



fig. 50
Cover Chapter Six: *Central Trope, Two Contemporary Painters*
oil, acrylic and ink on wood,
2010,
40 x 27.5 cm / 16 in x 11 in

CHAPTER SIX.

Central Trope in Two Contemporary Painters' Works

In the last two chapters we considered the creation of potential central tropes in an imaginary fashion and then saw my ruminations upon my own metaphor(m) embodied in a *Panels* painting-installation custom created as a part of this dissertation. Now let us trace the significance of realized metaphor(m)s in tangible detail by studying a single painting by Charles Boetschi and the most recent body of paintings by Leonard Bullock. As an exception, I have no overarching conceit in this chapter, unless an analytic essay which assays the chain of cognitive-metaphoric reasoning behind paintings is in some way indeed a trope of itself.

A Single Painting: Charles Boetschi's *Color Unit 24.1*

The major effect of metaphor in this poem is global.... Here we find a power of metaphor that we have not previously discussed *the power of revelation*. This is the power that metaphor has to reveal comprehensive hidden meanings to us, to allow us to find new meanings beyond the surface, to interpret texts as wholes, and to make sense of patterns of events.

—George Lakoff and Mark Turner¹

Idiosyncratic thought requires idiosyncratic language.

—Lakoff and Turner²

The artist, who passed away April 4th, 2006 at the age of only 48, was a friend of mine and a partner I treasured in discussions concerning art, especially painting, thus many of my perceptions here are informed by long personal conversation. Boetschi's paintings, including the one under discussion here, *Color Unit 24.1* (fig. 51), are both idiosyncratic and revelatory. They are idiosyncratic in that they ignore the pressures of many current art world fads, but also in their very compositional reasoning. Each work is a subtle and sophisticated combination of tropes critically utilized in a unique way — one which points viewers toward possible personal revelations of vision.

¹ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.159.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Boetschi displays unadulterated and courageous antithetical awareness. His paintings make clear reference to the minimalism of Donald Judd and the geometric abstraction of the hard-edge and *art concret* painters. Nonetheless, he denies and inverts several of their key premises. In his paintings, he acknowledges geometric art's tradition, but also shows that he has taken postmodern doubt to heart. Boetschi extends the metaphors of this style, sometimes by "backing-up", sometimes by leaping forward. He paints, a method Judd abandoned to go into a three-dimensional form falling between painting and sculpture which he termed the "specific object." Yet, Boetschi's surfaces are immaculately smooth. The only evidence of the object being hand-painted is the infinitesimally raised edges due to paint thickness where fields of color meet. The choices of hue are unique and playful, not primary and pedantically balanced as in *art concret*. The materials are traditional, unlike Judd's work. The artist forswears both the utopian aspirations of hard-edged purist painting and the Dada-fathered theatricality of presence in Minimalism. Therein, he is able to re-establish an activity important to early geometric painters such as Piet Mondrian, yet scorned by Postmodernists — the striving after integrity. He becomes technically, by choice of medium, and ethically, through his aim, prior to his composite of predecessors.

Boetschi uses a heavily intellectualized compositional strategy based on a grid formed of eight rectangular subdivisions. Generally, his compositions within his chosen constraints violate the standard rules of design as learned in art school. The paintings accentuate skewed arrangements and peculiar color. Strangely irritating yet attractive "off-hues" are adjoined in a seemingly random fashion. There are rarely primaries or even secondaries. Personal, emotional and anecdotal associations accrue to the various tints. Boetschi's works are intelligent, complex and precariously dissident.

Color and Light

Color is a happily difficult entity for trope and for theory in general. It is seldom mapped from the source domain of vision in fundamental metaphors in general speech utterances. This may be because particular colors are so insistently real, so sensual. Although it may be forced into a symbolic role, color does not mimetically represent anything in itself and it cannot be abstracted. It is always a sample of itself. Nonetheless, in many visual artists there is a mix of metonymy and metaphor in their central trope, which thereby allows the incorporation of color. A piece of something, a sample of color, may be utilized as either

synecdoche or metonymy. This trope may then be further manipulated as a metaphor or other trope leading to foundational metaphors. As a simple example, one might exactly match several of the multitude of colors of "white" people's skin — none of which one can in any fashion describe as actually white. The various yellows, browns and pinks are a synecdoche of humanity, become a metonymy of societal division, and are a clear metaphor for the falsity of racial definition. Obviously, color must come into play in visual art. Much of painting throughout history has revolved around color-formed space. Light and color are inextricably linked for visual artists. Foundational metaphors of light are thus often intricately manifested in color.

Let us explore this at work in the acrylic painting, *Color Unit 24.1* of 1998. The 200 by 200 centimeter piece may be viewed tropaically on two primary levels. First, there is the irregular/regular aspect pairing in the "J"-formed composition. Second, there are the individual, seemingly associative colors used where one would expect strong primaries. There are many additional elements convincingly integrated into the metaphor(m). These include the large size of the paintings, their scale in relationship to humans, the raised edges of the paint and the depth of the stretcher frames. However, these are of somewhat auxiliary importance, primarily displaying the artist's strength of reasoning in the pervasiveness of his central trope.

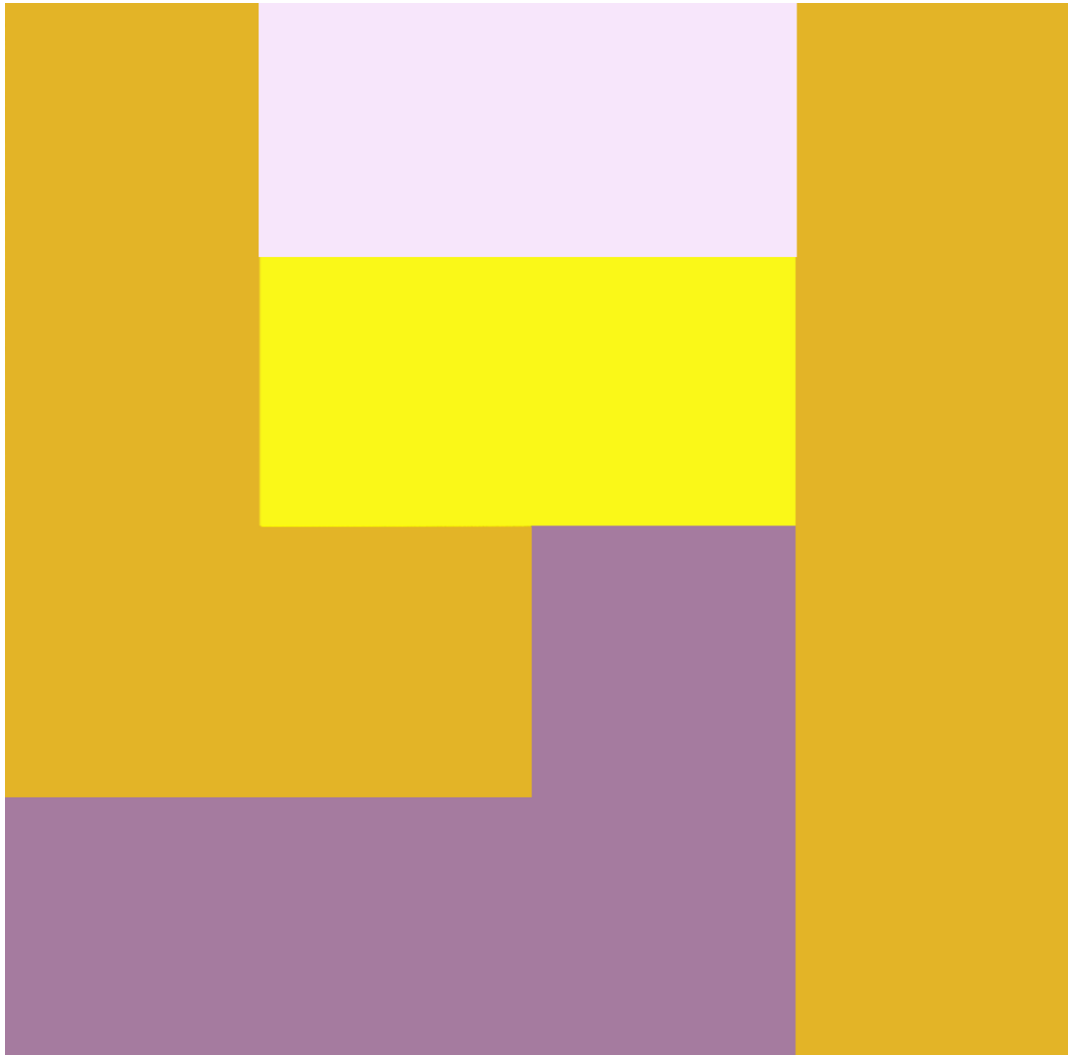


fig. 51
Charles Boetschi,
Color Unit 24.1,
acrylic on canvas,
1998,
200 x 200 cm / 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ in x 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ in

Irregular Regularity

George Lakoff and Mark Turner describe several prime methods for creatively applying foundational metaphors: extending (developing implications of the tropes), elaborating (adding in details), questioning (casting them into doubt), and composing (bringing two or more together).³ Boetschi is conducting several of these operations in this work, but most importantly he is composing tropes into surprises of opposition (*REGULAR / IRREGULAR*), thereby throwing their identity into question. His central trope is a productive model of thought. In Boetschi's metaphor(m) the action of composing and fusing tropes becomes the act of questioning them.

There are several ways in which a tropaic path may be established in a painting. In a poem or novel, this is relatively straightforward. These textual works tend to unfold as one reads, left-to-right, top-to-bottom. Thus the phenomenological experience of the reader is the sequential path along which tropes are laid out. Paintings have an at-once far simpler and far more complex presence. The viewer simultaneously experiences the work as a whole and as a sequence, usually the path one's eye follows through the work, as determined by the composition — what attracts attention first, second and so on. Planning and controlling such consecutive visual paths is one of the staples of the education of artists in art schools and universities. A walk through a single work becomes quite complex. The painting is always being viewed metaphorically on three levels: the whole, the sequence, and the interaction of these two. Although literature, especially poetry, does this to an extent too, it is not as foregrounded or inherently important to the basic construction of textual works as it is to visual works. The speed of the insistent interaction in a painting compels flickering attention, a dialectic, almost split-consciousness. Therefore, *Color Unit 24.1* must be viewed metaphorically as a spatial and temporal experience and as an entire entity, including its "internal" (e.g. arrangement, figure and ground) and "external" relationships (such as scale and the history of art).

Boetschi is making several analogous and complementary mappings in his paintings. The aspects of form he utilizes in his metaphor(m) are color and geometric composition,

³ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, pp.67-72.

through which he plays regularity against irregularity, typifying understanding and learning. His chief foundational metaphor is one common to our culture, if currently theoretically in dispute : "*UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*," ("*I saw the light!*"). Kin to this is the famous "*IDEAS ARE PERCEPTIONS*." Boetschi's personal creative extension is "*perceptions are surprising*." Furthermore, philosophically important to his art are the two foundational metaphors "*IMPERFECT IS IRREGULAR*" and "*PERFECT IS REGULAR*." His mapping proceeds as follows. "*Thinking is seeing*," metaleptically then, it is "*painting*." *Light* becomes *color*, (in Boetschi this is paint, but without obvious stroking, so more of an ocular than a physical presence). His choice of quirky color is the source mapped on the target "*IRREGULARITY*." Furthermore, this yields the target "*imperfect*," which in turn yields "*discovery*" or "*surprise*" by steps. In an inspired turn of elaboration and extension, the geometry of his compositions is matched to "*REGULARITY*," yet contrarily the arrangement of those forms is matched to "*IRREGULARITY*."

Geometric yet irregular composition and eccentric, allusive colors are manifested very particularly in *Color Unit 24.1*. The eight rectangular units have pleasing proportions, their length being twice the distance of their width. Any sense of stability this could contribute to the composition is undermined, however, by the fact that they are arranged both horizontally and vertically in a rather willful, non-serial fashion. A classic shape feels highly conditional. They do not line up in an obvious manner. This plays on our expectations rooted in the foundational metaphor "*COHERENT IS ALIGNED*" ("*I couldn't get the facts to line up*"). Boetschi is hinting at incoherence and clearly manifesting disparity. "*DISPARITY IS CHANGE*" is an important foundational metaphor ("*His books are getting shorter*"). By bringing these two together, his central trope is thus particularized to suggest that a change in what we perceive as coherent is necessary. Since seeing is a form of cognition and ideas are models, his insight invites broadening to perception and life in general.

Boetschi's rectangular units are contained within the overall square of the painting's form. This is an inversion of the expectation one has from the history of compositions based on the Golden Rectangle. The famous Minimalist Agnes Martin also often inscribes rectangular segments within square paintings. She has described the effect. "The little rectangle contradicts the square. And the square is authoritative."⁴ Although Martin uses

⁴ Joan Simon, "Perfection Is in the Mind: An Interview with Agnes Martin," *Art in America*, May 1996, p. 86.

much smaller rectangles, the point made by both artists is similar. Stability and authority are both presented and denied. *"THEORETICAL DEBATE IS COMPETITION,"* (*"They have rival theories"*) read in reverse, is united with *"STATES ARE SHAPES"* (*"He refuses to fit in"*), together questioning all our metaphors based on coherence, stability, and (thereby) authority.

The central figure in the work is a short-capped, long-based "J." It can be read as a tri-colored figure on a butterscotch ground. This, too, is highly provisional. The "J" seems to be formed of pixels which are much too large; it calls to mind the random doodles on graph paper of a distracted science student: filled-in squares forming faces, little stick figures, or initials. Additionally, it is too top-heavy and lopsided to the left. A viewer's eyes begin at the top, travel down the shaft and then turn rapidly to the left where they wish to zoom off the edge of the painting. Boetschi presents this so self-assuredly, however, that many a design fundamentals teacher would break his theoretical neck justifying this composition in standard Bauhaus-derived terms. However, the painting vigorously denies such a reading, which is an important aspect of Boetschi's metaphor(m). *"Importance is central"* and *"EMOTIONAL STABILITY IS BALANCE"* are blatantly negated. *Color Unit 24.I's* geometric structure displays a composite of elaborations and variations on foundational metaphors concerning regularity and irregularity. This composite is then utilized by the artist as a self-interrogating metaphor which causes us to mistrust our definitions of these concepts.

Redolent Color

As potent as this formal composition is in its own right, it acts to present color in an even more unique and overwhelming way. Boetschi frequently professes that color is the *raison d'être* of his work.⁵ That is, color itself — not color theory or color therapy, which many mistake for color as experience. There are hardly ever any primaries in this artist's work. In fact, there are seldom secondaries or tertiaries. The choice to work with only red, yellow and blue, familiar from so much hard-edge painting, is revealed to be a conceptual act negating color by relegating it to simple formulaic, arithmetical permutation. In contradistinction, Boetschi creates an intuitive calculus of color desire. The hues are so specific, yet so unnamable, that one feels drawn to refer to personal associations. Their suggestiveness is precarious, though, by being adamantly referentially indeterminate. Color refers directly to life outside the confines of formalism, yet retains its personal integrity by

⁵ Charles Boetschi, personal communication, St.Gallen, Switzerland, 2000-2006.

refusing to be a symbol. The "background" hue in *Color Unit 24.1*, that to the left and right, is an acrid butterscotch, equally attractive and repellant. The almost-white at the painting's top is exactly poised between white, grey and lilac. Or is it simply assuming these guises because of the surrounding tints? The yellow recalls Vermeer's pearlescent highlights on gold, yet it is colder, like the sun on a beautiful winter morning. The grayed lilac below seems paradoxically both tasteful and tasteless, were it a fashion or interior design choice. It is as friendly as the butterscotch is discordant. In another context, it could well be a cloying variation on ancient rose, yet here it seems to ring like a bell. Boetschi's color references while often metonymic are all additionally similes, more than metaphors, each foregrounding its own conditional *like* or *as*. These colors are decidedly not balanced, yet masterfully composed. The size of the work at 200 by 200 cm allows the viewer to swim in the colors, fully reveling in the stream of associative perceptions.

In color, Boetschi most clearly particularizes his central trope. "*UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*" is driven home with quiet force — color is not allowed to become a color name, seeing is not allowed to drop to mere verbalization, understanding is both a sensual and rational experience, not something one can memorize nor a mere pun. Imperfection becomes perfection. *REGULARITY* metaphors are not only played off against *IRREGULARITY* tropes, rather *IRREGULARITY* proves *REGULARITY* to be a misconception, overwhelming and replacing it sensually. Since "*OPPORTUNITIES ARE OPEN PATHS*" ("*Her new job offers her better paths of development*") and "*IDEAS ARE LOCATIONS*" ("*He's always jumping to conclusions*"), Boetschi's painting offers a new, more open possibility for envisioning and finding better perceptions.

Color Unit 24.1 is an instance of what Daniel Ammann has termed "the allusive game." He discusses this in the novels of English writer David Lodge.

...I have concentrated on selected examples of intertextuality as they occur in their immediate contexts. Separated from the whole, they can only be hints for what might be salient aspects in an overall interpretation.

Now I turn to intertextuality on a wider scale. Just as lexical repetition, collocating vocabulary or alliterative and assonantal patterns often yield persistent clusters of theme and imagery in an intratextual, stylistic approach to the text, so intertextual references may be integrated into a meaningful reading when they permeate the language of a novel.⁶

⁶ Daniel Ammann, *David Lodge and the Art-and-Reality Novel*, Anglistische Forschungen, no. 216 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1991), p. 86.

In *Color Unit 24.1* one sees the potential for such highly complex, "wider scale," creative, yet refined metaphoric structure in painting. Boetschi's metaphor(m) is multi-layered, allusive, *interpictorial* (to mimic the word *intertextual*), and permeates every element of the painting — most of all color and geometric composition. Let us graph his central trope in a blending diagram.

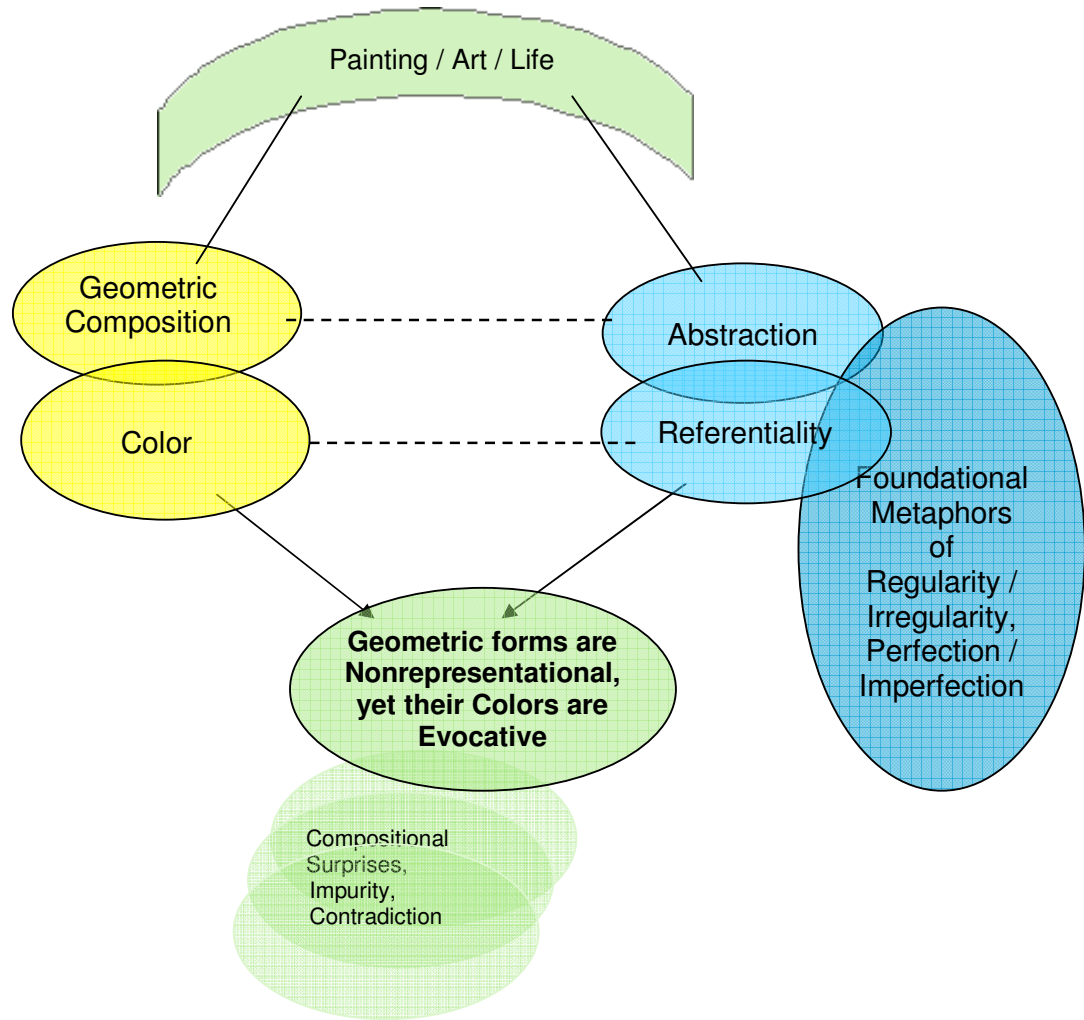


fig. 52

The Diagram of Charles Boetschi's Metaphor(m)

His personal central message is that unbalanced surprises in color and composition show the contradictory truth of experience. Boetschi maps geometric composition on abstraction (and its associations of regularity, nonrepresentationalism, even coldness) and simultaneously oppositionally blends the colors of the geometric forms with referentiality and evocativeness. Thus his metaphor can be stated in several fashions including: "*Geometric forms are nonrepresentational, yet their colors are referential.*" His central equation is:

"Composition and color are visually irregular," thus yielding "surprising perception," which imparts "new ideas," which supply "understanding." The postmodern complexity in this metaphor(m) is the fact that his image-mapping relies on our expectations from the history of the forms with which he works. Significantly, this painting is both idiosyncratic and global in implication.

Leonard Bullock: "Venetian" Heterogeneity and Eidophor

If semantics meets its limits here, a
phenomenology of imagination ... could perhaps
 take over from psycholinguistics and extend its
 functioning to realms where the verbal is vassal to
 the non-verbal.
 — Paul Ricoeur⁷

Let us now proceed to another contemporary painter, Leonard Bullock. The blending in his central trope is much simpler than that of Charles Boetschi, yet nonetheless quite rich in its affects. Bullock's opulent and engaging paintings present subtle developments in postmodern art which entice an historical analogy as well as two newly minted concepts. It could be said that Bullock is a "Venetian" among contemporary painters, because his art offers an alternative to current trends, intellectually being highly of the moment but far more visceral. As has been much described, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese and other Venetian artists created sensuous, painterly works emphasizing color, and light and space, thus supplying a clear alternative to the dominant rationality of much of the art of their day, particularly that of Rome. Bullock's work occupies a similar position within in the (post-) postmodernism of our day.

Heterogeneity

Heterogeneity is a noun describing the situation of being composed of vastly varied, dissimilar elements. Indeed, swirling structures of incongruous elements form the emotional

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 214. Ricoeur's italics.

and compositional heart of Bullock's approach. The parts themselves, however visually disparate they might be, nevertheless are fundamentally conceptually related. Each is an "eidophor."⁸ This neologism comes directly from the artist, self-coined to identify his creation of visual tropes through nodules of painterly activity, each of which contains a compressed collection of references and allusions. The painter is sensually and cerebrally thinking with paint — thinking *through* painting, in particular the stroke. Bullock's paintings embody Venetian heterogeneity and eidophor.



fig. 53
Leonard Bullock,
To/For Whom It May Concern,
oil, encaustic, and mixed media on polystyrol,
2000-2008,
97 x 139 cm / 38 in x 55 in

The painter's work is sensual, yet not expressionist, erudite yet anti-academic. However, what do these terms and conventions mean nowadays anyway? "Expressive" has come to mean a reiterated compendium of style tics conventionally signaling emotiveness; the academic is at present embodied in spectacles custom-designed to fit certain curatorial conceits. Bullock's paintings come alive through the viscidities of making — what James Elkins describes in his book *What Painting Is* as " 'pushing paint,' breathing fumes, dripping

⁸ Leonard Bullock, personal communication, Basel, Switzerland, 2007.

oils and wiping brushes, smearing and diluting and mixing."⁹ Or, important to understanding this work is the question another historian, Yves-Alain Bois (paraphrasing Hubert Damisch), has so pointedly asked, "What is thinking *in* painting, as opposed to thinking *about* painting?"¹⁰ As too much Postmodernist art has illustrated, art which refuses its various pasts and ignores the present represented in its making seems mired, as if it cannot reach to the future. It becomes a pale ghost of what it represses, cultural memory, quickened artificially by fad, that evil twin of what it suppresses, immediate experience — that is, art-out-of-time is condemned to be academic and mannered. In opposition to this, Bullock's work lives in an expanded and positive sense of time, which is his Bloomian agon. Bullock struggles with current conceptions by reaching back to a now commonly deprecated sensuality, one which, furthermore, he displays in allusions ranging from de Kooning through Manet back to Titian. The Postmodernist twist lies in his dissonant merger of these citations and suggestions with direct, indexical markmaking. He thus proves his art to be both more historically aware and yet more candidly personal than his contemporaries' works. It becomes metaleptically earlier in several fashions: through the paradoxical transgression of levels of depiction, by becoming a record of a series of "nows," and by troping on his forerunner's trope of the brushstroke.

The Venetians

Catachresis must help where established usage fails.

— Karsten Harries¹¹

These comments are an oblique way to begin a reflection Bullock's recent body of work. However, I believe they are necessary in order to situate Bullock's particular metaphor(m), as his painting embodies a dialogue between immediate surface and history. Bullock's conception of visual art is not only cognizant of history and past experience, thus broad, but also deeply rooted in the actuality of now, thus thick. This can easily be appreciated in any conversation with him, which will inevitably range over history, potential futures, current affairs and more, while delving into detail as required. Bullock's painting is akin to his conversation.

⁹ James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Oil Painting Using the Language of Alchemy* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 2-3.

¹⁰ Yves-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990); quoted in Elkins, *What Painting Is*, p.3.

¹¹ Karsten Harries, "Metaphor and Transcendence," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 85.



fig. 54
 Leonard Bullock,
Ride!,
 oil, encaustic, Letraset and venetian turpentine on polystyrol,
 2000-2007,
 97 x 139 cm / 38 in x 55 in

Bullock can perhaps be placed among the group of so-called "Conceptual Abstract Painters." This term has been applied to that group of artists who use organic forms in an intellectual, post-endgame creative endeavour. Such artists produce paintings which hover between abstraction and representation; manipulate both "high" culture and popular imagery; acknowledge art's past, yet reject reductivism; stem from certain conceptual thought processes, but are clearly handmade. Practitioners include artists Jonathan Lasker, David Reed, and Pia Frees. This term is clumsy and inadequate, but serves to connect Bullock to a larger movement.

In title of my subsection, by no means do I wish to suggest that Bullock is "quoting the Venetian," even in the rich, complimentary sense Mieke Bal deploys a similar insight in her wonderful book *Quoting Caravaggio*. I *do* wish to flirt with a Balian sense of entanglement as

a form of art analysis.¹² To understand Bullock's work one must grasp each painting not as a single condensed and reduced moment, but as a map of combinations of ribbon-like strokes built of allusions, memories, ruminations and struggles.

The Venetians' great contribution was the integration of line and color in the painterly stroke, thus fusing *disegno* and *colore*. These two characteristics of art had previously been viewed as incompatible opposites. Theirs was creativity with vast repercussions: a transumptive rapport of (assumed) antipodes, achieved through hard-won struggle. Thereby, as noted by Umberto Fortis:

The classicism of the Veneto did not find its fundamental expressive force in the use of line to create its images, but in the development of tonal painting, creating noble forms of a solemn plasticity to attain, with Titian, an ideal of ample, monumental beauty, yet anchored firmly in earthly reality.¹³

Bullock is pursuing a similar integration on a postmodern level. Analyzing how this is achieved through his metaphor(m) is what makes his work interesting for this dissertation

Heterogeneity

Ricoeur has developed a theoretical style that can best be described as "tensive." He weaves together heterogeneous concepts and discourses to form a composite discourse in which new meanings are created without diminishing the specificity and difference of the constitutive terms. ... Besides the metaphysical complexity and heterogeneity of the human situation, one of Ricoeur's deepest concerns is the tentative, even fragile status of the coherence of a life.

— Kim Atkins¹⁴

Bullock's most dynamic conception is his use of "heterogeneity," a word he uses frequently. Let us approach this key element of the painting in a roundabout manner. Postmodernism has been highly theoretical in an extremely ideological fashion, as I described

¹² Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹³ Umberto Fortis, *The Uffizi: A Guide to the Gallery* (Venice: Edizione Storti, 1980), p. 85.

¹⁴ Kim Atkins, "Paul Ricoeur (1913—2005)," website *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, direct page link: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ricoeur/>, last updated 7 July, 2005, accessed 16 August 2010.

in the Prelude. Ideology deprives any phenomenon of its heterogeneity. It generally presumes only something very schematic.

This word *heterogeneity* has its own past. It is often closely associated with the 19th century evolution-theorist Herbert Spencer. He thought both nature and society were in a continuous "change from a state of relatively indefinite, incoherent, homogeneity to a state of relatively definite, coherent, heterogeneity."¹⁵ Spencer believed that there was a cultural process wherein time would metamorphose something strictly utilitarian into something beautiful. Bullock seems to be taking Spencer at his word, even borrowing his word. In actuality, Bullock seized the word "heterogeneity" on his own, with no thought of Spencer, and made of it a tool to assault the very division Spencer wishes to reify. While not dealing with the "abject" as such, except in combination with its contrary "beauty," Bullock's notion of "heterogeneity" has more in common with Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection than Spencer's definition of heterogeneity. In Bullock's idea we witness a dream of transgression through manifold variety. Bullock's conception is closely allied with the word *heterodox*: to depart from or oppose standard doctrines, even leaning toward heresy.

Other contemporary artists are at work on this problem as well. Gerhard Richter's painting manifests a perplexing heterogeneity, yet in style-leap to style-leap from series to series, much like a doubting Picasso. Within each body of work, an identifiable, even marketable, style still prevails. Bullock attempts to push this approach to within the boundaries of each stroke itself. This is analogous to the developmental process of James Joyce through his *œuvre*. This author pushed his portmanteau creativity from within the confines of the book to within succeeding chapters to within each sentence and finally to within each and every word.

While telescoping formal elements, Bullock is also pressing them outward in the range of their allusiveness. Bullock's thought is rather more Emersonian and Whitmanesque than Joycean: it reflects the heterogeneity of the American populations as well as the vast distances between its coasts and borders, reflects the rich diversity and clash of cultures and imaginations that conjoin to form this mongrel civilization (a *mélange* which politicians

¹⁵ Lewis A. Coser, "Herbert Spencer 1820–1903," in *Masters of Sociological Thought : Ideas in Historical and Social Context* (New York: Harcourt, 1977); quoted on website *Dead Sociologists' Index*, <<http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/dss/>>, direct page link: <<http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/dss/Spencer/SPENWRK.HTML>>, last accessed 16 August, 2010.

frequently attempt to disguise with jingoism). The poet Walt Whitman wrote at the close of *Leaves of Grass*, "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself; / I am large I contain multitudes."¹⁶

Bullock manifests heterogeneity in his materials, handling, compositions and supports — yet most of all the bands of elements traveling through each painting which are a strange hybrid of accumulation and stroke. At first glance, one of his pieces might even appear to be a wild grab bag of painterly events, of visual information — however, quite frequently all details are subsumed within a shallow atmospheric space. In many recent works this space is predominantly white, like a luminous deep sky, too bright to allow quick impressions of color. The artist achieves this effect through numerous layers of overpainting, with oil glazes, alkyd transparencies, encaustic scumblings and nebulous clouds of spray. Within this mist float approximately 4 or 5 major visual incidents, creating a partially veiled optical net. Nevertheless, surprises pop forth now and again, such as hard-edged forms, vivid colors, or even completely naturalistic images such as, in one case, an almost photographically rendered grey skull, or a child and a tree in *The Donor/der Spender*.



fig. 55
Leonard Bullock,
The Donor/ der Spender,
oil, encaustic, pencil, serigraph ink and
spray paint on synthetic vellum,
2006,
122 x 102 cm / 48 in x 40 in

¹⁶ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), lines 1314-1316, p. 85.

The longer one contemplates a Bullock painting, the more complicated and richer it becomes. The hazy atmosphere slowly reveals an unanticipated large variety of hues. Forms appear ever crisper. The works are tonal *and* coloristic, enveloping subtly graphic masses of shapes. Whereas Bullock avoids the iconic and paints highly *malerisch*, his work is not about simple indeterminacy. Of central importance are his ribbons and nodules of form, which take the place of more traditional, large paint-strokes. These grow into variformed paths, leading one's eyes across the surface in a range of journeys. In this, he offers a new answer to the important question of where a rectangular image can go after Pollock's "over-all" compositions, that is, where it can go without resorting to a retreat to jejune relational balance, and without avoiding the conflict through appropriation or other quasi-Dadaistic evasion. Bullock has discovered a new, personal and tropaically rich compositional form by creating a paradoxical co-habitation of mutually exclusive elements. Think: nonrepresentational Rauschenberg with far deeper space.



fig. 56
Leonard Bullock,
Seinpost,
Oil, encaustic, spray and venetian turpentine on linen,
2001-2002,
63 x 58 cm / 25 in x 23 in

Bullock's heterogeneity appears as well in his wide range and mixture of painting mediums and supports. In the work *Seinpost*, what at first appears to be luminous oil on some strange support turns out to be oil, encaustic, Venetian turpentine, enamel spray, acrylic spray, neon paint, and alkyd on linen. Recently Bullock's unusual support-surface materials have included red silk, milky polystyrol and translucent, buttery fiberglass. He is even able to make ordinary linen seem unexpected. This is reminiscent of the German painter Sigmar Polke, who created pieces on various common fabrics — sheets, towels, or the like. This is a light-hearted play with the self-importance of the support in "fine art canvases." Polke's supports are metonymically derived from canvas — both are after all only different types of good cloth. Bullock makes metaphors out of purely factual effects of odd or "new" materials, referring playfully and synecdochically to elements of traditional, painterly space creation. He achieves a unity of real and illusory space worthy of Manet — yet with postmodern humor. The creamy, translucent polystyrol paintings are the best to describe. These paintings sport shallow Modernist space next to sections of built-up Late Modernist space — Pollock inspired strata of layered paint. The back of the polystyrol is also painted on, emphasizing the real spatial difference between front and back due to the thickness of the material. This simultaneously suggests a vast, atmospheric, virtual depth because of the fogginess of the translucent plastic. Bullock thereby also integrates the wall behind the work, allowing it to show through in spots, revealing cast shadows from the brushwork. Qualities of light, handling and material form a blend of real and illusionary spaces, at once deeply atmospheric and assertively flat.

Eidophor

A girl, the princess Eido, named for her beauty,
 Her mother's darling - as long as she was a child.
 When she was grown up - sexually mature -
 They changed her name to Theonoe:
 Theonoe, "the mind of god", because she turned out
 The theological one. She knows all the gods' plans
 Past, present and yet to come.
 — Euripides¹⁷

¹⁷ Euripides, *Helen*, trans. Andrew Wilson, on website *The Classics Pages*,
 <<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/>>, direct page link:
 <<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/helen.htm>>, accessed 16 August, 2010.

What, then, ties his work together? The answer is situated in one simple yet effective discovery, which Bullock christens with his self-invented appellation, the *eidophor* and in this lies his metaphor(m).

Bullock manifests this idea most clearly in the quirky, complex nodules of activity which are scattered over each work. These passages are "accretions of eidetic memory" (to use the artists own words), coupled with cathechrestic portmanteaus of visual observations.¹⁸ They form areas of concentration which just might be a possible replacement for the "missing" human figure Frank Stella so perspicaciously has wished for in abstraction.¹⁹ Some painters use bold, condensed iconic motifs for this purpose. Bullock achieves this similarly but more messily, particularly in the layering and merger of levels of space and in the melting of elements of markmaking into capricious trails which seemingly signify adventures. While the notion of *eidophor* may be applied to the entire surface of one of Bullock's paintings, I find it most pivotally present in these passages uniting the haphazard with the emblematic in this expanded conception of the brushstroke. Therefore, I willfully misemploy and delimit the term *eidophor* to refer solely to these elements. Whereas painters such as Willem de Kooning or the French Tachists created compositional movement through swooping single strokes of paint, Bullock builds strings of compilations of effects, effectively assembling an expanded substitute for the single virtuosic stroke. These tropaically become paths of disparate experiences, which is significant for his central trope.

In the 2002 painting *Seinpost*, we can see three primary *eidophoric* configurations. Top center is a collision of a mottled, red-outlined conduit form with a compact, flame-like green-blue splotch. Traveling obliquely across the lower right quadrant of the work is an intricate, linear conglomerate. From lower left to upper right, this diagonal consists of: a scumbled and glazed neon-orange smudge, reminiscent of Rembrandt; a sumptuous magenta see-through curlicue; a dried-blood-colored version of the same, ambling up next to a partially removed marine blue S-swirl; finally capped with a Velazquez-like loaded brushstroke, which agglomerates all the preceding forms and colors in itself. A translucent cyan blue brushstroke from the first *eidophor* leads the eye to the third, in the lower left. This is a glowing area of

¹⁸ Leonard Bullock, personal communication, Basel, Switzerland, 2009.

¹⁹ "Yet abstraction has dared to try to get along without the human figure. Today it struggles, at least partly, because it has failed to come up with a viable substitute for human figuration, for the spatial vitality and versatility provided by the human figure. It was not so much the loss of the human figure itself as it was the loss of what the figure did to the space around itself that has been so hard to replace." In Frank Stella, *Working Space* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 74.

powder blue on which a small, almost upright, Day-Glo orange stroke issues a halo of deep violet and tumbles over what appears to be a piece of applied manila masking tape. Appearances can be deceiving. This "tape" is a carefully applied, raised area of oil paint— a bas-relief trompe-l'œil. These three eidophors float in the surrounding creamy white field, which is itself marked by comb-scrapped ridges revealing a wide variety of underpainted hues. The configurations collapse connotations of figures with evocations of their movements and momentary events affecting them. One is encouraged to read associations into the shapes, not like a Rorschach blot, but rather as if they were representational, while they are clearly wholly abstract. Most of all, they appear to encourage quasi-sequential readings, each area narratively following the other, forming bands of traversed ground. They seem sensuous, physical, voluptuous, yet somehow amusing. The artist uses witty visual foils to remind us of this. In another painting, a "racing stripe" similar to that on an automobile is scratched through an expressive, Manet-like brushstroke, making it even faster. "Shoddy chic" is parodied in such illusions as that of the applied "tape." There are small, almost invisible lines of wavering text in that now disappearing technology of pressed-on lettering called Lettraset or Presstype, so common to designers of the past generation. These phrases proclaim philosophical and personal invectives: text as textural draughtsmanship. Bullock can combine visceral sensibility with a self-irony that is not cynical. They form sentences, or at least phrases, reminding the viewer of the metaphor of streets inherent in the shape of sentences, yet generally overlooked.

While contemplating Bullock's coinage, I discovered that the term *eidophor* had been used once before, unbeknownst to the painter. A patent was applied for in 1939 by Fritz Fischer for a light-modulation-based TV image projector. For his machine, Fischer also coined the name *Eidophor*, "from two Greek words meaning Image Bearer." Although this device was better than those available today, it has disappeared from production.²⁰ From where, in fact, does Bullock's rather more philosophical invention of the term derive? For the painter, it is a cross between *metaphor* and *eido*. The term *metaphor* can be seen as a union of *meta-* (meaning "over, trans-, beyond," — or through analogy in nonce coinage meaning "transcending or sub/self-referential," such as *metacriticism*), with *-phor* from *pherein*, meaning "to carry or bear." Thus metaphor is an implied analogy in which one thing is

²⁰ Peter Yanczer, "The Eidophor Television System: Fritz Fischer," page on website *Early Television Museum*, direct page link: <http://www.earlytelevision.org/yanczer_eidophor.html>, accessed 16 August, 2010.

imaginatively compared to another, where qualities are "carried over." Much as I am in this dissertation, Bullock is concerned with metaphor in its expanded sense, as trope in general, rather than in its more limited sense of comparing two widely separate nouns.

His second root word is the Greek *εἶδος* which in its Latin form becomes *eidos*. This term means form, figure, or shape, that is, the external or outward appearance of something. It becomes incredibly rich in extended application and usage. In the King James version of the Bible, it is translated into English by several words, including *appearance*, *fashion*, *shape*, and *sight*. One of the most famous instances of its use is in Luke 3:22. "And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape (*eidos*) like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." This instance bears a complex of meanings: "in the form of," "the appearance of," "in one's sight as," or "in the fashion of" a dove. The verb, as well as combinatory, form of this word is *eido*, which is a treasure house of wonderful combinations of the ideas "to see," "to understand" and "to know." Again, in the Bible it is translated by a variety of terms including "to see," "to discern," "to turn the attention to something," "to get knowledge of," "to cherish" — and my favorite, "to behold." Jesus frequently uses this in commands to listeners, demanding that they go and see and thereby understand and know the truth. Much of Bullock's painting has a visual equivalent to the proclamation "behold!" — "Behold and follow the divergent paths I have taken." The most famous use of the word *eidos* which does *not* apply to Bullock's work is that in Plato. For this philosopher, material forms are imperfect realizations of ideal forms, which are the true realities. Bullock's thought is completely opposite. In order to distance Bullock's use of *eidos* from Plato's, I would like to describe it differently and precisely. My pseudo-dictionary-like definition reads:

ei · do · phor (ī ' dō fôr', ī ' dō fôr') *n.* [ModL.:<Gr. *eidos*, what is seen, shape + *pherein*, to carry, bear] the carrying over of visual understanding. A trope of image-making, containing a compressed and sliding series of visual references and comparisons.

Bullock's coinage bears a rich range of references, making it ideal mirror of the aggregate path-like clusters of perception dominating his paintings.

Heterogeneous Eidophors

According to Søren Kierkegaard we are all a little heterogeneous but there can be an absolute heterogeneity, which is, however, either demonic or divine. He himself is somewhere in between, that is to say, more than a little heterogeneous.

— Alastair Hannay²¹

Heterogeneous swirls of eidophors. This an equivalent on the theoretical level of the spiral composition of the Baroque, whose discovery allowed artists to dynamically organize their works, while disavowing the static, enclosed geometry of the Renaissance. Expansion, multiplicity and flux became central. More appropriate to Bullock's work would be mention of the faceted, vector-oriented compositions of Titian, which served as an alternative Renaissance compositional structure. In his *Votive Picture of the Pesaro Family* in the Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, Titian created a work that is site-specific; one which anticipates the direction of approach by viewers as well as their final standpoint for observation, while integrating and defying the surrounding architecture. Installation and painting merged in the 1520s. Its lively, asymmetrical composition utilizes competing diagonals and complex color contrasts across a tilted oval arrangement of human figures and columns, in short, proto-heterogeneity (and proto-painting-installation to link it to my own work).

²¹ Alastair Hannay, "Something on Hermeneutics and Communication in Kierkegaard After All," *Spreti Kierkegaard Newsletter: A Publication of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library*, St Olaf College Northfield, Minnesota, No. 42 (September 2001), p. 10. Originally delivered as the Opening Address at the Fourth International Kierkegaard Conference, June 9, 2001.



fig. 57
 Titian,
Votive Picture of the Pesaro Family,
 oil on canvas,
 1519-1526
 488 x 269 cm / 192 in x 106 in

This could serve as an astute parallel to our period. Sundry artists, especially painters, are pressing in this direction. Jonathan Lasker proves art's histories to be plural, Mary Heilmann is unabashedly physical and anecdotal. David Reed is able to locate mass-media references embedded in paint. Painters seem to be in the process of inventing artistic techniques charged with meaning that could lead to a much needed (anti-?, post-?) Postmodernism which incorporates the discoveries of this period into a healthier whole, yet is not a Neo- or Alter-Modernism.

In many ways Bullock is a fellow-traveller of Reed's, but painterly. The manner in which recent Polke paintings stand toward Richter is an analogy of Bullock's position vis-à-vis other Conceptual Painting. Granted, Bullock is more Action Painter than Pop influenced, but his work has a popular cultural feel, only more solidly rooted, like Jazz. And the precursor figurehead to both battle and embrace at this moment in visual culture for many artists is a triumvirate of Action Painting, Dada and Pop — with perhaps a sidelong squint at Minimalism. Bullock is openly working through his own personal agon with past art practices, yet he is not simply worshipping art's histories. He is involved in a dialogue with his time, but is also in a debate with the past and is attempting to persuade the future. Bullock has often repeated a favorite de Kooning quotation, "Style is fraud."²² In Bullock's art, style is expansive, exclusivity is fraud.



fig. 58
David Reed,
#513,
oil and alkyd on linen,
2002-2004,
91 x 397 cm / 36 in x 156 ¼ in

²² "Style is a fraud. I always felt the Greeks were hiding behind their columns." Willem de Kooning, "A Desperate View," *Collected Writings*, ed. George Scrivani (New York: Hanuman, 1988). Cited in Dictionary.com. *Columbia World of Quotations*. Columbia University Press, 1996. <http://quotes.dictionary.com/Style_is_a_fraud_I_always_felt_the>, accessed: 16 August, 2010.

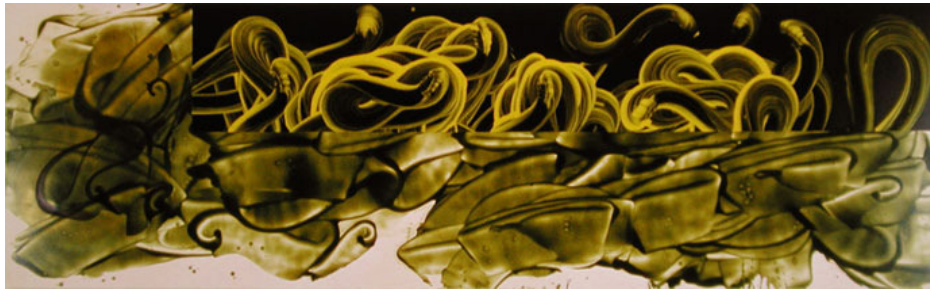


fig. 59
David Reed,
#442,
oil and alkyd on linen,
1998-1999,
112 x 366 cm / 44 in x 144 in

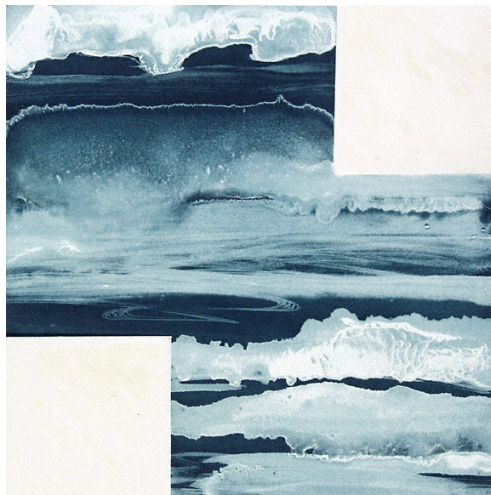


fig. 60
Mary Heilmann,
Kelly's Cove,
copperplate etching,
2002,
Image Size: 30 x 30.5 cm / 11 7/8 in x 12 in
Paper Size: 76 x 56 cm / 30 x 22 inches



fig. 61
Jonathan Lasker,
Ascension,
oil on canvas,
1983,
147.3 x 183 cm / 58 in x 72 in

Cognitive Metaphor

The aspect of form Bullock utilizes in his metaphor(m) is the brushstroke. Therein he returns us to the discussion of Vincent van Gogh presented earlier in this dissertation, yet Bullock's interpretation of this element is unlike van Gogh's. Bullock breaks the unity of the stroke into an assemblage of parts and blends that with the likeness of an ever-changing path in an iconic image-mapping. This allows him access to his chief foundational metaphor, one of the most common in our culture, "*LIFE IS A JOURNEY*." This is sometimes seen as a correlate of "*LONGTERM PURPOSEFUL CHANGE IS A JOURNEY*," which is particularly close to Bullock's notion, as he emphasizes the transformations from one subsection to the next within each painterly trail. Furthermore, a subordinate instance of this trope is important in Bullock's reasoning: "*Stages of life are routes you have to travel on.*" A related metaphor is "*PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES ARE JOURNEYS*." The "purposeful activity" clearly being art-making, as the practice of painting is conflated with the endeavor of leading his life for Bullock, as well as for most artists, as I have discussed above. Important to the construction of his bands of painterly activity is the trope "*CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF DIRECTION*," for, as I have described, Bullock's eidophor-routes consist of sequences of course modifications, some of which can be quite jarring. These clearly serve as metaphors for the shifting circumstances and predicaments of life. The alterations can be seen as progress, perhaps growth in self-knowledge (because "*DISPARITY IS CHANGE*," "*CHANGE IS MOTION*" and "*THE PROGRESS OF EXTERNAL EVENTS IS FORWARD MOTION*").

His mapping proceeds as follows. "*Life is painting*," and "*painting is the brushstroke*," both synecdoches. Each brushstroke itself becomes a compendium of personal variations and historically associative ones, thus a metalepsis. This is mapped onto the image-schema of the path, yet a variegated one with many stops and alterations, false-starts, restarts, changes of surface, and so on. This is a seemingly slight yet highly original variation on the image of the "*road of life*" achieved by both the elaboration and extension of the cultural mainstay, "*LIFE IS A JOURNEY*." This yields Bullock's metaphor(m): "*The brushstroke is a variegated path.*"

The blending diagram of Bullock's metaphor(m) can thus be drawn as follows:

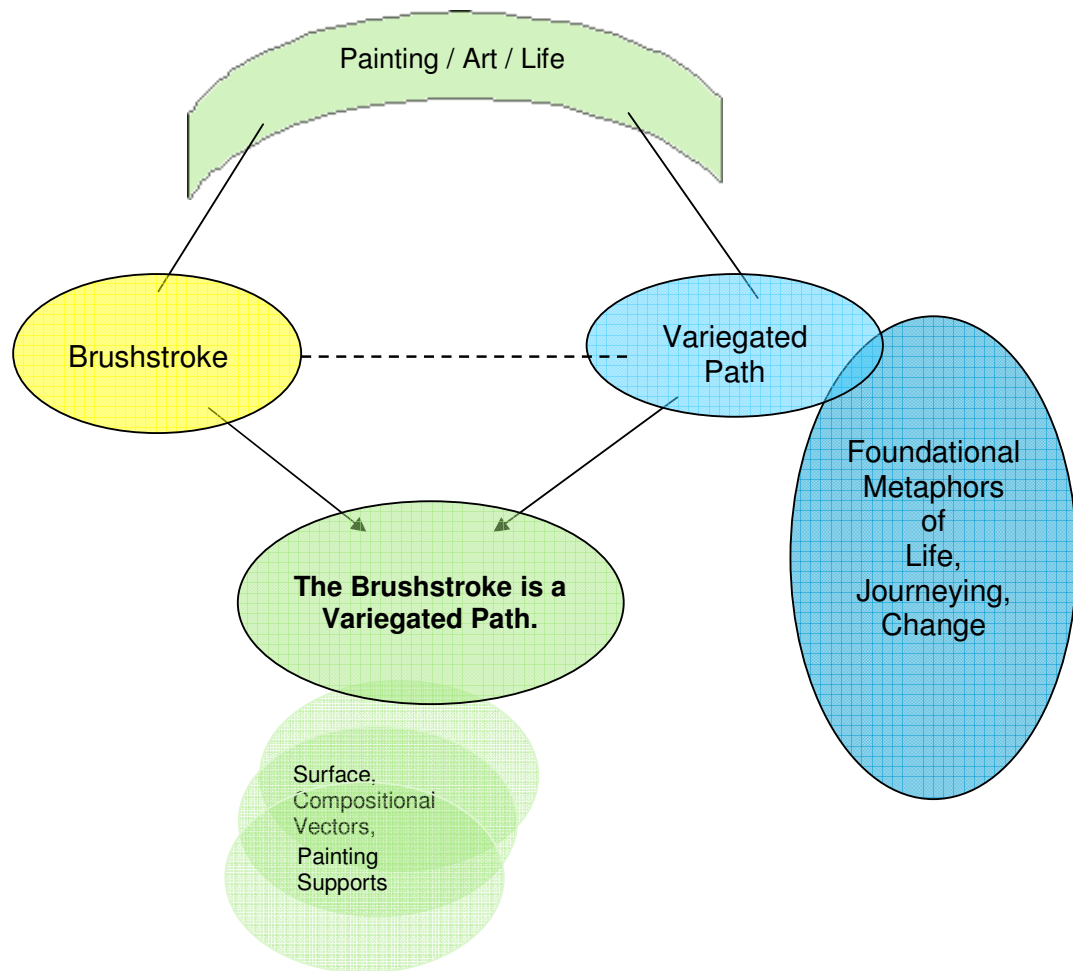


fig. 62
The Diagram of Leonard Bullock's Metaphor(m)

Bullock's works concretize this central trope into a collection of painterly expressions of quandaries with which the theory of metaphor(m) is concerned: How do we know and express anything within a physical artistic form? How do we impel brute reality to manifest our conceptual desires? Antithetically merged with these is the further question: How does interaction with material form allow us to *discover* our visions — and can we, through art, know at all? He addresses how our lives are informed by the historic past (his haptic allusions to art history), our own pasts (the changes in the strokes), how we have tranquil, stirring and

more thorny experiences (the various subsections and surface treatments) — and how a large number of such collections of experience begin to map our life as a whole.



fig. 63
Leonard Bullock,
Eidophor (Dispute with Imitators),
oil, encaustic, spray and mixed media on polystyrol,
200-2003,
118 x 97 cm / 46.5 in x 38 in

CHAPTER SIX: THE SEQUENCE

While I was working intently on this chapter on Elba, Craig Humber, our support person from the foundation, began playing Bach beautifully on the piano in the living room, or parlor.

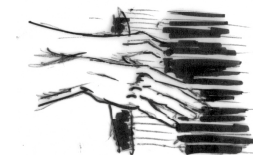
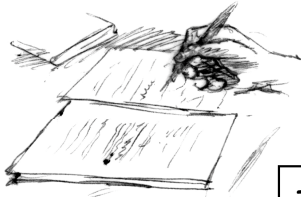


(Even though he is an avowed and dedicated organist.)

The other guests, as I have mentioned, were also working away on their projects.



It was great to be enclosed, so to speak, with them during the bulk of this chapter – seeing us all work, and having intense discussions about art, literature and music –



– as I was concentrating on the work of two artists other than myself.

Two contemporary painters.

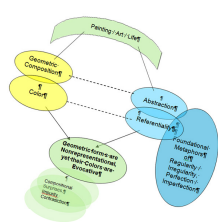
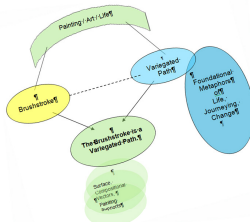


Charles Boetschi and Leonard Bullock

Although very different from one another, and both from my own art, I appreciate their paintings and they served as two provocative antipodes of an imaginary aesthetic spectrum upon which to test my theory.



I felt challenged, but thoroughly enjoyed concentrating so intensely upon them and finding their metaphor(m)s and diagrams of central trope.



After one particularly long day of struggling with the combinations of tropes in their works, I went down to the bay and stuck my hot feet in the ocean.



Now in Switzerland, finishing the chapter, the weather and my feet are cold.