Visual Metaphors

Bonnie Gordon Pfahl

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VISUAL METAPHORS
by
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis will be to inquire into the nature of symbolic imagery and to produce three dimensional symbolic figures incorporating etchings and etched plates. I will test my images with several theories of symbolic or imaginative thought and I will test these theories with examples from my supply of symbolic images.

Visual metaphor and visual humor are the most constant features in my work. I invent and discover symbolic jokes and comparisons with the help of my growing supply of found images. Until a few months ago all of my imagery was presented two dimensionally. I would collect photographs or factual drawings of parts of the human figure, faces, facial expressions, articles of clothing, and commonplace objects which I would combine freely to form hybrid or composite figures. When one of these combinations would trigger an idea which interested me I would work it out as a line drawing or etching.

Recently I began to supplement my collection of found images with found objects and casts of objects, faces or parts of the human figure. I combined these to form metaphors and jokes similar to those which I had developed earlier in two dimensions. The most inventive aspect of these figures, as with my drawings and etchings, is the unexpected fitness of the objects I choose to combine.
For my thesis project I set myself the problem of transforming three of my linear etchings into three dimensional figures incorporating intaglio prints and etched plates.

The techniques I've combined in these figures fall into three categories. First, whenever I needed a two dimensional image I used an intaglio print or etched copper plate. Second, I often stretched or folded thin copper plates or printed felt to form three dimensional shapes. Third, I used found objects or plaster gauze casts of hands, faces, and objects. To strengthen inner structures I used wood, wire screening and fiberglass cloth. To create a tough outer shell over fragile casts and objects I used polyester resin.

Although I became involved in a lot of changes and adjustments in the course of building each figure I could see in retrospect that there had been or could have been a very clear sequence of procedures. I will describe the series of techniques employed in constructing each of my three dimensional figures as if I were giving instructions on how to build a replica.

The physical techniques I use to print or construct my images are easy to describe. The psychological techniques I use to invent, select, and combine my images are more elusive. Nevertheless I would like to try to explain them. In order to do this I will seek out information about the mental processes which generate the kind of images which interest me
and the general themes and points of view which these images suggest. The authors I will lean on most heavily will be Ernst Cassirer, E.H. Gombrich, Irwin Panofsky, Rudolf Arnheim, and Roger Schattuck. As these names suggest, I am interested in the foggy boundary areas where the imagery of visual art merges into and emerges out of the imagery of literature, and supernaturalism.
CHAPTER I

METAPHORICAL SYMBOLISM

The word symbol can be defined in more than one way. One of these definitions stretches to include meanings which are alien or antagonistic to my images while the other contracts to admit only those meanings which are compatible with them.

"The clash over (the meaning of the word symbol)... is partly due to a divergence of philosophical traditions in Western thought. The extension of the word symbol to cover any kind of sign can be traced in the Anglo-Saxon tradition from Hobbes to Pierce and has lead to such coinages as symbolic logic. Against this expansionist tendency, the German Romantics and their French successors stressed the religious connotations of the term and wanted it restricted to those special kinds of signs which stand for something ineffable and untranslatable."¹

The signs which would exclude my images are described by Dewey as having "a purely external reference. They have meaning in the sense in which an algebraic formula or a cipher has it."² The restricted symbol which would include my images "functions within a complex network of matrices and potential choices which can perhaps be explained up to a

²John Dewey, Art as Experience (Capricorn Books, 1934) p.83
Gombrich describes these matrices by comparing them to a guessing game based on comparisons or metaphors:

"The task would be to guess the identity of a person or thing through a series of appropriate comparisons or emblems. The guesser would ask the group in the know such questions as "If he were a flower what would he be? Or what would be his emblem as an animal?... Clearly if he started to ask what kind of flower might be the appropriate attribute and were told that it might be a thistle a whole range of people who are either jovial or shrinking should be ruled out from the start. Should he then be told that among animals his symbol might be a bear, his prickliness would take on a more specific character.

You might indeed compare each of these answers to the indices of letters and numbers on the sides of a very irregular map which combine to plot a position. The psychological category of bear-like creatures sweeps along a wide zone of the metaphorical field and so does the category of thistley creatures, but the two categories are sufficiently distinct to determine an area that can be further restricted by other plottings."\(^3\)

Gombrich goes on to show how Freud's well known interpretations of dream symbols like the aggressive male symbolism of an image of a knife, tree trunk, or umbrella and the receptive female symbolism of a cave, cupboard or oven present themselves as examples of this game of multiple matrix matching and help to chart the area of the mind where the symbol and the metaphor overlap one another.

"There is no difficulty in subsuming Freud's

\(^3\)Gombrich, 1969  p. 152
concepts of symbolism under the ancient idea of metaphor. If you accept my formulation that the symbol represents the choice from a given set of matrices of what is least unlike the referent to be represented, that variety of objects that can stand for sexual organs need cause us no surprise."  

The relationship of the symbol or metaphor to its object, then, is based on partial or accidental resemblances. Arnheim includes a quote from Braque in his discussion of this kind of symbolic connection.

"Georges Braque advises the artist to seek the common in the dissimilar. 'Thus the poet can say the swallow knifes the sky and thereby makes a knife out of a swallow'. It is the function of metaphor to make the reader penetrate the concrete shell of the world of things by combinations of objects that have little in common but the underlying pattern. Such a device, however, would not work unless the reader of poetry was still alive, in his own daily experience, to the symbolic or metaphoric connotation of all experience and activity. For example, hitting or breaking things normally evokes the overtone of attack and destruction. There is a tinge of conquest in all rising - even the climbing of a staircase."  

When Arnheim talks about "the symbolic or metaphoric connotations of all appearances" he suggests that the words metaphor and symbol can be synonymous when the word symbol designates analogical rather than logical relationships. The two poles of the term symbol might be divided and described as the sign-symbol and the metaphor-symbol. These two uses of the word symbol point to two distinct modes of thinking.

"Basing himself on his work with computers, (Ulric

4Gombrich, 1969 p. 168
Neisser) proposes to replace some of the older distinctions between mental activities by the two types of information processing he calls sequential and multiple processing. Ordinarily, he writes, there is a main sequence in progress in human thought, dealing with some particular material in step-by-step fashion. The main sequence corresponds to the ordinary course of consciousness, consciousness being intrinsically single. But this main sequential operation of what might be called logical thought is normally accompanied by a complex orchestration of multiple operations which are in the nature of things, infinitely richer though less precise that the well focused sequential process... When this multiplicity is mobilized and forced into consciousness with all that feeling of richness and elusiveness which goes with the abandonment of the main sequence we come a little closer to a psychological account of the experience of the ineffable that the restrictionist claim to be the hallmark of the symbol, because it vouchsafes us a glimpse into vistas of meaning beyond the reach of logic and convention."

These two kinds of thinking point to a very important difference in function of the sign-symbol and that of the metaphor-symbol. The sign-symbol seeks out the clearest most precise single meaning with which it can identify itself. The metaphor-symbol seeks out the image which evokes the richest cluster of associated meanings. This difference is due to the fact that the sign-symbol intends to convey information. A multitude of possible, equally appropriate meanings would frustrate this purpose.

The metaphor symbol, on the other hand, summons up associations, attitudes and responses. A single unequivocal

6Gombrich, 1969 p. 155
interpretation would frustrate this experience.

As words like association, attitude, and response suggest, the metaphorical symbol tends toward an introverted point of view. This characteristic, even more than its tendency to carry multiple meanings, determines the traits of imaginative symbolism which Cassirer examines in his Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.

Like Gombrich, Cassirer sees two distinct modes of thinking. He calls these the scientific empirical and the mythical view. The differences between these two points of view correspond to the differences between the symbolism of signs and the symbolism of metaphors.
CHAPTER II

MYTHICAL SYMBOLISM

Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is full of insights into the nature of these two distinct but co-existent modes of human thought which he calls the scientific empirical view and the mythical view. The scientific empirical view includes the signs of logical, sequential thought whereas the mythical view underlies the metaphorical symbols of analogical, multiple thought processes. The scope of the kind of thinking which Cassirer calls mythical thinking is suggested by a short description of the Warburg Library where Cassirer and Gombrich did much of their work on symbolism.

"Cassirer listened attentively as (Dr. Saxle) explained to him Warburg's intentions in placing books on philosophy next to books on astrology, magic and folklore and in linking the sections on art with those on literature, religion and philosophy. The study of philosophy was for Warburg inseparable from that of the so-called primitive mind. Neither could be isolated from the study of imagery in religion, literature, and art."  

Due, perhaps, to Warburg's view of the close kinship

7 Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Volume II Mythical Thought, (Yale University Press, 1929) p.iv
of these various disciplines Cassirer bases his inquiry at the source of the kind of thinking which underlies all imagery. He calls this mode of thought mythical consciousness. He calls the products of this consciousness mythical figures and mythical meanings. These mythical figures and meanings show themselves to be very closely related if not identical to the metaphorical symbols described by Gombrich.

In the course of his study Cassirer isolates the peculiar view the mythical mind takes of the relationship of the part to the whole, of cause and effect and of change.

"For our empirical comprehension the whole consists of its parts; for the logic of natural science it results from them; for the mythical imagination neither of these propositions applies; here there prevails a true indifference both in thought and in practice, between the whole and its parts. The whole does not have parts and does not break down into them; the part is immediately the whole and functions as such."^8

Long before I had heard of Cassirer's study of mythical thinking I had found that certain fragments of figures or faces cut out of magazines had an unexpected power to exist as independent wholes or to express or caricature an entire face, figure or gesture. Claes Oldenburg mentions the same phenomenon in an interview about his work:

"Fragments have always interested me. I think one of the big differences between the artist's vision and, if there is such a thing, a normal person's vision is that artists tend to see in fragments.

^8Cassirer, Mythical thought p. 49
They tend to take a part of the lamp, a part of the telephone, a part of the ashtray and make a whole out of that and ignore the rest. I mean they tend to be very partial in their looking. What I wanted to do in the early fragments, for example in The Store which has a lot of fragments from advertisements, was to limit the subject matter to things that interested me and that I could compose into a new whole. So I always thought of seeing as basically a fragmentary activity. If I walked down the street I would only see certain things and I wanted to be true to that vision. Fragments are also good because they suggest what's between, you know, and so a little piece of something suggests the whole of it..."9

In an essay on picture reading Gombrich suggests that there might be a physical reason for this "tendency to see in fragments" which would be by no means limited to artists.

"...eye movements can be filmed and fixation points plotted on pictures. These records confirm...that reading a picture is a piecemeal affair that starts with random shots and these are followed by the search for a coherent whole. Consider if we had to read a statue blindfolded."10

Whatever the reason for it, the point remains that the mythical mind does not see a stable relationship between a whole object and its various parts. Myth feels free to detach the parts it wants and to consider them wholes or to attach them to other things to form new wholes.

"Things which come into contact with one another in the mythical sense - whether this contact is taken as a spatial or temporal contiguity or as a similarity however remote...have fundamentally

ceased to be a multiplicity; they have acquired an essential unity...The relations which myth postulates are not logical relations in which those things which enter into them are at once differentiated and linked; they are a kind of glue which can somehow fasten the most dissimilar things together."

This adhesive quality is as much a feature of my fragments of figures and faces as is their ability to detach themselves or disassemble. I found that they tended to attach themselves to one another very easily on the basis of the slightest similarities. They would sometimes come together as visual puns because of similarities of shape or they would join to dramatize a simple event suggested by the cliches or symbolic meanings to which each fragment might refer. Sometimes they combined to form caricatures, hybrids, and agglomerations of cliches.

The pleasure that certain artists take in collecting and combining different kinds of objects seems symptomatic of this mythical stickiness. They produce a very inclusive, pluralistic kind of art which gladly accepts and unites images and materials from libraries, laboratories, museums, department stores, churches, factories, and so on.

Their disinclination to make distinctions between categories of objects corresponds to another characteristic of the mythical point of view which Cassirer calls "polysynthetic."

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11 Cassirer, Mythical Thought p. 63
"If scientific thought wishes to describe and explain reality it is bound to use its general method, which is that of classification and systemization. Life is divided into separate provinces which are sharply distinguished from one another. The boundaries between species, families, genera – are fundamental and ineffaceable. But the primitive mind ignores and rejects them all. Its view of life is a synthetic, not an analytic one. Life is not divided into classes and subclasses. It is felt as an unbroken continuous whole which does not admit of any clean-cut and trenchant distinctions. The limits between the different spheres are not seen as insurmountable barriers; they are fluent and fluctuating. There is no specific difference between the various realms of life. Nothing has a definite, invariable, static shape."\(^\text{12}\)

Cassirer goes on to suggest that the boundaries between objects appear so unstable to the mythical mind that one object can be transformed into another. This mythical law of metamorphosis contrasts sharply with the scientific approach to change.

"When scientific thinking considers the fact of change it is not essentially concerned with the transformation of a single thing into another: on the contrary, it regards this transformation as possible and admissible only insofar as it is based on certain functional relations and determinations which can be regarded as valid independently of the mere here and now. Mythical "metamorphosis", on the other hand is always a record of an individual event - a change from one concrete material form into another."\(^\text{13}\)

This transformation or metamorphosis is obvious in my clearest metaphors. The remark by Braque which was quoted earlier that "the poet says the swallow knifes the sky and

\(^{12}\)Cassirer, Mythical thought p. 81
\(^{13}\)Cassirer, Mythical thought p. 47
thereby makes a knife out of a swallow" shows the close relationship between metaphor and metamorphosis. Likewise, like the table-woman or the chair-man could also be called metamorphoses. "Woman is table" (figure 6) could be understood as "woman becomes table." To represent an object as emerging out of or merging into another object could be taken as a device for condensing the process of metamorphosis into a single image. A less obvious example of metamorphosis might be the large white figure and golf ball (figure 7). Here the shape and placement of the object suggests such a strong similarity to a host of other objects that it could be expected to transform itself into those other objects in the mind of the viewer.

The large white figure (figure 7) is obviously a caricature of a female figure. But she is being held like a baby and in shape she resembles both an insect larva and a leg of lamb. In general she suggests objects associated with infantilism or atavism.

This figure, like all of my images, demonstrates all three main mythical techniques. They all began as parts or fragments of wholes which grew together to form new wholes and they are all in the process of transforming themselves into other objects either physically or psychologically.
I would like to underline the fact that these characteristics of mythical techniques depend upon an introverted experience or point of view. It is the internal, psychological image, not its concrete physical counterpart in the external world which has the flexibility required for mythical behavior. Think for example of how clearly the images of the dream, that most introverted of all familiar experiences display the traits of mythical consciousness.

Consider the dreams subjective, introverted gaze and the dreamer's passive suspension of his disbelief. To dream, as to mythical consciousness, the things of the world are so fluid that they melt into one another, so unstable that parts of each image can be detached and transplanted to any other image, so adhesive that one thing sticks to another at the most accidental contact, and so interchangeable that anything can be transformed into anything else.

But is instability the only principle or law by means of which the elements of mythical thinking fall apart, stick together or replace one another? Are mythical choices of what to add, what to subtract or what to substitute completely arbitrary? Is any and every part of an object equally competent to stand for the whole? Can any object be fused to or transformed into any other object whatsoever with the same
conviction? Is mythical consciousness so passive that it makes no choices or distinctions at all but merely seizes upon anything which happens to fall into its field of vision?

Speaking for my own images I would simply say no to these questions. Cassirer implies the same answer in his explanation of what it is that captivates the mythical imagination.
"What myth primarily perceives are not objective but physiognomic values...Whatever is seen or felt is surrounded by a special atmosphere - an atmosphere of joy or grief, of anguish or excitement, of exultation or depression. Here, we cannot speak of "things" as dead or indifferent stuff. All objects are benignant or malignant, friendly or inimical, alluring and fascinating or repellent and threatening."\(^{14}\)

I want to concentrate on the fact that the term physiognomic refers to the face and to facial expression. In its narrower sense physiognomic perception reads facial configurations into nonhuman forms like rocks and clouds. It has the mythical capacity to accept a single feature like the eye as a whole face but it does insist that the thing which is experienced must somehow suggest the physical form of a face or one of its features.

"The automatic recognition of an object like the face is dependent on the two factors of resemblance and biological relevance. The greater the biological relevance an object has for us the more we will be attuned to its recognition - and the more tolerant will therefore be our standards of formal correspondence."\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (Yale University Press, 1944) p. 76

\(^{15}\) Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, p. 5
In its broader sense, physiognomic perception reads facial expression into nonhuman forms like shapes, colors, textures, landscapes or still lifes which do not resemble the physical form of a face.

"The poet can speak of smiling skies because he lives in a world which can be divided into things which smile and things which frown. From this point of view metaphors are not primarily transferred meanings, linkages established. They are indicators of linkages not yet broken, pigeonholes wide enough to encompass spring sky and smile.

What we call the expressive character of sounds, colors and shapes is nothing more than this capacity to evoke physiognomic reactions."

While physiognomic values in the narrow sense are evident in many of my images (figure 4), physiognomic values in the broad sense are basic to the nature of metaphor. In order to present both kinds of physiognomic perception in their simplest clearest form Gombrich goes beneath the earliest most primitive metaphorical expressions of children or primitive adults to find examples of animal behavior which seem to correspond to human physiognomic reactions.

"If you remove an egg from a sea gull's nest and put it nearby it will retrieve it. It will also retrieve other round objects - pebbles or potatoes, if they are sufficiently close in shape and touch to the egg - but it will leave angular and soft shapes untouched. For the gull, the class of egg-like things is larger than our class of eggs. Its filing system is a little too wide, which makes errors possible but not likely in the wild state. It is on this range of classification that the

16Gombrich, Meditations on a Hobby Horse, p.48
scientist plays when he wants to deceive the gull. He cannot make eggs which would answer his own definition, to be sure, but he can make eggs which answer the gull's definition and study the bird's reaction to the image or counterfeit.

...N. Tinbergen made dummies of sticklebacks to probe the reactions of the male fish. The naturalistic dummy does not impress it much, unless it is red, but the caricature with plenty of red arouses a violent reaction. Indeed, there are cases when dummies arouse more reaction than the real thing - they exhibit what are called the "releasers" in a purer, more recognizable form than life situations ever provide. But life also plays its tricks, particularly on animals in captivity. Tinbergen's sticklebacks always postured in their aquarium when red mail trucks passed by the window at some distance, for to their brains red stands for danger and rivalry."¹⁷

The sea gull's reaction to all egg shaped objects and the stickleback's reaction to the color red demonstrate the nonlogical nature of similar human responses and categories. They also underline the point that "all image-making is rooted in the creation of substitutes."¹⁸ These dummies or substitutes "are not imitations of an object's external form but rather an imitation of certain relevant aspects."

"The test of the image is not its lifelikeness but its efficacy within a context of action. It may be lifelike if that is considered to contribute to its potency, but in other contexts the merest schema will suffice, provided it retains the efficacious nature of the prototype. It must work as well or better than the real thing."¹⁹

A clear example of such an image might be found in my Shoe Face object (figure 2). The naturalistic mouth inserted

¹⁸Gombrich, Meditations on a Hobby Horse, p. 9
¹⁹Gombrich, Art and Illusion, p. 110
into the opening of the shoe transforms the shoe into a face and the pair of gromits nearest the toe of the shoe into eyes. They fall into the class of eyelike objects because they "look" at you. They can be accepted as images of actual eyes because they release a similar response.

But Gombrich is careful to point out that we do not react to these minimum images with the inflexibility and predictability of animals.

"We are not simple slot machines which begin to tick when coins are dropped into us, for, unlike the stickleback, we have what psycho-analysts call an "ego" which tests reality and shapes the impulses from the id. And so we remain in control while we half surrender to counterfeit coins, to symbols and substitutes. Our twin nature, poised between animality and rationality, finds expression in that twin world of symbolism with its willing suspension of disbelief."20

Nevertheless, the sea gull's reaction to round shapes and the stickleback's reaction to the color red seem to be primitive forms of the categories and responses which lead in man to metaphorical or symbolic imagery. The sea gull's mistake in particular seems to be a rudimentary form of paronymy. According to Muller, "the phenomenon of paronymy, or the use of the same word or shape to convey a host of entirely different images"21 might serve as a link between animal reactions and the mythical or metaphorical imagination.

20Ibid. p. 102
21Cassirer, Mythical Thought, p. 35
Paronymy is obvious in the drawings of young children. Kubie suggests that their poverty of vocabulary forces them to use one shape or word to carry a variety of meanings. Children typically use a circular shape which they modify with simple lines to symbolize a man, the sun, a tree, or a flower. There is no end to the number of objects which can be compared to a circle and consequently to each other. The circle serves as the basis of the partial resemblances essential to paronomy and to myth and metaphor. All of this places the mythical or metaphorical imagination in the part of the mind where more primitive modes of consciousness color more recently evolved mental activities. It tends toward the twilight areas of the mind where vestiges of animal reaction and childish response lie in the shadows behind the words of more advanced, differentiated forms of thinking. It can hardly defend itself against the charge that it has a regressive, primitive aspect. But it has a progressive aspect as well.

"Culture is based on man's capacity to create unexpected substitutes," says Gombrich. "The possibility of metaphor testifies to the mind's capacity to perceive and assimilate new experiences as modifications of earlier ones, of finding equivalences in the most desperate phenomena and substituting one for the other".

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22 Lawrence Kubie, *Neurotic Distortion of the Creative Process* (University of Kansas Press, 1958) p. 42
23 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 103
CHAPTER IV

COMIC SYMBOLISM

Like dream and myth, dream and wit are one process according to Freud. Most of the techniques of the myth and the metaphor correspond to Freud's techniques of the joke. Myth, metaphor and joke seek the common in the dissimilar. All three think in images, which are by definition, rooted in the formation of substitutes. All three tend to carry double or multiple meanings and tend, as a result, to be ambivalent or ambiguous. "Symbolism", says Freud, "is not peculiar to dream but is characteristic of unconscious ideation...and it is to be found in folklore and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom, and current jokes to a more complete extent than in the dream."24

It is the joke rather than the dream which generates and selects my images. Perhaps it is characteristic for visual wit to present images in a wordlike way. When I say wordlike I do not refer to the "true classical style in writing which required that a work have one clear, logical meaning in each context."25

25 Roger Schattuck, The Banquet Years p. 36
I refer rather to the kinds of words which like dream symbols "have more than one or even several meanings and, as with Chinese script, the correct interpretation can only be arrived at in each occasion from the context." The word-like visual images I seek out correspond to the kinds of words sought out by the symbolist poets. "For the symbolist poets," say Roger Schattuck, "language was endowed with a mystery of meaning which increased with the number of different directions in which each word could point...The pun, then, with its argus eyes had been raised to the status of a legitimate literary method."26

My visual images function nearly enough like words to be used as examples of Freud's techniques of the joke. For example, "condensation, the telescoping of a whole series of ideas into a single pregnant image, is the essence of wit,"27 says Gombrich, paraphrasing Freud. The female figure (figure 7) who is also a baby and a larva, and the golf ball which is also an egg, a dropping, or an internal organ are very clear examples of condensation.

This same female figure displays the technique of modification. The caricaturing of body parts in this figure - the tiny hand and foot and the inflated mouth and torso - demonstrates what Bergson calls "the added element of exaggera-

26Ibid.
27Gombrich, (1963) p. 130
tion, a disproportion in detail that can, if skillfully executed, suggest both sympathy and mockery."\(^{28}\)

Multiple use of the same material is a common device in my work. (figure 8). Roger Schattuck mentions "that frequent use of strict symmetry and repetition for the purpose of obtaining a comic effect. The use of twins, the repetition of situations, the constant mannerisms in the behavior of a person, are all favorite "ornamental" devices in comedy because they uncover mechanical order - that is, lifelessness - in life, which is precisely what Henri Bergson described as the business of all humor...In fact, Bergson has maintained in his book on laughter that what strikes us as comical is the discovery of mechanical aspects in the behavior of people. On the other hand, inanimate objects often seem uncannily alive."\(^{29}\)

The Shoe Face (figure 4) is not only an example of condensation - the economical telescoping of a shoe and a face - but also a clear example of Bergson's insight into the tendency of wit to see the human in the inanimate and vice versa.

Perhaps this tendency of wit to "seek out mechanical aspects in the behavior of people" helps to explain why "the mid-nineteenth century brought an upsurge of painting that provoked laughter or grimace."\(^{30}\) It might be more than coincidental that the mechanical age has co-existed with "a pervading note of humor" in painting and writing. This appetite of wit for mechanical behavior might also explain why I

\(^{28}\)Schattuck, p. 32
\(^{29}\)Arnheim, p. 137
\(^{30}\)Schattuck, p. 31
choose my motifs from the stereotypes of advertising and my techniques from technical illustration and model making.

Since all of my images are at once jokes, metaphors, mythical figures, and symbols I see no way or reason to separate their comic aspects from their mythical aspects. If there are larger themes underlying my family of images my jokes are no less symptomatic of these themes than are my myths and metaphors.
CHAPTER V

SYMPTOMATIC SYMBOLS

Are the crowds of metaphorical figures which make up my family of images symptomatic of certain basic themes and tendencies? Can they be tested for what Panofsky calls intrinsic meaning?

"Intrinsic meaning or content is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a class, a religion, or philosophical persuasion which has been unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work." 31

Panofsky goes on to explain what kind of understanding the interpretation of this intrinsic meaning requires.

"To grasp these principles (of intrinsic meaning) we need a mental faculty comparable to that of a diagnostician - a faculty which cannot be better described than by the discredited term "synthetic intuition" which might be better developed in a layman than in an erudite scholar." 32

But how can the suspicions and assertions of whatever passes for "synthetic intuition" be tested or controlled?

"The controlling principle for the interpretation of intrinsic meaning (should be) the history of

32 Ibid.
cultural symptoms or symbols in general. (This requires) insight into the manner in which under varying historical conditions essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by certain themes and concepts."\(^3_3\)

Because it is very evident in my own images and in the images of contemporary painting in general and because I have found a variety of historical clues to its significance I would like to examine the "intrinsic meaning" of the motif of dismemberment.

George Digby has written about the dismemberment theme in connection with the work of Henry Moore. Although my work could hardly bear less resemblance to Moore's sculpture it does share one trait in common with it. We both present human figures in which "the most highly developed human parts - the head, the hands, the feet, are atrophied or amputated. (figures 3, 6, 7).

Digby presents three ancient myths as evidence of the connection he suspects between the symbol of dismemberment and the idea of rebirth. In each of these myths there is "the idea of the resurrection of something superior from the destruction and sacrifice of what had gone before." In both the Greek myth of Dionysus and the Egyptian myth of Osiris the god in question is dismembered and in both myths something grows or is erected over the scattered fragments of each god's

\(^{33}\text{Ibid. p. 15}\)
body. Here the dismemberment theme seems to correspond to the idea of growing a new tree from a branch broken from an old tree rather than to an idea of purely destructive mutilation. A similar idea seems to motivate the Tibetan Rite of Chod which demands that the initiate imagine himself being ripped asunder in order to effect a reorientation of his personality.

In all three of these myths "the energies and functions which will have to shape themselves anew...must first be disintegrated - shaken apart and scattered before they can be reunited and integrated as a new whole...The dismemberment theme," says Digby, "is part of a drama of regression, of reversion to primal roots and of possible regeneration and rebirth."34

Erich Neuman presents an ancient myth of creation which states that "before the world was created with its familiar figures, fragments came into being - arms, heads, eyes, torsos etc. - without the interconnections which appear only at a later birth."35 This myth not only compliments Digby's collection of myths of dismemberment but also serves as a kind of self-portrait of the mythical imagination. It is the clearest of examples of the mythical belief in the detachability of attributes and the ability of these detached attri-

34 George Digby, Meaning and Symbol (Faber and Faber unlimited 1954) p. 153
35 Erich Neuman, Art and the Creative Unconscious (Pantheon Books, New York, 1959) p. 119
butes to transform themselves into new wholes.

I'm not equipped to accept or reject any of these interpretations of the theme of dismemberment. I can only base my suspicions on what I am conscious of in my own imagery and on what I have gathered from the theories of Cassirer, Freud and Gombrich.

In my imagery I use two different kinds of dismemberment which relate to two distinct but related ideas. The first is dismemberment by fragmentation or amputation in which the whole is simply cut up into its component parts. Once they are detached from the whole these parts are free to join other fragments to form new wholes. In this device dismemberment is clearly a preliminary to change or metamorphosis. (figures 3, 6). The second device is dismemberment by atrophy or, more precisely, by distortion. (figure 7) Here, I do not detach parts from the whole but rather reduce those parts which I want to understate and enlarge those parts which I want to overstate. In this case I have reduced the more highly developed human parts like the head, the hands, and the feet and enlarged the vegetative body parts like the torso. It might be more than a coincidence that I have used this kind of dismemberment in the white female (figure 7) in order to make a caricature of what Kenneth Clark would call a "vegetable
Venus," a term he uses to describe a female stereotype which suggests man's relationship to animal life, to plant life and to earth. My exaggerated "vegetable Venus" is in the process of regressing to the embryo or further still to the egg or seed. The egg will then presumably become something new. This device of dismemberment by atrophy seems, like the device of dismemberment by fragmentation, to present itself as a preliminary to change or metamorphosis or in other words to rebirth.

Both Digby and Neumen see the theme of dismemberment as typical not only of certain individual artists but of contemporary art in general.

"Certain Symbols are met in the psyche," says Digby. When a person reaches a point where he can't go forward or maintain himself. Then the unconscious gives up images that indicate that something within him is turning back in search of a new departure - a deep place on which to build again...The occasional feeling after embryonic forms (in contemporary art) doesn't reflect the professed aims of the times but it may reflect an unconscious attitude - the shadow of a new point of view which is rising into consciousness."  

Neuman's interpretation of the fragmentation and atavism in contemporary art is very similar.

"The center of gravity in contemporary art has shifted from consciousness toward the creative matrix where something new is in preparation."  

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37Digby, p. 157  
38Neuman, p. 126
CONCLUSION

My inquiry has not lead to an unquestionable explanation of the nature of metaphorical imagery but it has turned up some definite clues about the symbol's behavior, its whereabouts in the mind and the circumstances under which it is most likely to be conceived and developed.

In Chapter I, Metaphorical Symbolism, I have tried to clarify the differences between the sign, or symbol which conveys factual or literal meanings and the metaphor, or symbol which evokes imaginative, ambiguous meanings.

In Chapter II, Mythical Symbolism, I tried to show how Cassirer's analysis of the methods of imaginative thought (which he calls mythical imagination) corresponds to the methods I use to discover and develop visual metaphorical images.

In Chapter III, Physiognomic Symbolism, I leaned heavily on explanations by Cassirer and Gombrich which try to account for the "expressive" or "emotional" nature of imaginative symbolism.

In Chapter IV, Comic Symbolism, I used parts of theories of wit by Freud and Bergson to help substantiate my suspicion that humor branches from the same root as myth and metaphor.

In Chapter V, Symptomatic Symbolism, I made an attempt to seek out attitudes and tendencies underlying the theme of dismemberment which is one of my recurring images.
This theme shows itself to be a kind of image of the process of image making.

The psychological theories I studied about the nature of metaphorical imagery provided me with very definite hints about the nature of my own images and, in return, my images presented themselves as evidence of the validity of the theories I investigated.
1. The silhouette of the figure was cut out of 3/8" plywood and painted black.

2. The 10" x 10" etching of an image of an eye was glued to the center of the lower half of the plywood silhouette with Elmer's Glue-all.

3. The zipper components were drawn and etched on 20 gauge copper sheeting, then cut out, inked, wiped and varnished.

4. The breastplates were hammered out of 20 gauge copper sheeting and varnished.

5. The torso shapes were constructed from plaster gauze bandage casts taken from balloons ranging from 2" to 2' in diameter.

6. These shapes were assembled, reinforced from the inside with fiberglass cloth, and glued to the plywood silhouette with epoxy cement.

7. A cotton shirt was dipped into clear polyester resin, folded into the shapes I wanted, and allowed to dry.

8. Fiberglass cloth was adhered to the hidden surfaces of the shirt with clear polyester resin.

9. The plaster gauze casts and the areas where they were joined to the shirt were covered with Sears Plastic Body Filler and sanded smooth.

10. The figure was painted with white polyester finishing resin. While the resin was still wet it was dusted with white talcum powder which gave it an even dull finish.

11. The zipper shapes were assembled and glued into place with epoxy cement.
1. A 30 gauge copper plate was coated with soft wax etching resist.

2. A disassembled sneaker was placed face down upon the waxed side of the copper and run through an etching press.

3. The texture of the cloth and the metal gromits pulled away the wax resist leaving a clear reversed image of the sneaker in exposed copper.

4. The copper was placed in a dutch mordant acid bath for two hours in order to allow the acid to etch into the exposed areas.

5. Since the copper had been embossed in reverse at the outset in order to take an imprint of the sneaker's texture, it now had to be run through the press again, this time with the sneaker shapes behind rather than on top of the etched surface of the copper in order to make a positive embossed image of the sneaker.

6. A partial cast of a face was made from plaster gauze bandages, reinforced from the inside with fiberglass cloth, covered with Sears Plastic Body Putty and sanded smooth.

7. The copper image of the disassembled sneaker was cut out, reassembled, and glued together around the face cast with epoxy cement.
FIGURE NUMBER THREE: THE TABLE WOMAN

1. The tablecloth shape was made from a 2' by 3' rectangle of wire window screening folded to conform to the shape it would take if it were cloth.

2. The female shoulder shapes were constructed from plaster gauze bandage casts taken from balloons ranging from 2" to 2' in diameter.

3. The hands emerging from the table are plaster gauze casts of actual hands and the hands emerging from the plate were caste from all-purpose polyester resin poured into plaster gauze casts of actual hands.

4. The wire screen table cloth and plaster gauze shoulders were covered with fiberglass cloth for strength.

5. The hands holding the tray and the hands emerging from the tray were fastened into place with screws and epoxy cement.

6. The junctures between the table and emerging figure forms were covered over with Sears Plastic Body Filler and sanded smooth.

7. The tray and its emerging hands were painted with white polyester finishing resin.

8. The surface of the tablecloth is felt. The dark checks were printed from an etched copper plate and glued into place individually with Elmer's Glue-all. Felt suits this purpose very well since it can be stretched to conform to a warped surface.
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