty with classical sculpture is that it ignores this inherent distance of reality and unreality. The history of sculpture is equivalent to three thousand years of modeling corpses, imaginary figures which cannot survive in real space. To Sartre, sculpture must present something about life--after all, sculpture is man sculpting himself--and not about stone: "a dead man plus a dead horse do not equal the half of one living being."[21] The classical sculptor may have thought he was sculpting what he saw and thereby representing a truthful image, but he failed to realize that what he sculpted was what he knew. He presented a generalized view, not the specific one of what he saw. "Seeking the true, he...arrived at convention."[22] Sartre wants to present another path to the truth, much as Greenberg wants to demonstrate the means of attaining a more literal order.

When Sartre describes Giacometti's work, he clarifies that it is in opposition to the classical tradition. Sartre acknowledges that critics complain about the way in which Giacometti ignores his predecessors and turns that criticism to his advantage. To Sartre, sculpture must begin again, for "the task of Giacometti and of contemporary sculptors, is not to enrich the galleries with new works, but to prove that sculpture itself is possible."[23] Sartre's emphasis on the novelty of Giacometti's work is embellished with anecdotes which imagistically describe Giacometti's work and his working methods. "Giacometti himself perpetually starts afresh,"[24] Sartre implies. This "freshness" is logistically impossible--Giacometti is not naive, removed from society and its influences. Sartre positions him thus in order to demarcate the novelty of his pursuit and his importance as an artist. Either by breaking his work so that there are literally no precedents for what he makes, or by constantly modifying and changing the work with which he is involved, Sartre explains that Giacometti keeps a distance from artistic traditions that only produce dead forms. Sartre goes even further and relates Giacometti's elongated forms to the original movement of creation--Sartre seems to think this original movement is to heaven, but it seems possible to formally interpret the act of childbirth in similar terms. Sartre's reference to heaven is part of a larger linguistic structure which relates Giacometti's work to the spiritual realm, divorcing it from an impossible reality. Giacometti's sculptures are "fine and slender natures ris(ing) up to heaven...a group of Ascensions, of Assumptions"[25] that literally constitute a "Copernican revolution."[26] Sartre's point is that Giacometti is concerned with appearances, not with reality, and it is because of this that he can attain the absolute. Despite the differences in Greenberg and Sartre's approaches, they come remarkably close. Sartre's absolute via appearance is equivalent to Greenberg's literal via medium.

Study for the 'Tall figure', plaster, 1917

"In giving up the outline Cézanne was abandoning himself to the chaos of sensations, which would upset the objects and constantly suggest illusions...he wanted to depict matter as it takes on form, the birth of order through spontaneous organization."[27]

"Expressing what exists is an endless task."[28]

On the third page of the catalog, the Giacometti sculpture that is first truncated and framed by the cover, then placed within a black zip, is finally fully illustrated in the context of the artist's studio. It is now, unmistakably, Giacometti's work. As a unified object, it is a signal and symbol of his style. There are visible manipulations on the sculpture's surface--places where the artist's hands have been--and it stands in its place of birth or origin, submitting itself to the realm of the real. Although it is not graced by the artist's signature, it is titled and this lends it some kind of existential authenticity. This image provides the ground for a discussion of the remainder of the articles by Greenberg and Sartre, which both characterize the new sculpture in detail, discuss its mediumistic possibilities, and postulate roles

for the artist and the spectator in approaching the work.

Greenberg's calls the work by sculptors like Giacometti the "new, pictorial, draughtsman's sculpture."[29] By relating the new sculpture to pictures and drawings, Greenberg secures its mediumistic preoccupations while he observes the possibility that it can retain an unfinished quality, like that of a sketch. Given that the monolithic tradition he abhors is undermined by its connection to complete illusionism, Greenberg sees the possibility for suggestion rather than representation in the new sculpture. This possibility is underscored by Greenberg's assertion that new sculptors are "more drawn to ideas conceived by analogy with landscape than to those derived from single objects."[30] Not only will they avoid trying to reproduce what they see, but they will take a multifaceted rather than a unidimensional appraoch to their work. That Greenberg understands the new sculptors to be working with analogy rather than mimesis is a reference to the media being used and the way in which the sculptures invite spectatorial involvement, two issues which I will address momentarily. However, the most interesting word in Greenberg's statement is "landscape", and I take this to refer not to a literal landscape but to a field of possibilities that are open to a sculptor who rejects the lessons of historical sculpture and embraces those of the new sculpture. The catalog image of Giacometti's sculpture certainly proposes this landscape, which might only be characterized by the hermetic but cluttered environment of the artist's studio.

Greenberg differentiates the new sculpture from the old in terms of media. He rejects stone and bronze--the traditional sculptural materials--and embraces alloys, steel, iron, glass and plastics. It is important that Greenberg refers to the new sculptors as "sculptor-constructors"; they are cubists working entirely in three dimensions, and their work is a collage of sorts. They are no longer dependent on one material to represent their ideas, but can work among and between several. Greenberg feels that this mediumistic approach is "so new and so cogent that it produces interesting work almost automatically...(extracting)...masterpieces from even mediocre hands."[31] This is a curious denial on the critic's part of the importance of the hand of the artist. The artist is basically a facilitator, who works within relationships proposed by the media. The medium is privileged and the artist becomes a channel through which it can assert itself.

In this arena where materialistic relationships come to constitute the meaning of the new sculpture, the spectator's role increases since s/he must visually reassemble those moves made by the artist. Greenberg's belief that the appreciation of art requires work is supported here for "the new sculpture-construction has to contend with (the) habit of vision (that allows) a piece of sculpture (to fade) too quickly into an indifferent background as a matter-of-fact ornamental object."[32] To Greenberg, the new sculpture presents a spectatorial challenge that was absent in sculpture that devoted itself to illusionistic representation. He wants to protect sculpture as much as painting from the lure of the decorative, so that its physicality remains substantial.

For Sartre, the substance of Giacometti's work is not so easily reduced to the medium with which he works, although the medium is important. Sartre's conception of the medium is different from Greenberg's; he includes space as one of the materials that must be formed. Like Greenberg, Sartre denies the importance of stone ("a forever frozen now"[33]) to Giacometti's work, and speaks about his use of plaster: "never was matter less eternal, more fragile, nearer to being human. The matter of Giacometti, that strange flour which gently powders and covers his studio, slips under his nails and into the deep furrows of his face, is the dust of space."[34] Giacometti's plaster is discussed as if it is space itself--it dissipates into particules which occupy the artist's studio, which cover it and him. Sartre puts the sculptor in his medium so that it infiltrates his very pores. The two become entwined so that a move of the artist becomes a move of the medium, and a move of the medium a spatial one.

Given that the job of the new sculptor is to make a sculpture that denies the frozen, dead forms of classical sculpture, Sartre dismisses rigid sculptural media in favor of those which have an omnipresent character. The problem is "how to mould a man in stone without petrifying him?,"[35] and Sartre solves it in part with a mediumistic explanation. The question really revolves around issues of absence and substance, emptiness and materiality. How much material is too much, how much space is overwhelming? Greenberg's attitude that the new sculpture is related to the sketch is mirrored in Sartre's idea that the way to avoid classical sculptural petrification is to allow the sculpture to be ephemeral, to be literally constituted by "moving outlines", to sometimes last only a short while "like a dawn, a distress, an ephemera."36 It will then mirror humanity--instead of representing substance, the new sculpture will represent perishability, or the inevitable mortality of all men.

Sartre goes quite far in humanizing Giacometti's work. "I do not know," he writes, "if we should regard him as a man who wants to impose a human stamp on space, or as a rock about to dream of the human. Or rather, he is the one and the other, and the mediation between them."[36] Giacometti is the facilitator of the medium in a realm that is far more poeticized than that inhabited by Greenberg's sculptor-constructor, who essentially plays the same role. But Giacometti facilitates the making of men, not sculptures, and he is thus engaged in remaking the world--the metaphor of the heavens returns, and Giacometti is become god. Images throughout the catalog support this idea: a number of Giacometti's sculptures are shown in the street as if they are walking, pointing, living. Sartre clarifies that Giacometti's work attains its life through suggestion and not through mimesis. Giacometti represents man at a number of paces away, so that the sculpture appears "at a proper human distance."[37] The extended forms of Giacometti's sculptures are the result of the artist's "horror of the infinite" which is not horror vacui but, as Sartre describes it, a horror of too much. Giacometti avoids all attempts at reproduction in his work and compresses space because he knows that "there is nothing redundant in a living man, because everything there is functional...to sculpt, for him, is to take the fat off space; he compresses space, so as to drain off its exteriority."[38] Giacometti's sculptures possess bodies that suggest to us our own, rather than mimicking their general forms. He works with the idea that the shape of a body remains constant, while the qualities expand and contract. These qualities, in Giacometti's sculpture, are largely provided by the spectator.

Giacometti's elongated forms ask the spectator to divine forms that do not exist on or in sculpture but which are suggested by it, or which appear around it. The viewer's imagination is integral to understanding Giacometti's work. As with Greenberg's spectator, the beholder of Giacometti's sculpture must synthesize the ambiguities and the absences that appear into a meaningful whole. His work consists of ideas that must be read. Sartre writes: "As soon as I see them, they spring into my visual field as an idea before my mind; the idea alone possesses such immediate translucidity, the idea alone is at one stroke all that it is."[39] Where sculpture begins with an idea (of one man to sculpt another in stone), its end appearance is that of an idea. Reading this idea produces a strange sense of discomfort, something that Greenberg would have appreciated as a signifier of the work necessary to access the sculpture, for as Sartre points out, seeing a woman of plaster puts him in a "delightful disquiet...I feel compelled and I do not know to what end or by whom until I discover that I am compelled to see, and by myself."[40] The spectator is alone with the sculpture at the end, and the sculpture's lack of solidity asks the viewer to reconstitute it without the help of mimetic references and alone. The processes of making (Giacometti's task) and appreciating (the spectator's task) collide. Both the artist and the viewer come to their work as solitary individuals whose ideas energize art that, in the end, is made of and occupies the same matter of which they are made and in which they live.

Despite this linkage in the roles of the artist and spectator, Sartre carefully positions Giacometti in a

realm apart from that of humanity, somewhere between the medium and the sculpture, as an intense observer who works incessantly at making beings in order to establish contact with other beings. "I know nobody as sensitive as he to the magic of faces and gestures;" Sartre intones, "he regards them with a passionate desire, as if he were from another realm."[41] From this realm of remove the artist, creator of men, can watch, make and oversee the increasingly independent lives of the figures he has formed, figures that literally seem connected to his body. "These statues are still more than half sunk in his flesh, he cannot see them..."[42] Giacometti's constant attention to and involvement with his work makes it invisible to him but an integral part of him. The distance that Giacometti has from the outside world allows him to send his sculptures away so that they will live their own lives. The sculptures will not be finished by the artist but by his audience. In this sense, Giacometti attains the absolute--in Sartre's words, he wins the war. "He knows it: his hunted look gives him away: he knows that despite himself he has won and that he belongs to us."[43] The artist, one with his medium, no longer belongs to himself. As spectators, we cannot see him in his distant realm, much as he cannot see the beings he sends out to us.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to locate similarities in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Clement Greenberg. The two texts, though stylistically very different, are themselves historical evidence of the kinds of preoccupations that writers had in the aftermath of World War II. Research that delves into the cultural exchange between Europe and the United States at the time these articles were written would do much to flesh out and describe the milieu suggested by their ideas. General historical accounts usually cite differences in the way both continents viewed the avant-garde, the individual, communism, liberalism and surrealism; it would be helpful to investigate these further in the context of articles like those by Greenberg and Sartre. Likewise, exploring into the relationship between phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis would help to position both writers in a larger context.

Notes

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[1] This paper does not examine the exhibition-as-event by making inquiries about its origin, the actual works included, responses by the artist, the public or critics (excepting Sartre), or the gallery's hopes and intentions. I am looking at the exhibition through a catalog which is, itself, material evidence of the culture (artistic and otherwise) which surrounds the event. I should note here that my analysis of the catalog is somewhat compromised because I am working from xeroxes and slides rather than the actual object. Much can still be gleaned from these reproductions, however.

[2] While I concentrate on two articles, it is clear that their comparison is only a point of departure. Much more research should be done on the critical and artistic exchange between Europe and the United States after World War II, specifically in terms of how and when writers like Greenberg and Sartre would have come to know each other's work. It is clear from my preliminary research that there is some relationship between their writing and that of phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and artists like Barnett Newman.

[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" in Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert and Patricia Dreyfus (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 16. I frame the themes I have culled from the essays by Greenberg and Sartre with Merleau-Ponty's words which pre-date both essays by three years. Merleau-Ponty's ideas bear a strong resemblance to those set forth by Greenberg and Sartre, and I use them to frame and expand the two articles under consideration.

[4] Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," *Partisan Review* (June, 1949): 637.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Search for the Absolute," Exhibition of Sculptures, Paintings, Drawings (New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery, 19 January-14 February 1948), 2.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," 19.
[10] Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 637.
[11] Sartre, "The Search for the Absolute," 3.
[12] Despite the sexism, I will continue to use Sartre's term "man" as a way of remaining close to his text.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] See for example Barnett Newman, "The First Man Was an Artist," *Tiger's Eye* 1 (October 1947), 59-60 and Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now," *Tiger's Eye* 6 (15 December 1948), 52-53.
[17] Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 639.
[18] Ibid., 640.
[19] Ibid., 641.
[20] Sartre, “The Search for the Absolute,” 8.
[21] Ibid., 4.
[22] Ibid., 9.
[23] Ibid., 4.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 16.
[26] Ibid., 14.
[27] Ibid., 13.
[28] Ibid., 15.
[29] Greenberg, “The New Sculpture”, 640.
[30] Ibid., 640.
[31] Ibid., 642.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Sartre, “The Search for the Absolute,” 4.
[34] Ibid., 6.
[35] Ibid., 3.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 6.
[38] Ibid., 3.
[39] Ibid., 20.
[40] Ibid., 14.
[41] Ibid., 23.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 22.