MODERNISM AND FRAGMENTATION

by

Cornelis Timmer

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

FACULTY OF PERFORMANCE, FINE ARTS AND DESIGN UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY, NEPEAN 1998
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td></td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One:</td>
<td>The Nature of Fragmentation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two:</td>
<td>Fragmentation and Late 19th Century Modernism</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three:</td>
<td>The Fragmentation of Cubism</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four:</td>
<td>Schwitters, Mondrian and Pollock</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The aim of my dissertation, as the title indicates, is to determine the relationship between modernism and fragmentation. The objective, however, is twofold. In addition to the argument through which I explicate the neglected discussion of the connection between modernism and fragmentation, this paper reveals the thought processes and artistic influences crucial to my own development as a painter.

The majority of artists I discuss have informed my practice stylistically as well as aesthetically. The thesis therefore serves not only as a theoretical discussion but also as a partial justification of my personal conceptions regarding my work, on which I will elaborate in my appendix.

This paper demonstrates that the resolution of all things depends upon the collection, selection, arrangement and rearrangement of fragments, including my painting and this paper itself.
INTRODUCTION
This paper is a discussion of the neglected connection between modernism and fragmentation. Both fragmentation and modernism are terms not easily explained. My intention from the outset is therefore to explain these terms within the context of this thesis and to provide the necessary discussion. The main focus however will be the connection between the two and the exploration of several fundamental issues determining their meaning.

Modernism as a product of modernity and its affinity with the Enlightenment, industrialisation and the machine age/technology are by now topics thoroughly discussed, analysed and justified. What I aim to achieve in my current argument, however, is to create a discourse whereby modernism as a product of modernity is strongly related to a fragmentation, which was caused by modernity.

Throughout this thesis I will discuss several issues of modernity. I will highlight the relevant issues that affiliate it with fragmentation through the writings of Anthony Giddens, Barry Smart, Jose Arguelles, Marc Shapiro, Marshall Berman, and others. What I will argue in the following chapters is not an institutional analysis of modernity but rather an investigation in how fragmentation was one of the conditions of this phenomenon and how this effected the course of modernism.

My approach therefore will be a different one from most traditional, stylistic approaches. Without arguing the connection between modernity and modernism my angle of incidence will be distinctly variant. The appreciation of the evolutionary character of modernism I will reason, is not necessarily the product of the reflexivity of the modern era but indeed a commodity of the modernity process strongly influenced by fragmentation.

To establish my argument it is necessary to examine certain artists active in the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries, and the (r)evolutionary character of their pictorial representations. Within the parameters of this essay, however, it is impossible to focus on the complete account of this ‘history’. I have therefore selected a number of avant garde artists which best elucidates my discussion. Their significance is based on their fundamental importance to my argument rather than their distinction in the history of modernism. My approach to the work of these artists will emphasis their expanding sense of social awareness evident in their work. This awareness is the foundation of fragmentation. Fragmentation is the response to knowledge and is therefore ultimately connected with what we now know as modernity.

Modernity represents a dynamic framework of knowledge based on a network of information. To understand the nature of fragmentation we have to examine the various complications associated with this framework.
The first part of this essay will investigate the determining causal conditions and nature of fragmentation and its relationship with this framework. This nature, however, will be foremost connected with the consequences of modernity and therefore modernism. The character of change as the pre-eminent feature of modernism will be discussed here as the effect of the accumulation of knowledge. The very fact of accumulated knowledge not only inspired a sense of change but coincided with fragmentation, ‘the disintegration or breakdown of norms of thought, behaviour, or social relationships’.¹ If this fragmentation is an inherent element of modernity it is exactly this that I want to relate to modernism and in particular late 19th and early 20th century modernism.

In my first chapter I will analyse both the nature of fragmentation and the levels on which it operates. Individually, socially, culturally, politically, etc. we are daily confronted with new knowledge and ideas which can either be satisfying or dissatisfying but which ultimately enlighten us. Although this process enriches our knowledge, it on the contrary can be confusing, where only fragments of the total are understood or even misunderstood, resulting in disorientation.

In my subsequent chapters I demonstrate how the effects of a spreading rationalism influenced the modern artist and their work. For the development of my analysis I have selected a number of artists, including Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso, Piet Mondrian and Kurt Schwitters. This selection is not only based on their importance concerning this analysis but also because the periods in which they were active substantiates the historical context through which I have approached my argument.

My principal concern deals with the fragmentary effects of modernity’s industrialisation, globalisation and urbanisation. The artist’s particular and individual appropriation of modernity resulted in a multitude of distinct artistic styles and movements. Original beliefs and ideologies were expressed as a result of growing awareness in a continuously transforming world affecting social conditions and relations. The altered consciousness of the modern artist, I will argue, was strongly dependant on the fragmentary peculiarities of these changes. Throughout this thesis I will refer to the writings of relevant critics and philosophers who communicate the intellectual climate of the time.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF FRAGMENTATION
Fragmentation performs on multiple levels and occupies many aspects of our being. It influences us socially, culturally, intellectually, economically etc. and it is necessary therefore to put the types of fragmentation discussed in perspective and make them relevant to my discussion.

The implications of fragmentation affects us all. If we examine, for example our own individuality it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that such a concept is not purely a notion of the self as being independent, unaffected and autonomous but rather an accumulation of influences in addition to what is described as personality/character, the aggregate of qualities that distinguishes one person from another. The type of fragmentation which I refer to in this observation includes the above but will also encompass those fragmentations taking place on a local as well as global level in terms of milieu, environment, and society and therefore life itself. In both, personal and social instances, however, this fragmentation is closely associated with knowledge. This knowledge or acquaintance with facts on the other hand is reliant on one's circumstances. Environment, milieu, society and knowledge in the 19th and 20th centuries have largely been determined by what we know as modernity and it is through this modernity that I will examine the notion of fragmentation.

The nature of modernity has essentially been determined by our expanding knowledge about ourselves and the world we live in, resulting in change. It has been generally accepted that this expanding knowledge found its origins in the 18th century philosophical movement the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment originated from 17th century rationalism and its main philosophies were brought to life by Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Baudelaire, Denis Diderot and Immanuel Kant. Although the Enlightenment is important in the context of my discussion it is unnecessary to pursue an investigation into what caused this occurrence or analyse its total account. I will therefore be content here with a definition of Michel Foucault, who referred to the Enlightenment as:

...an event, or set of events and complex historical processes, that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies. As such, it included elements of social transformation, types of political institution, forms of knowledge, projects of rationalisation of knowledge and practices, and technological mutations. 

Several critical tendencies, however, remain a prominent focus in my discussion. One of these tendencies is scientific inquiry and invention resulting in technology and the industrialised production of goods: The Industrial

---

Revolution. Another prominent aspect which resulted from the Enlightenment is that of reflexivity which, according to Giddens, "...consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character." Both industrialisation and reflexivity remain crucial components of the character of modernity.

Modernity and its consequences or the nature of modernity have been and continue to be analysed and interpreted through a multitude of philosophies, viewpoints and ideas and is still subject to controversy. In support of my argument I have selected the following, generally accepted, major effects of modernity for further discussion, these are; social change as a result of industrialisation, globalisation and expanding knowledge triggering reflexivity. This selection is based primarily on their fragmentizing qualities reflected in modern society and the modern individual. Fragmentation is associated with being composed of fragments, the process of breaking up, incompleteness, disconnectedness, divisiveness, separateness, etc.

The first topic and its fragmenting qualities I will discuss are the consequences of the enormous growth of the cities and other centres as a result of industrialisation. Technology has created new human environments and has left old ones behind generating a modern life-style. The modern city has its origins in the 18th and 19th centuries when through industrialisation people were drawn to the centres where the industrial production took place. This urbanisation is the main cause of the majority of people living in a created environment, "an environment of action which is, of course physical but no longer natural." 

The atmosphere of this environment has created a new modern sensibility, dominated by upheaval, shifting morals, self-centredness and "self derangement." A multitude of new experiences offer themselves leading to new knowledge and information. As a result new opinions are created forming groups and parties with distinct views.

One of the positive achievements of our modern life is of course the fact that an abundant number of ideas have been formulated and adequately used both locally and globally. There is, however, a fundamental negativity to all this.

---

4 Ibid., p.60
5 M. Berman (1982). All that is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity. New York., p.18
Berman, for example in recognising the positive also mentions that:

On the other hand, as the modern public expands, it shatters into a multitude of fragments, speaking in commensurable private languages; the idea of modernity, conceived in numerous fragmentary ways, loses much of its vividness, resonance and depth, and loses its capacity to organise and give meaning to people’s lives.⁶

Earlier Karl Marx in the ‘Communist Manifesto’(1847), had similarly described modern life as contradictory and warns that, ‘At the same pace that mankind masters nature (through technology), man seems to become enslaved to other men or his own infamy’.⁷

By now modern life has a worldwide impact and little to nothing has remained unseathed. Whereas the Enlightenment was contained within Europe, modernity became a global affair. Modern environments and experiences, according to Berman, cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology.⁸

He continues that these modern environments and experiences can be regarded to unite all mankind but elaborates, however, that this unity is paradoxical; ‘...a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish’.⁹ In this context we can refer to this unity as a unity of fragments. Giddens argues that many of us are, ‘...being caught up in a universe of events we do not fully understand, and which seems in large part outside of our control’.¹⁰ What I determine is that the knowledge we have obtained exists only as fragments of the total.

The universal character of modernity has provided us with instantaneous information from practically the entire world, and beyond, through a set of complex communication networks. Ever since the early days of modernity the swelling stream of information has enabled us to have knowledge of what is happening elsewhere.

Worldly and extended local awareness and the knowledge that comes with it have enabled us to capture the new from just about any place. Observing and knowing about the other has led not only to a critical examination of the other but consequently to an investigation into ourselves and our practices.

⁶ Ibid., p.17
⁷ Ibid., p.20
⁸ Ibid., p.15
⁹ Idem
¹⁰ op.cit., A. Giddens. The Consequences of Modernity. p.2
According to Giddens, this reflexive appropriation of knowledge may be summarised as, ‘The production of systematic knowledge about social life (becoming) integral to system reproduction, rolling social life away from the fixities of tradition’.\(^\text{11}\)

From this perspective tradition as it was understood in pre-modern societies had lost most of its significance. Once reason began to eradicate the reliance on tradition this appeared to induce a sense of certitude more satisfying than the ones attached to earlier beliefs. Consequently, however, modernity’s reflexive tendencies have led to the predicament where the equation of knowledge with certitude has become undone. By now, the end of 20th century we can not be sure about any knowledge at any time simply because we are not sure that modernity’s reflexively applied knowledge will not be revised.\(^\text{12}\) Modernity in this respect as a reflexive entity continuously changes as it examines itself. Such examinations have led to a vast number of interpretations of this modernity and numerous modern and post-modern thinkers over the last two hundred years have tried to analyse this occurrence but they have merely left behind a philosophical fragmentation of opinions. As a consequence the plurality of opinions lacks a comprehensive unity.

Baudelaire understood ‘the modern’ as the momentary, the temporal, the contingent, even the ephemeral in contrast to any appeal to stability.\(^\text{13}\) Although, at the time, Baudelaire perceived this positively many philosophers including, Friedrich Nietzsche argued that this merely contributed to the lack of any reason for convincing one self that there is a true world.\(^\text{14}\) In these the final years of the 20th century we understand Nietzsche had a worthy argument. Uncertainty is more irrefutable than ever. The remaining intrinsic fragmentary element of modernity I will discuss deals with industrialisation purely as a method of production.

Industrialisation brought with it (apart from elements such as a rising bourgeois, capitalism and those mentioned before) a new kind of human labour differing from previous types of labour associated with (artisan) manufacturing and conventional agriculture. During the 19th century working methods changed dramatically as a consequence of the employment of new technologies developed through programmes of scientific research. One of these new methods was the assembly line whereby the culmination of (mechanical) manipulations resulting in the final product had been fragmented into isolated actions. Competition and expanding world markets meant that these new

---

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p.53  
\(^{12}\) Ibid., p.39  
scientifically developed technologies informing the area of industry had to be constant and pervasive. The vigorous nature of industrialism demanded an ongoing rationalisation resulting in an increasing division of labour causing a growing number of unskilled and semi-skilled workers on the one hand and specialists on the other. During the later half of the 19th century and the most part of the 20th century this phenomenon of rationalisation of the processes of labour was extensively enforced.

In his Postmodern Ethics, Zygmunt Bauman emphasises the dangerous aspects of this occurrence:

Like anything else, modern humans are technological objects. Like anything else they have been analysed (split into fragments) and then synthesised in novel ways (as arrangements, or just collections, of fragments).15

The fragmentitious nature of technology, according to Bauman, has led to the division of expertise whereby, specific problems are dealt with by separate bodies of expertise.16 These expert systems, organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today and therefore influence the character of human interaction with these environments. On this note Barry Smart suggests that:

Increasing scientific rationalisation, specialisation, and professionalisation places individuals in a situation of dependency upon institutionally produced commodities and services. Individuals, as increasingly passive appendages to manipulative ‘tools’, which prevent the self-production of use-values, have of necessity become consumers of exchange values, of industrially produced commodities and services. Industrial ‘tools’...have produced a progressive homogenisation of persons and relationships, and an erosion of individual autonomy and creativity.17

The diversity of modernity has resulted in a world as a collection of fragments; the principle of modernity is the principle of fragmentation.

As I mentioned in my introduction, the fragmentary qualities of the modern world can be a burden. Although we live in a world full of experts, specialists, etc., uniform opinions are often lacking. Politicians, environmentalist, economists and philosophers alike tend to argue amongst themselves, leaving

16 Ibid., p.197
us, the non-experts with an often confusing collection of views and ideas
frequently complicating rather than solving problems.

The conundrum, arising now, relates to the individual. Who and what are we in
a global world of constant flux? Have we become the individuals whom the
Enlightenment foresaw us to be; free, rational and determining our own fate?
Kant wrote of a freedom from a dependence on historical tradition and the
to rule one's own beliefs. Self-direction and autonomy through reason
were terms frequently employed amongst the Enlightenment philosophers. The
modern notion of personal autonomy is individualism and as I mentioned at the
beginning of this chapter there are a number of complexities associated with
this multi-faceted term. Due to the reflexivity of modernity and the constant
flow of new ideas (globally) we, as part of modernity have constantly altered
and adjusted our knowledge of ourselves. If individualism or self-
determination involves some sort of search within for one's basic desires,
needs, or interests and then to realise them, it is undoubtedly affixed to the
desires, needs and interests obtainable in our time. We are therefore products
of out time. Although the notion of identity is problematic it will suffice here
to acknowledge that identity is socially mediated and moreover, 'mediated by
an advanced modern (capitalist) society that is heteronomous and itself
thoroughly mediated'.

One can argue, as Ivan Illich does in his text, *Tools for Conviviality*:

...that the politically autonomous act of 'learning' has been
transformed into the controlled business of 'education' through
which people are constantly taught, socialised, normalised, tested
and reformed according to modern standards.

Thus far I have diagnosed several predominate aspects of modernity and its
fragmentizing characteristics. The rapidly accelerating and uncontrolled forms
of change over the last 200 or so years have affected an increasing number of
facets of social life. The concept of culture, therefore, needs to be examined in
relation to the consequential produce of modernity's fragmentary qualities. In
the ensuing chapters my aim is to inquire into how this fragmentation has
influenced the course of modernism.

---

Frankfurt School*. Wisconsin, p.17

CHAPTER TWO

FRAGMENTATION AND LATE 19TH CENTURY MODERNISM
Modernism is aligned with numerous aspects of modernity, one of them and probably the most predicated is the notion of change through progress. As I have demonstrated in my previous chapter, rationalism is one of the predominant features of modernity and the modern artists followed or were at least influenced by this trend. New modernist perspectives and the consequent stylistic metamorphoses motivated changes in technique. Particularly in the field of painting the artist became aware of the distinct qualities associated with the two-dimensional canvas, line and colour. This in combination with the technical innovations of modernity the modern artist’s concern included therefore the very material components of representation. Rendering nature in the three-dimensional (traditional) became less significant and innovation in terms of expressing the new modern sensibilities became a priority. Classified as the *avant-garde* the modern artist forced a division in terms of the new and the old (traditional).

Rationality’s association with modernism needs to be explained in terms of fragmentation rather than as an independent reasoned justification of changing the tradition of art. The consequences of modernity rather than its strategies caused a change in depicting visual reality.

One of the predominant features of the period of the Enlightenment and modernity exists in the challenging of realities as they were known in a traditional sense. The Church, aristocratic politics and the acceptance of Nature and the way it occurred dictated pre-Enlightenment realities and truths. In the Age of Reason old values faded and became increasingly replaced by facts, truths and principles, perceived through scientific study and observation. The main social effects of this tendency have been discussed in the previous chapter. What follows will be an inquiry focussing on the impingement of modernity on the individual.

As awareness grew and societies changed, ‘the modern human’ was forced to constantly monitor him/herself in relation to new sets of circumstances; a process of comparing the old (yesterday) and the new (today) and one’s place within. As the nature of modernity can be described as an ongoing change due to it’s reflexive character, people exist in a continual transformation wherein certainties are non-existent or very short lived. Cultural life under the new set of circumstances had no choice but to change.

As a starting point for the visual evidence of my argument I have chosen the Impressionists. Although one could easily trace the origins of change in earlier periods, the modern movement of French Impressionism enables us to examine a variety of painterly modifications and therefore its prominent impact on transfigurations to come. Impressionist painting has left us with a very sound idea and impression of life in its changing milieu of French and in particular Parisian bourgeois society. Bourgeois leisure was depicted where it most often
appeared; the streets, the cafés, the parks and country/sea-side. Alongside the leisure theme the Impressionists captured the mobility of the environment through the ‘...spectacle of traffic and changing atmospheres’.

Although Impressionism seems more or less timid in revolutionary terms, compared with for instance Cubism, the Impressionists made a definite break with the traditional overtones of their contemporaries. The Impressionist style therefore caused serious controversy at the time. Shapiro in his text, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*, suggests:

In its unconventionised, unregulated vision, in its discovery of constantly changing phenomenal outdoor world of which the shapes depended on the momentary position of the casual or mobile spectator, there was as implicit criticism of symbolic social and domestic formalities, or at least a norm opposed to these.

The Impressionist movement made a break with artistic tradition instigated by personal visions to do with society and new notions involving (personal) freedom. I argue that in the rebellious traits associated with the Impressionist views the emphasis of the new direction is based on the conditions of the moment. The changes occurring in art were resonate of modern social changes. The Impressionist, according to Shapiro rendered comprehensive representations of a wider experience that embraced not only culture but also society, economics and politics.

During the later part of the 19th century a younger post-impressionist generation of painters appeared. Their Post-Impressionist style, as it has become known was even more influenced by their personal views and feelings about contemporary society.

The comprehensive mechanisation of European work places in the 1880's, and the requirements generated by this extensive industrialisation had become immutable and incredibly sophisticated. What remained of the pre-industrial world was mostly a thing of the past. Cities were becoming increasingly urbanised and cosmopolitan, obscuring traditional views of nature, the world and the self. The increasingly unnatural lifestyle in the urban centres was inevitably having an effect on the individual consciousness.

After the earlier phase of Impressionism the apparent painterly joyfulfulness, was slowly eradicated by a more fervent individual questioning of matters.

---

21 Ibid., p.192
22 Ibid., p.188
concerning society and the role of the individual including that of the painter. The later Impressionist images of absinthe drinkers, for instance Edgar Degas’ *The Glass of Absinthe*, (1876) and brothel scenes, such as Toulouse Lautrec’s *Au Salon a la Rue des Moulins*, (1894), do not beautify but rather emphasis a growing concern with questions arising from the contemporary society. The visual arts and painting in particular became overtly an art of its time dealing with real reflections of the people who were there, living it. One can interpret that the painter rather than the painting took centre stage as s/he emphasised personal views and opinions.

When in the late 19th century Symbolism emerged, one of its founders Paul Gauguin, titled one of his works Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?, (1896) summing up the interrogative nature of his mind. Form became more simplistic and iconic whilst colour became more vivid and evocative. Symbolism mediated the expression of consciousness whereby the work of art became the ‘...outer symbol of a profound psychological process’, involving intelligence, feeling, sensation and intuition. 24 What seems to prevail in Gauguin’s work as a whole, his oeuvre, is that it questions society and its lack of stability. Gauguin in leaving France, family and friends sought refuge in Tahiti where he tried to restore the harmony between human life, animals and nature and escape the detrimental impact of industrialisation, globalisation and the diminishing authority of the individual.

Whilst Gauguin expressed his confused, disillusioned and fragmented mind by fleeing to Tahiti, Paul Cezanne, his contemporary, similarly after a period in Paris decided to find refuge in his birth place Aix-en-Provence in the south of France. Whilst Gauguin’s search for truth followed the lines of Symbolism, Cezanne’s main concern was the language of his work whereby interrelationships between the depicted elements becomes the focus. Examining Cezanne’s work we witness a profusion of expressions whereby new painting visions are combined with the affinities of the pre-modern Masters. Hilton Kramer, reviewing the 1977 exhibition, *Cezanne: The Late Work*, Museum of Modern Art described the work as follows:

> Some of these pictures are dense, monumental tapestries of colour, whereas others- especially the watercolours, and the oils inspired by the watercolours are pictures constructed out of the most delicate transparency.25

Works with bold sculptural effects exist next to works with an almost ‘abstract’ flatness. His impressionistic play with light and airiness combined with a particular concern with his tools and materials are but some examples of his

---

24 Ibid., p.171
awareness concerning painting and its new possibilities. Kramer reminds us that, in regards to Cezanne’s work, “...there is no single ‘late style’ but a whole spectrum of styles and possibilities of style...”

Cezanne’s late work is often interpreted as being a paradigm of reality and not an imitation of it. Values had shifted in terms of depicting what can be perceived as real. In a series of works dedicated to his native mountainous Provence and in particular the numerous versions of Mont Sainte Victoire, (1904-5), (ill. 1), the mountain is comprehended through “a series of retinal planes and light vibrations ‘abstracted’ from the object, mountain.”

Cezanne’s work, especially his later, tries to emphasize the intellectual perception of material objects through a practice of sensational observation, henceforth his comment, ‘Treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere and the cone.’ Such a scientific (geometric) beholding became the stepping stone for a number of later artists and movements. Pure painting, a term often associated with Cezanne’s work highlights the notion of personal discovery and expression.

What becomes important for the first time in Western art is that emphasis is on the way of perceiving an object rather than its specific material qualities. Cezanne’s painting differs in this regard from Impressionism; rather than a realistic impression of the material world it became a psycho-analytic inquiry into the intricacies of its subjects stressing an ideal synthesis of shape, colour, and balance with a focus on the order and harmony of the overall design. In order to achieve this ‘serenely ordered whole’, he sacrificed conventionality with the result that certain subjects look distorted and simplified. His vision consequently became highly personalized. In relation to this serenity Arguelles explains:

It is clear that the reason Cezanne’s art came to be so highly regarded was that in a time of disintegrating values and sheer cultural anarchy, it exemplified a purist approach.

Hence, what comes in to being according to Arguelles, is an autonomous art, an art that has no standard to meet but itself and is therefore art-for-arts sake, a personal expression. Cezanne’s importance, according to critics and historians as the mediator of abstraction in art tends to be justified in this sense.

---

26 Ibid., p.65
27 op. cit., J. Arguelles The Transformative Vision, p.181
30 op. cit., J. Arguelles The Transformative Vision, p.181
By the late 1880's direct experience with nature had been diminished to a point where an increasing urbanisation and mechanisation had led to artificiality. When the French Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud, (1854-91) wrote 'Je est un autre', - 'I is another', he was referring to the alienating effect of modernity. The abstraction of natural experience had resulted in arbitrary values and automated responses. This new reality and its effect on the human psyche evoked a search for a reality beyond the realities associated with modern society. This in turn had a soul-searching effect on the self-conscious modern human being not only questioning society but also the 'being' of the human being. Some observations as a result of this process are as follows:

Van Gogh, in discussing the destination in his life and the infinite writes in one of his letters (1888):

...a child in the cradle has the infinite in its eyes. In short I know nothing about it, but it is just the feeling of not knowing that makes the real life we are actually living now like a one-way journey in a train. You go fast but cannot distinguish any object and above all, you do not see the engine.  

Cezanne wrote in 1896:

At the present time I am still searching for the expression of those confused sensations that we bring with us at birth. If I die everything will be over, but what does it matter?

These concerns indicate that the progressive artistic visions of both Van Gogh and Cezanne integrate with a higher social awareness and therefore, self-awareness. Their concerns about life reflects their questioning of moral and aesthetic values signifying a degree of what I shall call psychological or mental fragmentation. What both artists were encountering was:

A crisis which is associated with an increasing erosion of the binary structures of reality-appearance, real and phenomenal forms, science and ideology, consciousness and the unconscious, and with the growing doubts about analytic claims to reveal hidden truths.

Both Van Gogh and Cezanne, particularly towards the end of their careers, viewed the rendering of correct representations as secondary to their increasing concern that their work be a vehicle to express personal feelings. If we take

---

33 op.cit., B. Smart Modern Conditions, p.203
into consideration those feelings were showing a growing sense of fragmentation, then their work, especially those later works, strongly reveal this sensation. In Van Gogh's, The Starry Night, (1889), (ill. 2.) all the elements within the painting, be it the sky, the trees, etc are represented through dots and strokes of pure colour. Gombrich mentions, 'Van Gogh used the individual brush strokes not only to break up the colour but also to convey his own excitement'. 34 Whether momentarily excited or not the process of breaking up or fragmenting is undoubtedly present. Van Gogh in one of his letters from Arles writes:

The emotions are sometimes so strong that one works without being aware of working...and the strokes come with a sequence and coherence like words in a speech or a letter. 35

As words are the fragments of a sentence and the sentence a fragment of a poem/story, Van Gogh's dots and strokes become the fragmented painting. Besides the inherent fragmentary quality of the painting, as such, the painterly style that came with it also conveys the fragmentation process as mentioned in my introduction, ie. the disintegration or breakdown of norms of thought, behaviour, or social relationships. Van Gogh did after all create a personal style unlike any previous styles. Cezanne too developed his work according to an intrinsic fragmentation process. In examining Cezanne's oeuvre the criteria within which he operated deal mainly with structure, balance, juxtaposition and symmetry. Planes of colour guiding the eye through the painting emphasize the painting's equilibrated state.

In his extensive study of Cezanne, Shapiro concludes that his method of rendering a visual sensation emphasize a conscious decision of the mind and the operation of the hand. He continues with:

In this complex process, which in our poor description appears too intellectual, like the effort of a philosopher to grasp both the external and subjective in our experience of things, the self is always present, poised between sensing and knowing, or between its perceptions and a practical ordering activity, mastering its inner world by mastering something beyond itself. 36

In a later essay entitled 'The apples of Cezanne', Shapiro discusses the meaning of subject matter in still life painting. In addition to suggesting an erotic sense and therefore 'an unconscious symbolizing of repressed desire' in Cezanne's

35 ibid., p.417
work, Shapiro stresses that any element within a painting has more than one purpose and must satisfy a multitude of requirements.  

A one-purpose objective within the choice of the elements of a still-life would be over simplifying and Shapiro therefore acknowledges that, ‘The choice of objects is no less bound to the artists consciously directed life than to an unconscious symbolism; it also has vital roots in social experience’.  

Hence, my argument that Cezanne’s self-consciousness in terms of subject matter and its consequent depiction of it indicates a search for harmony of mind and emotion, analysis and spontaneity and the artificial and the natural, inevitably resulting in the apparent abstract qualities in Cezanne’s work. It is after all that these fragmental qualities make Cezanne’s work a topic of great interest.

Having highlighted just a few artists whom I consider relevant to this thesis there are many more which I consider relevant. George Seurat, Paul Signac, Odilon Redon, Gustav Klimt and others conceal various forms of fragmentation.

There is indeed no doubt in saying that the sheer amount of diverse artistic developments during the second half of the 19th century indicates a fragmentation in itself. Different standpoints, opinions, beliefs led to a multiplicity of artistic expressions.

---

38 Idem
CHAPTER THREE

THE FRAGMENTATION OF CUBISM
This playground of visions, opinions and ideas continued throughout the turn of the century which saw the births of movements such as Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Constructivism, Dada, Surrealism, De Style, Futurism, Orphism and more spanning approximately twenty years. Not only does this indicate the number of visual possibilities but also and more importantly the expanding consciousness in this regard. Boundaries of visual expression were challenged as if they were limitless. This limitlessness coincided with social awareness, indicating an affiliation between visual art and experience. As Marx describes it, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness'.

To support Marx's observation I have selected Cubism to illustrate this view. Cubism like many of the other movements just mentioned were local and in this case a specific Parisian affair or at least Parisian influenced. The Parisian society of early this century is a rather complicated one. If we mention but a few local issues of the time it will indicate a more than fluxionary episode in Parisian life incorporating, urbanisation, industrialisation, globalisation (Imperialism), capitalism, class-systemisation, etc and the consequent political, philosophical and artistic impulses.

Cubism through its foremost producers of this style, Pablo Picasso and George Braque, became a conscious response to daily life and the issues of the time. Fusing the social implications already mentioned with the diverse artistic developments to which those artists were exposed, Cubism, was a logical result. Cubism can be regarded as the culmination of previous and contemporary social and artistic values and ideas. Picasso in 1935 said as much himself when he confessed, 'When we invented Cubism, we had no intention whatever of inventing Cubism. We simply wanted to express what was in us'.

There exists a large body of literature on the interpretation of Cubism. Much has been written on its origins in relation to Cezanne's mature style and African sculpture as its major influences. To an extent these influences played a role in the birth of Cubism but it was more importantly instigated by a larger totality of social and cultural forces.

---

What one observes in early Cubism as for example in Picasso’s, *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, (1910), (ill. 3), is the following:

- the fragmentation of shapes into more or less geometric planes
- highly distorted corporeal elements of the figure depicted leaving him, in this instance, unrecognisable
- only but a few aspects of the figure are discernible; head, hands and in some ways a torso
- lack of depth and the ambiguity of back and foreground
- lack of coherence of contour
- esoteric space reinforced by a monochromatic pallet

The fragmentary quality of the painting is one of the most outstanding features of this work. So how do we interpret a Cubist work like this one? To answer this question we have to go back to the origins of the cubist style. Two paintings will suffice here, they being Picasso’s, *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, (1907), (ill. 4), and Braque’s, *Gran Nu*, (1907-8), (ill. 5).

In making an analysis of early Cubism I will examine the manner in which the subject has been depicted in *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* and *Gran Nu*. The first thing to highlight is the rather shocking (especially for the time) quality of the ‘in your face’ crude female bodies, forcing a direct (like it or not) confrontation with a reality constructed by both these artist. The figures lack detail and are comprehended through a basic, almost childlike, and distorted anatomy of the human figure. Beautification is definitely not an issue, nor is the background or facial expression. What is left is graceless female flesh! The next question seems obvious. What is the point in creating such images? Is it an urge to further disassociate painting from tradition? Is it an expression of frustration towards femininity or is it a daring ambition of challenging along the lines of ‘tell me if I’m wrong”? Once we have acknowledged that Cubism did not portray any particular contemporary philosophies, we must then consider the just mentioned explanations.

In many ways both paintings depict a type of realism unique in the history of painting. This realism was so authentic that it could not stretch the imagination much further beyond the truths of *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* and *Gran Nu*.

Both Picasso’s and Braque’s paintings deal with impersonalisation, dislocation, isolation, disintegration and fragmentation. All these issues already being conveyed in works by van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, Cezanne and others were subsequently predicated by the aware minds of Picasso and Braque. After seeing a display of primitive art, at the approximate time of the creation of *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, Picasso acknowledged the ‘magical’ and
‘exorcistic’ significance of this art, particularly the African masks. Much has
been said in relation to the development of Cubism and the influences of
primitive art on this process. What is significant is that the conceptual qualities
of primitive art, rather than the formal qualities, enabled Picasso to justify his
own reality and the depiction of it. In his own words on the African masks he
said:

They were weapons. Arms to free people from being the slaves
of the spirits; to become independent. They were instruments. If
we turn the spirits into material forms we free ourselves of them
and gain our independence. The spirits, the
unconscious...emotion, all mean the same thing. Now I
understood why I was a painter. That was probably the moment,
Les Demoiselles d'Avignon came to being, but not because of the
forms I saw, but because it was my first exorcistic canvas.41

If it is indeed the unconscious which dominates Picasso’s painting, then this
unconsciousness shows strong affinities with modernity’s rationalism and a
conceptualisation of modern social change. What is reflected in Les
Demoiselles d’Avignon, is the following:

♦ the differentiation of social spheres into specialised and quasi;
autonomous institutions
♦ the growth of abstract conceptualisation of sovereignty and power,
which in turn made possible the gradual development of the abstract
citizen in the urban city cultures of western Europe
♦ separation of the private (emotional) and public (rational) world within
which separate mentalities or characters were to develop
♦ the secularisation and disenchantment of culture, producing, not a
uniformity of values, but a polytheistic reality of competing perspectives
without an integrating or unifying principle.42

All these notions reinforced the social and personal fragmentation of the time.
Picasso's and Braque's search for new artistic expression during the Cubist
period displays a strong analogy with many of modernity's reforms. One of
those can be found in the time-space compression of modernity. Newspapers,
telephones, trains, cars etc assisted in this subjugation of time and space.
Cubism shows the same tendencies in ordering and controlling pictorial space
through rationality and technique. In the previously mentioned, Portrait of
Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, by Picasso this process is evident. The stylistic and
abstract qualities of this work are reflective of identical conceptions in society.

41 Ibid., p.33
It is in works like this that artistic fragmentation meets social fragmentation. In both processes the subject loses significance and identity leaving it fragmented with few recognisable features.

Bell describes modernism as ‘a cultural temper or mood’, on the one hand lacking a single unifying principle but on the other featuring similar tendencies to be ‘wilfully opaque’ and ‘selfconsciously experimental’. Modernism asserts Bell ‘constitutes a response to late nineteenth century transformations in sense perception and self-consciousness’. The principle sources from which those transformations arose, are changes in space-time orientations and the ‘crisis in self-consciousness’ arising in turn from an erosion of the beliefs and values, guarantees, securities or certainties associated with traditional world views.

In this, what I call the modern crisis of self-consciousness the emphasis is on modern. Modern refers to turmoil and flux, perpetual disintegration and renewal, struggle and contradiction, rapid change, the shift in the experience of space and time, the accelerating pace of life and a growing sense of fragmentation and discontinuity.

Fernand Leger observed in 1913 that life was, ‘more fragmented’ and more quickly paced than previously and therefore it was essential to devise a dynamic art to depict it. Leger’s early Cubism indeed reflects both the fragmented and dynamic qualities he referred to, as illustrated by La Femme en Bleu (1912), (ill. 6).

Fragmentation and dynamics play an important role in the initial phase of Cubism. In the period in which Picasso painted, Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Kahnweiler himself wrote, ‘The great step has been made. Picasso has exploded homogeneous form’.

Working towards what is now known as synthetic Cubism, Picasso and Braque to a certain extent disregarded dynamic overtones in favour of flagrant fragmentation. Initially there was the introduction of words or parts of words into the work, again fragments upon an already highly fragmented structure of the painting. Not long after it is Picasso whom in 1912 introduced the pasting of actual material on the canvas. Still Life with Cane Chair, (1912), contains a piece of wax cloth signifying the cane back of his chair. In the following years Braque and Picasso used various materials as elements for 2-dimensional assemblages in some cases without any traditional use of drawing or painting.

44 op.cit., B. Smart Modern Conditions p.153
45 op.cit., D. Bell The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism. p.50
46 Ibid., p.47-50
Fragments of newspaper, wallpaper and sheet music were cut up and glued together to create a collage.

Between 1911-1917 the Cubist works of Braque and Picasso emphasise the fusing of the subject with its medium stressing the qualities of painting rather than the subject itself. The fragmented and re-arranged configuration becomes increasingly concordant with the formal nature of painting itself. Cubism at this point finds itself close to absolute abstraction (fragmentation) and formal autonomy. The Cubists, however, never eliminated subject matter altogether whereas future artists did. In the following chapter I will discuss some artists who achieve total abstraction. Their methods and approaches, however, continue to be impelled by that which I have described so far in this paper as fragmentation.
CHAPTER FOUR

SCHWITTERS, MONDRIAN AND POLLOCK
In this my fourth and final chapter I will continue to explore the importance of the fragmentary qualities as described in my previous chapters in relation to modernity and modernism. Via the work of the artists Kurt Schwitters, Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock, I will establish that the previously discussed fragmentation continues in both similar and miscellaneous ways.

The transformation of 20th century society due to modernity highlighted issues such as, mass culture, consumer society, global village, and the nuclear era. These changes concerning us all certainly influenced modernism. The two World Wars have been largely responsible for a new way of interpreting the world and the societies that came with it.

Between 1914 and 1918 the world was witness to The Great War, involving 32 nations worldwide. In those four years casualties in the land forces amounted to more than 37 million and in addition saw 10 million civilian deaths caused directly and indirectly by the war. Modern warfare had introduced tanks aeroplanes, submarines and other technically advanced weapons in order to destroy enemy armies, fleets and cities.

The disinclination caused by this hideous event saw the European artist respond in horror. Paul Klee attributes much of the growing abstract artistic tendencies to this increasing world dread when he wrote in 1915, ‘The more horrifying this world becomes the more art becomes abstract’.

Despite some Futurist pro-war tendencies celebrating modernity, Klee was correct in recognising the simultaneity between the expanding awareness amongst modern artists of the possibilities of pure abstraction and the increasing questioning of modernity.

From 1910 to 1920 we witness a growing number of modernist movements and artists exploring abstraction. The Blue Rider Group, including Wassilly Kandinsky; Orphism, including Robert Delaunay and Frantisek Kupka; Constructivism, including El Lissitzky; Suprematism, including Kasimir Malevich and De Style, including Piet Mondrian are the foremost exponents of abstraction. Despite their affiliation there also existed conflicting views based on the particular modus operandi.

This fragmentation within modernism itself was more or less highlighted with the birth of Dada in 1916, which introduced its so-called anti-art. Marcel Duchamp, a leading Dadaists and inventor of the concept of the ready-made explained this idea as ‘...based on a reaction of visual indifference with a total absence of good or bad taste... in fact a complete anaesthesia’.

---

48 op.cit., J. Arguelles The Transformative Vision: p.191
49 Ibid., p.209
statement was aimed directly at bourgeois taste and society which still dominated European culture. Dada also reacted against certain modernist aesthetic tendencies, including Impressionism, Futurism and Expressionism. Ultimately their explorations with the undoing of traditional form became the pre-conditioning of new construction. Raoul Hausman, a spokesman in the early Dada period declared that Dada was constructing the world according to its own needs; it uses all forms and customs available to destroy the moral self-righteousness of the bourgeoisie with its own means.50

In this process the Dada members used real materials like glass, wire and cardboard to produce their constellations. Although some Dadaist for example, George Grosz and Hans Arp still used conventional means of expression, collage became a prominent medium for the movement. As Dorothea Dietrich asserts, 'In Dada, painting, sculpture, and architecture all partake in fragmentation, but are reconstituted in a new syntax: The medium of collage was developed to attack the “decaying culture of Europe”.'51 In constructing works of art through an arrangement of different fragments, collage became an ideal medium for those artists who wanted to express social, cultural and personal fragmentation.

One of these artists was Kurt Schwitters. Schwitters based in Hannover commented when reflecting on WWI’s impact on his art, ‘everything had broken down...and new things had to be made out of fragments...’.52 Although influenced by Dada and to some degree Cubist collage his work developed essentially independent from those movements.

Basically isolated from foreign modernist centres, such as Paris, during the war his introduction to collage afterwards gave him the opportunity for a different approach to the medium free from already ingrained political and anti-traditional conceptions existing within for example Dada collages produced Zurich. Schwitters’ collage style therefore takes on more non-specific qualities as expressed in his work, Mz. 169. Formen im Raum, (1920), (ill. 7). His collages express the fragmentations and discontinuities of modern life. The formal discontinuities of collage serve as an analogue of the dislocations within urban environments

The reality of modernity’s capitalism, especially after the war, became characterised as a reality of destabilisation. Lyotard refers to this as follows:

...capitalism inherently possesses the power to deanimate familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-

51 Ibid., p.37
52 Ibid., p.7
called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery...

What transpires, as Jameson informs us, is a shift in the dynamics of culture pathology which can be characterised as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject. In this context the subject should be understood as being both the artist and his/her subject matter simultaneously.

Whilst the Dadaist recognised in collage the capacity for social critique, Schwitters additionally recognised its wider constructive possibilities. The discarded bits and pieces of modern society could be used in a positive and creative way. For Schwitters collage was the ideal technique for representing reality as well as the value of newness. Tradition belonged to the past and to depict a new modern, fragmented and fragmenting society what better means than collage? Schwitter’s work, however, comprises more than the capturing of the modern moment typified by dislocation, the new, the transitory, and the elusive. It also conveys his attempt to unite, revealing a desire for stability. As early as 1894 Odilon Redon had stated that, “The artist...will always be a special emissary - isolated, alone - with an innate sense for the organisation of matter”. Many of Schwitters’ collages are concerned with the use of antitheses and contradictions as structuring principles. Schwitters himself who throughout his career also remained involved in naturalistic oil painting indicates this conception of oppositional pairing in art. What we find therefore in the art of Schwitters and in the artist himself is a simultaneous adherence to tradition and an acknowledgment of the modern, a duality pertaining to fragmentation.

It is certain that Mondrian’s first stay in Paris (1912-14) left a Cubist stamp on the work he produced in this period. Not only the Cubists but the Futurists; as well as Matisse, Cezanne, Delauney and other artistic trends were absorbed. Around this period Abstraction was on everybody’s lips and Mondrian’s experimental works of his pre-Parisian experience not surprisingly led to the confident creation of his first total abstractions. Having acquainted himself with the latest European artistic notions in Amsterdam his move to Paris was a natural impulse. To adequately comprehend Mondrian and his ‘career’ move to Paris, however, one needs to investigate aspects of his previous artistic explorations. Mondrian’s work before he arrived in Paris shows affiliation with Van Gogh, the The Hague School, Cezanne and religious symbolism related to

54 Ibid., p.71
theosophical spiritualism. Unlike the artistic milieu in Paris, Mondrian’s
development thus far had been somewhat insular.

By the time he reached Paris his painting career already spanned 20 years. His
knowledge of the Dutch Masters is without doubt and his awareness of
significant impressionistic endeavours is indisputable when we look for
example at works like, The Amstel: Haze, (1907), (ill. 8). Although invariably
impressionistic, this work shows Mondrian’s affinity with simplicity, geometry
and abstraction. Following The Amstel: Haze, Mondrian successfully
experimented with a range of painterly possibilities covering flatness of
surface, pure colour, the elementary subject and the spiritual. After arriving in
Paris, Mondrian was equipped to compare rather than to adopt Cubism with his
own achievements. This comparison led to a number of alterations in terms of
pallet, the use of flat space and function of line. In the period 1913 to 1914,
Mondrian’s work is dominated by Cubist inspired fragmentation, flatness and
most importantly total abstraction, where reduction and essence become a
priority.

According to Arguelles his pursuit was greatly inspired by the Theosophical
Movement. Essential to the Theosophical Movement was the bridging between
East and West and to an extent the conscious and the unconscious. Like
Mondrian other artists including Kupka and Kandinsky were stirred by its
philosophical doctrines. Arguelles argues that ‘to Kandinsky, this movement
was the ‘spiritual turning point’ in the dark age of materialism’. 56

What plays a major role in Mondrian’s pre-WWI abstractions is the continuing
search for balance between the conscious and the unconscious, a duality similar
to body and soul. Body and soul or the conscious and the unconscious are
translated through perpendicular lines where their convergence symbolises
perfect harmony and a moment of true balance; an attempt to find truth and
universality. Mondrian in this sense is clear in terms of his awareness of body
versus soul, conscious versus unconscious and the utopian answer that could be
regarded as a solution. In Composition with Blue, Gray and Red, (1913), (ill.
9), he deals with the fleeting, an attempt to control the incontrollable. The
painting animates a contemporary space ship where the manageable (the ship)
is managed but where the course (the infinite) is boundless. The obscure
fragmented configuration seems to float by being disconnected from the edges
of the painting. Mondrian’s artistic endeavours, therefore, seek to harmonise
the apparently incongruous.

What appears is not only a theosophical (and Platonic) realisation of
instructions dealing with opposites, but also an awareness of a painter in search

56 op.cit., J. Arguelles The Transformative Vision: p.188
al realities, concentrating ultimately on reduction in order to reveal

imism has played an important part in modernism, reaching a climax in
crime works, Black Square, (1915) and White on White, (1918),
alevich. Although Mondrian came close to complete
simism, he never entirely gave in to the utopian concept behind this

beliefs clearly influenced the modernist era of the late 19th and early
nies. In many respects this meant a shift from an all encompassing
the Christian religion to a modern rationalism. The duality between
ral and the religious forced the individual conscience to contemplate
compassing the infinite, God, self, and the Other. The multitude of
rary artistic expressions confirms this.

ne manner as Van Gogh and Cezanne tried to convey ‘pure’ feeling ra-
ration of modernists attempted no different. However, Mondrian’s
mained worldly, refusing to lose sight of its human elements. The
cting of the absolute with the limited human realities characterise
n’s pre-WWI dualism.

n’s spiritual convictions are combined with a personal dissecting
owards art equivalent with juxtapositions of organic versus inorganic
fact versus artistic construction. This art deals primarily with the
balance of unequal parts or fragments. For Mondrian art is universal
ltimate work of art therefore is the expression of universal beauty.
lem, according to Mondrian is that the individual expression of the
is/Her attempt to represent this beauty is subjective.

llenge for the artist therefore is to work towards an objective in which
creation of universal beauty and the aesthetic expression of oneself
k. Paul Crowther summarises Mondrian’s art as follows:

...Mondrian sees art as part of a greater whole - an immanent
logic of duality and opposition, where oppositions are gradually
refined, made explicit and thence brought into a state of higher
dialectical unity. The outcome of this total logic is the realization
of universal unity. 57

an’s perfectionist visionary system, however, reveals a utopian and
ic longing, ardent but impractical in social terms. Mondrian himself
ed this when he referred to tragedy as the consequence of inequality in

P. Crowther The Language of Twentieth-Century Art, p.142
the appearance of the duality by which unity manifests itself. Ultimately Mondrian’s work deals with the balance of dualities or rather with unifying; inward/outward, spirit/nature, mind/matter, abstract/real, universal/individual, etc. Hence truth is a multiple unity of opposites. The pursuit of and arrest of this unity will alleviate tragedy. There is therefore a basic element within Mondrian’s work that deals with the eradication of tragedy. This tragedy stems from a consciousness formed through contemporary social experience and a longing for a re-conditioning of social reality. The transcendence of the self in search for truth reveals a certain self-alienation process in Mondrian’s abstractions. In ‘Modernism relocated’, John Welchman notes when referring to the practices of Malevich, Kandinsky and Mondrian:

These foundational practices of visual abstraction are predicated on radical anti-materialistic claims that actively cultivate particular forms of subjective (and social) transcendence from the practices of everyday modern life.\(^{58}\)

Welchman argues that pioneer abstraction created an escape from the conditioning of social reality. Modernity’s lack of coherence led to a withdrawal into the self and a search for identity beyond the polymorphous character of modern society and culture. In other words, early abstraction is closely related to a breaking away from the intrinsic ‘fragmentitious’ qualities of contemporary society and culture.

Throughout the 20\(^{th}\) century fragmentation continued to play a major role in determining modern society, humans and culture. Industrialisation, urbanisation, rationalisation, institutionalisation, and specialisation continued to transform the world which can be described as a techno-environment with all encompassing and artificial tendencies. According to Arguelles, abstract art was the outcome of a search for an authentic expression of this new environment. Abstract visions and values both mirrored and looked beyond the new realities of life. New experiences and knowledge continued to grow and the advanced modern society became increasingly multifaceted.

Abstract art which deals largely with the exteriorisation of psychic states produced a large number of styles and accompanying explanations, where artists and critics alike become specialists in their own way.

After WWII bourgeois democracy became accepted throughout the western world. Thus the rebellious role of the avant-garde artist as anti-bourgeoisie had lost its potency. The focus now became the new and the different in solely

artistic terms. The anti-traditional became traditional in the sense that in time \textit{avant-garde} art had become normative.

Art movements, such as Dada and De Style, with their intention of bringing art to the people in order to encourage social transformation had diminished and artists concentrated more and more on their individual feelings and consciousness. With post-war mass industry, consumption and media there was the growing sense of diminished control and loss of individual autonomy.

Modernity’s rationalism and techno-centric ideology has often been identified with the belief in linear progress and absolute truths. In terms of modernism this has been no different. The critics Clement Greenberg and Alfred H. Barr ultimately saw modernism as an ongoing progression, coinciding with the rationality and reflexivity of modernity.

Unfortunately contemporary art criticism developed in such ways that it was a determining factor on whether an artist or rather his/her style was justified. The post WWII art world consists of a collection of styles and differentiation with a dominant fragmentary character. Both in Europe and the United States the artists explore their practice through abstraction, Surrealism, Realism, Primitivism, Expressionism, Tachisme, Dadaism etc.

Jackson Pollock, the well-known Abstract Expressionist was hailed by critics such as Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg as the first major American to contribute to modernism. Through this critical attention and media exposure Pollock and the Abstract Expressionist style of painting soon became international. The commercialisation of \textit{avant-garde} art had become a reality and works associated with the new, or as Rosenberg described it, ‘the tradition of the new’, became popular artefacts. As previously mentioned, the new and in this case the new painterly style became dominant over artistic endeavour. Dubbed by the critics as ‘action painter’, ‘dripper’ and pioneer of the ‘tradition of the new’, Pollock’s commercialisation victimised his artistic development. Modernity’s constant demand for newness allowed both misinterpretation and distraction.

Pollock’s impulse, however, stemmed from a modern reality involving consciousness, identity and the fragmentary qualities of modern society. Arguelles argues that Pollock’s accomplishment as a painter was the presentation of the raw texture of human consciousness during a time of maximum confusion, aggression and sheer collective hysteria.\footnote{op.	extit{cit.}, J. Arguelles \textit{The Transformative Vision}; p.253} The dripping and sprinkling techniques used by Pollock resulted in the all over fragmentary quality of his work. In this process Pollock’s strive for control over his medium creates a sense of neurotic tension. Personal neurosis combined with
social fragmentation was translated through aesthetic coordination in an attempt to self-control and discovery, as in his Unformed Figure (1953), (ill. 10). According to Pollock, every good painter paints what s/he is.60

In modern society art often takes on a therapeutic role bringing forth conscious processes where there were once unconscious impulses and hence restoring the organism to a state of harmonious self-regulation. Art in this case becomes inseparable from the attainment of expanded consciousness.61 The formal vocabularies of the 20th century are multitudinous. Many of them can be explained through the argument of fragmentation.

The fragmentary features of modern society and its impact on human consciousness has led to a great number of variable art forms and practices. In what now is referred to as post-modernism this process persists. Ever expanding knowledge, rationalism and reflexivity continue to lead the way towards diversity and separateness. Smart argues that this tendency towards diversity is evident in art, education and mass culture, producing a fragmentation of cultures and communities.62

Lyotard suggests that the accelerating ‘development of techno-sciences’ might be considered aggravating rather than alleviating our difficulties, introducing a destabilising ‘obligation to complexity’.63 A major element of the failure of the modern project, according to Lyotard, is constituted by it allowing this excessive complexity.

Whether modernity is a failure is not relevant to this paper. What is relevant is that modernity’s complexity was the major cause for the fragmentizing qualities within modernism, a trend quite happily continuing across the post-modern.

60 Ibid., p.254
61 Ibid., p.185
62 op.cit., B. Smart Modern Conditions, Postmodern Controversies, p.71
63 Ibid., p.176
Conclusion
Zygmunt Bauman (1995) stated that, "identity is an oblique assertion of the inadequacy or incompleteness of the 'what is'". What I have pointed out in this thesis is that throughout the period of modernity modern practice became more individualised than ever previously. Modernity emphasised the postulate identity and gave rise to the individual self-expression, which dominated the course of modernism. However, the identity of the modernist artist as I have suggested throughout this paper is, like Bauman’s, an oblique or rather a fragmented one.

Modernism brought us a great diversity of styles and approaches resulting in a multitude of art-movements and opinions about art under it’s headline. This diversity I claim is the result of the modern project driven by rationalism including industrialisation, globalisation and urbanism. The multiple social implications of these processes and the individual interpretations of them have left us with an immensely varied account of ideas and concepts and to a degree an obsession with the new. Consequently the appearance of modernism is fragmented and often episodic, distinguished by a succession of differing styles. The fragmented qualities of modernism, however, stem from the previously mentioned personal fragmentation which I have attributed to an exhilarating influx of new knowledge.

Modern methods and the reflexive qualities intrinsic to them resulted in a new modern way of life. Consequently a new way of thinking and finding ‘truths’ emerged. In modern society the new method employed in answering questions and resolving problems was the method of reason and experiment. Hence, change became one of modernity’s major characteristics as different generations held different beliefs and points of view. No less is this evident than in modernism. As I have noted the options that have become available over the last two hundred years or so for conceptualising our social and political life have been and are immensely diverse. The course of art under the influence of this flexibility inevitably altered. Modernism comprises a great variety of new styles and types of art most of which occurred concurrently with the fluctuant social and political climate of modernity.

Throughout this thesis I have discussed a variety of artists whose work was greatly influenced by the expanding knowledge that became available to them. The fragmentary qualities inherent in their work, I have argued, were the result of the fragmenting properties of modernity.

Bibliography


LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS
1. Paul Cezanne, *Monte Sainte-Victoire*
2. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*
4. Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*
5. George Braque, *Gran Nu*
6. Ferdinand Leger, *La Femme en Blue*
7. Kurt Schwitters, *Mz. 169, Formen im Raum*
8. Piet Mondrian, *Amstel Haze*
9. Piet Mondrian, *Composition in Blue, Gray and Red*
10. Jackson Pollock, *Unformed Figure*
11. Cornelis Timmer, *Improvisation (Landscape)*
12. Cornelis Timmer, *Study for Railway Bridge*
13. Cornelis Timmer, *Fragments 1995*
14. Cornelis Timmer, *Remnants*
15. Cornelis Timmer, *Improvisation 7*
16. Cornelis Timmer, *Decomposition 2*
17. Cornelis Timmer, *Panthea*
18. Cornelis Timmer, *Improvisation 9*
Illustrations
1. **Paul Cézanne**, *Monte Sainte-Victoire*, 1904-5, o/c, 60 x 73 cm, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

2. **Vincent van Gogh**, *The Starry Night*, 1889, o/c, 73.7 x 92.1 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
3. **Pablo Picasso**, *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*. 1910, o/c, 100.6 x 72.8 cm, Art Institute of Chicago.

5. George Braque, *Grain Nu*, 1907-8, o/c, 134 x 96 cm.
Collection of Alex Maguy, Paris.

194 x 130 cm, Kunstsammlung, Basel.

8. Piet Mondrian, *Amstel Hazy*, 1907, a/c, 32.5 x 42.5 cm, Collection Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.
9. Piet Mondrian, Composition with Blue, Gray and Red, 1913, o/c, 88 x 115 cm, Collection Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo.

10. Jackson Pollock, Unformed Figure, 1953, o/c, 125 x 185 cm, Museum Ludwig Köln, Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln.

13. **Cornelis Timmer**, *Fragments*. 1995, oil and acrylic on board, 67.5 x 91.5 cm.

oil on canvas board, 71 x 56 cm.

16. Cornelis Timmer, *Decomposition 2*, a/c,
56 x 67 cm.

Appendix
Notes on my own work.

During the course of my Master of Arts my work has evolved towards total abstraction free from any representational content. This obtained freedom has allowed me to work spontaneously and unrestricted with line and colour in a way that could be described as expressive. This development, however, attained a sense of continuity and homogeneity in terms of a consistent fragmentation process. In my most recent works the breaking up of the picture surface plays a fundamental role. Through colour and line the surface becomes an interplay of overlapping planes creating a sense of multifarious space. My attention focuses on the instantaneous, sensuous and physical aspects of the painting whilst maintaining spontaneity and elements of construction. A particular tension within the work is created by contradictory elements including chaos versus organisation and turbulence versus self-control.

A neurotic uneasiness reflects features of contemporary life and the uncertainties that come with it. One of the foremost concepts I deal with in my work is fragmentation. My thesis reveals that fragmentation was and is a fundamental part of the modernist tradition, continuing its role in what we now refer to as post-modernism. The fragmentary qualities of my work originate from the fragmentation processes performing on a social, cultural and personal level. The increasing abstraction of our society and the rest of the world compelled me to work towards pure abstraction in search of a more incorporeal meaning.

A network of lines activates the picture surface creating interacting rhythms as in a buzzing city. The images never-the-less evoke a sense of structure, balance and harmony. I maintain a general commitment to a modernist tradition and to exploring new means of expression counter to the post-modern rejection of universal and absolute notions such as, truth and reason. The post-modern conceptions of recycling and appropriating previous styles, materials and themes are not my concern. My work is inevitably influenced by a multitude of other artists, such as, the early work of Piet Mondrian and the later work of Jackson Pollock, yet I reject adopting such styles as Cubism or Abstract Expressionism.

The development of my work is to an extent informed by the developments within modernism. In my thesis I have outlined my particular interest in the fragmentary qualities inherent in the work of numerous modern artists. This inclination continues and has become an essential element within my work.

When I commence a painting I do not know what the end result will look like. Although I work methodically in terms of layering to build up the surface of the painting, what happens in regards to composition and choice of colour is unpredictable. The final appearance of the work evolves through intuition. Spontaneity and emotion determine the end result. I do not work according to
any particular agenda outside self-examination and to a certain extent metaphysical concerns. What the work reflects is primarily self-reverential; painting as an exploration of cultural and social effects on the self. Despite the fragmentary overtones in the works I still see them as poetic making the painting a harmonious whole.

My gradual acquaintance with traditional and modern art has resulted in fragments of previous styles being concealed within my work. Additionally fragments from my personal experiences in combination with extensive travel has inevitably impacted on my art. Thus my work is simultaneously studied and personal. My art is neither parochial or provincial but rather exists within the discourse of modernism. The research for this paper has also enabled me to reflect upon the reasoning of the artist and how social and cultural forces play a determining role in his/her practice. The expression and translation of feeling through line and colour is certainly my primary aspiration. Criteria for achieving this is dependent on the condition of society.

Cornelis Timmer, 1998