Glass: A Study of interior spaces

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Glass: A Study of Interior Spaces

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December 1, 1984
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Date: December 1, 1984
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Proposal</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns &amp; Influences</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Development</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Processes Utilized</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plates</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Bibliography</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I intend to spend my final academic year further exploring and expressing myself through glasswork and other related media.

Aesthetic concepts, particularly those involving the utilization of internal space and the breaking up of preformed structures, are of prime importance to me. I intend to combine different processes and materials in my work. I will present a body of work that will represent these aesthetic concerns and others as my final thesis.
Every artist searches for the medium that best suits their artistic temperament and the medium that most effectively expresses that message. This occurs through exploring and experimenting with a number of materials and then choosing to work with a limited number of the chosen materials in depth to finally understand their potential and limitations.

As an artist matures, self-expression evolves due to experience and through the knowledge stored that is drawn upon for this self-expression. Technique and process are extensions of the mind and the hands which are drawn from the stored knowledge gained through experience. Without this knowledge, the artist is severely limited in potential. Techniques derived are put into effective use to express an aesthetic concept which is of prime importance.

Contemporary art emphasizes individual self-expression. An artist seeks this through a natural balance between temperament and experience enabling the development of personal style and interpretation. The fascination and intrigue with glass is a challenge which I find especially rewarding.

"Glass is often described as a supercooled liquid solution of inorganic materials with an amorphous structure. It is brittle, smooth and hard, but also viscous, flowing, endlessly ductile and responsive. It is brilliant or dull, opaque or transparent, intensely colored or colorless. The words used to describe glass are so contradictory that anyone must wonder that any sense can be made of them. Yet, it is these very contradictions that mean so much to the artist. Because glass really has no shape, form, or definite substance, the
artist is free to impose upon it his own sense of structure or form statement.¹

In my first year of graduate study, I began to analyze concepts which represented my attitudes, and by process of elimination, I began to concentrate and focus on one major direction. I studied the work carefully; there was a consistent quality in each piece. The major concern was toward the fragmentation and/or breaking up of the traditional vessel; this quality is far from subtle. During the first quarter, I started experimenting with blown vessels. One after another I began to intentionally break the glass. The transformation of parts began to be of interest. I did not enjoy the loss of volume created, so I began to reassemble the parts. The creation of an internal dimension within glass thickness is also an important factor resulting in the use of fragments.
CONCERNS & INFLUENCES

Throughout the ages, most media, (wood, stone, clay, metal) have been quite acceptable as materials for artistic expression. This is not the case with glass which has only recently, in terms of the history of art, been accepted as a viable art medium.

Therefore while working with the tradition of glass, my focus was within three major concerns: material (vessel tradition), process (breaking), image reconstruction. These three concerns propelled the work away from the traditional approach of working with glass, toward a new way of viewing the art activity within the glass field.

A. Material: vessel tradition

Glass, a sensuous material, both hot (molten) and cold, is notorious for its ability to seduce both the artist and the viewer. In many cases, it is difficult to see beyond the intrinsic properties of glass and all the dictates of its past associations.

For the thesis work I experiment with sculptural forms but the finished product did not speak of history and tradition which I feel is important (plates No. 1 and 2).

B. Process: breaking

The process of breaking glass vessels is a primary statement of the thesis work. A major rationale for breaking stems from the idea that a hand blown vessel is not a complete entity, to me. After the
same vessel is broken, the glass fragments become material to be used like a painter's canvas. Temporarily those fragments are meaningless and without tradition, and can be dealt with as material more freely. The glass fragments utilize another portion of the overall intent; to look beyond the intrinsic properties. These fragments escape that inherent mystique, and allow freedom for new possibilities.

C. Image: Reconstruction

Physically breaking glass allows me to approach glass reconstruction in a new way. The dimension or space created within the glass wall is an internal structure which can be compared to a piece of fruit. When a piece of fruit is sliced, exposure of the interior structure is revealed. The slicing is the breaking of the glass wall and allows the interior to show its qualities. This process may also be compared to the cross-section of a house, similar to the idea of a doll house. The space created by the break wall could represent the partitions that separate the rooms.

There were three influences ever present in the work: nature, Islamic architecture, and a glass designer, Rene Lalique. This chapter will briefly reflect upon these historical references as they impacted my work.

Pertinent influences come from analyzing nature, particularly dwellings, with special attention paid to the relationship between interior and exterior. An example of how the interior on a particular structure begins is made evident when comparing a seashell to a beehive. With the seashell, one can see a gradual passage from the exterior to the interior of the shell. The edges are curled and folded,
drawing the viewer's eye to the nucleus. The beehive, on the other hand, has a strong distinction between structural elements which are abrupt, and invites no movement to the center. Both of these complex structures deal with the expressive qualities of a vessel container form.

Another strong historical influence is Islamic architecture (plate #3). Islamic architecture's contribution to my glass statement has primarily been through its rich variety of decorative themes and techniques.

Decoration is derived from many concepts exemplifying dual meanings. Oleg Grabar describes Islamic art in the following manner:

"Animal or human figures are decorative and magical; architectural themes are supports for decoration and decorative in themselves; geometric elements have the same double function; writing is ornament and also meaningful; vegetation is both artificial and lively."²

Surface treatment develops multilevels of relief and depth thus creating dual patterns of positive and negative space as well.

A 9th century relief-cut glass bowl is one of my favorite pieces of historical glasswork (plate #4) because it shows a strong relationship between the decorative treatment on the surface and the form. The entire bowl was carved down to an extraordinarily thin wall leaving the design in high relief, making this work exceptionally strong due to its decorative theme and detailed precision. In summary, the Islamic style shows the importance of the overall decorative effect in relation to the individual motif.

Glass designer Rene Lalique (1860-1945) made the transition to 20th century art in Western Europe by becoming one of the most influential and noted glass artists of the century. I became interested
3) Islamic Architecture
in Lalique because he promoted an art aesthetic for glass which extended the use of the material. While Lalique produced a wide range of glass over half a century, he maintained a unique sculptural quality throughout all his work. In the decade from 1920-30, Lalique designed over 200 vases for aesthetic appreciation only, with most of this group consisting of thick glass with surface relief to further enhance the optical qualities (plate #5).
5) Lalique
WORK DEVELOPMENT

After studying contemporary artists and experimenting, I concluded that surface decoration was far from the full potential of the material.

Working with traditional forms became frustrating because they were empty and impersonal for me. Although I had enjoyed the process of making these forms, I soon realized that I had come to a dead-end with glassblowing and vessel making. A personal statement was necessary for me to continue. I needed to make a drastic change with the vessels. I began breaking them and enjoyed the results. At the same time I felt empathy. Eric Potter’s quote in Read’s book best defines how I feel about empathy.

"These intense 'love affairs' which artists have with the things of the world go beyond the normal level of attraction to flowers, trees, and skies which most of us experience. As Herbert Read has often pointed out, it is necessary to remember the distinction between sympathy and empathy. The sympathy for nature which the average person experiences is a feeling for things; whereas the artist who is moved profoundly enough to create, projects his own feelings into things--an involvement best described as empathy."³

I began to restore or patch the broken fragments and through this process enjoyed the transformation of beauty and function into experience and existence. This gave me further insight into glass as a contemporary art form.

Fragmentation became increasingly important. The structural break-up was a vehicle to question what was normally accepted. I
began to look for ways to unify all the broken fragments by reconstructing the original vessel form. I started hinging the pieces together in such a way that the entire piece would open, and I noticed that when the pieces were closed, the outer form reconstructed the original vessel. When one or more of the fragments opened, the entire form was transformed into an abstraction. In addition, I began to attach titles to the work such as *Is it or isn't it?* (plate No. 6), to support the childlike quality of the idea.

I found physical characteristics inherent to the material could be worked to my aesthetic advantage after breaking. Opposite qualities particularly interested me such as; smooth/sharp, violent/passive, and inviting/dangerous.

Breaking the blown vessels allows more involvement with the interior space. What is inside can be brought outside, and this phenomenon is further emphasized by the applied decoration. It is with this focus that I identified my direction. The piece *Black Pins* (plate No. 7), exemplifies this concept. The outside of the clear form was sandblasted to create a translucent quality with black pins mounted on the outside of the top half, and more pins mounted on the inside of the bottom half. A base is incorporated with this piece thus introducing an environment for the first time.

In *Home* (plate No. 8), the interior space defines the vessel. Both hinged fragments are left clear. This allows visible access into the interior, while the remaining body is sandblasted to create a translucent boundary. The vessel symbolizes both safety and shelter of a home. At the same time, the fragments open to create visual changes within the structure.
6) Is it or Isn't It?
Self-Portrait (plate No. 9) is a college of found objects in a box construction. The front surface of the box is a piece of obscure (rippled) glass, which creates a distorted illusion of depth similar to the effect created by water. The collected objects are visually strong enough to be identified under this extreme distortion.

I started experimenting with the idea of moving away from the utilitarian form but remaining interested in many of the concepts concerning the vessel.

Color is an important element which helps emphasize a symbolic reference which is vital to the work. I began a series titled Fear of Survival (see plate No. 1 for a representation of the series). In this body of work, the vessel was translated into an egg-like shape which, when broken, has fragments surrounding an interior heart-shape object. The symbolic meaning of the heart "refers to the true inner Self of Man--the Ego." The element of color becomes especially important. Black, grey and a goldfish yellow were selected to give overall visual strength.

The next piece, Horseshoe Crab (plate No. 2), was similar to the Fear of Survival series. The work involved the interaction between an exterior form covering an interior form. The exterior shell of Horseshoe Crab was fragmented. This refers to a patching effect that is covering the inside, possibly suggesting the process of shedding. In opposition to the exterior shell of the preceding series, the fragments remain unattached. This indicated that time has passed; the breaking is over. In this piece, the concern was to enclose without concealing. Sandblasted glass allows light to penetrate the surface, and the interior form represents an abstract animal form.
Plate No. 10, War Games, deals with story-telling to convey a social statement. The message is represented through a combination of objects, and their relationship to the activity within the structure. The description of these pieces is clarified by dividing them into three basic categories: (1) structure, (2) objects and (3) internal activity. The combination of these categories complete the statement.

The basic structure strays from the vessel format when I used three layers of obscure plate glass (5"x5"). This size represented a page from a book while the intimate scale creates the atmosphere of story telling. The process of layering in conjunction with this type of glass creates the illusion of depth which reinforces the concept of distorted values.

The objects are used on the surface as a replacement for words. They are childlike objects and have little apparent importance or real value, but I am interested in the subtle message of these small articles since they effectively have a contributing factor, the symbolism of the object itself.

The internal activity within the structure consists of abstract imagery and the use of color. The materials used between the layers of plate glass are gun caps and glass enamels, the bottom layers having strips of gun caps with each piece varying in the amount. The second layer has red enamel directly above the strips. These layers are heated to approximately 1500° Fahrenheit to permanently fuse the plate glass. The enamel, in this case, did not burn away or discolor because it was sealed between the layers. For this same reason, the gun caps remained on the plate glass and, during this heating and fusing process, the caps went through an interesting transformation. All the
11) Breaking Through to Contentment
color was burned away leaving only white strips of ash, but the red enamel helped to maintain some of the gun cap image.

After this slumping process was completed, I then applied the objects to the surface. A specific space was deeply sandblasted for each object to fit into the surface. This was important because it unified all the elements with the glass.

Looking back on the past work, I realized that the lack of control with breaking was partly responsible for my experimentation with ideas and processes. Nothing lived up to the results I achieved with the broken vessels.

To perpetuate this aesthetic, I realized that there had to be more control over the process of breaking vessels. The loss rate of blown vessels was upward of 75-80 percent. The foremost problem was that there wasn’t an information source concerning this process. I experimented with different methods keeping accurate records. The work seemed futile. As fast as the blown vessels were produced, they were used on a test and the outcome was that I kept working on what few pieces survived. These pieces were treated with extreme care and judgement since I never knew how long it would be before the next successfully broken vessel could be used.

When it came time to connect the fragments, the hinges were inappropriate for many reasons. Primarily, there were too many fragments to hinge and by hinging them together, they would lose their definition of form. As an alternative, gluing the entire piece together helped to define the shapes of each fragment and unify the broken vessel.
Breaking Through to Contentment (plate No. 11) was the largest piece I had worked on (approximately 18-20 inches in diameter). The form became a bubble filled with private fantasies. Recognizable images were used to represent life experiments. The interior surface treatment and use of color became more complicated as the piece itself became more involved.

After the interior work was finished, an exterior image (a film strip) was used to complete the story and visually unify the fragments to the form.

Sea Cups is also a large blown form (plate No. 12). The exterior is sandblasted, resulting in a cloud-like quality which helps the illusion of a fantasy world. The use of the translucent surface allows light to penetrate, helping to evoke an emotion and create an atmosphere for the environment inside. This piece was also broken to allow physical access to the interior volume. In this piece, the fragments were glued together to complete the original form, housing an image inside of teacups and saucers. Each cup sits on a saucer that has pierced the bubble. The cups seem to be in motion, whirling around the inside of the form. From the outside, the edges of the saucers which pierce the bubble become an invitation of curiosity. The sand was used for a base to imply the idea of a message in a bottle which was found by the shoreline.

The next piece, Andy's Ticket (plate No. 13) was a blown vessel, broken and hinged together. The hinged structural break-up implied movement between the fragments. A few basic elements convey the story while the vessel was used as a metaphor to house the story. The
12) Sea Cups
Andy's Ticket
three symbols used to convey the story were an airplane, a window and a road.

According to Thoss-Thienemann, "road signs carry clear cut, unambiguous messages." The road is a sign, not a symbol, carrying no hidden meanings.

Carl Jung speaks of the symbolism of flight, saying the "bird is the most fitting symbol of transcendence." He continues,

"... talking of wild birds as symbols of release or liberation. But today we could as well speak of jet planes and space rockets, for they are the physical embodiment of the same transcendent principle, freeing us at least temporarily from gravity. In the same way the ancient symbols of containment, which once gave stability and protection, now appear in modern man's search for economic security and social welfare."

Thoss-Thienemann equates the historic relationship between the body and architectural features:

"The identification of eye and window is but a small segment of a more general equation identifying the house with the body, the fireplace with the genitals, the door with the mouth, and the windows with the eyes. These equations are found in various languages. They are very old, dating back into prehistoric ages. In Greek, phaos means the "light of the eye," the plural, phota, means "eyes" and "window". In English, the word, window, originates from the former compound, "wall-eye." ... the object, "window" was originally, when primitive blockhouses were first built, an opening cut into the timber in the shape of an eye. The windows of the primitive blockhouses of our ancestors looked, indeed, as if they were "eyes" of the wall.

I feel that these objects, the airplane, window and the road were successful means for universal communication.

The Skeleton (plate No. 14) consists of a fairly large vessel that has been broken and hinged together. The hinges were placed on the piece in such a way as to allude to a backbone or spine and to allow
15) Passion Bowl
the connected fragments to unfold. Slate was chosen as the base for this piece because of its lifeless quality which reinforces and relates to the skeleton.

Up to this point and including The Skeleton, all the vessels were made of thin-walled glass. The pieces were so thin that the break edges were often unnoticed. Increasing the wall thickness, gave me a new dimension to explore by creating an internal wall or plane.

Increasing the thickness in the glass caused a temporary set back. The breaking of thicker pieces became a new problem, different from those of the thinner walls. I spent a lot of time working out technical problems with thick glass. Although there were a lot of fatalities, I gained control of the breaking process and realized that breaking can be controlled like any other glass process.

I progressed through refining the breaking concept. One major change was to simplify the vessel form, making it easier to carry complex images. Simplifying the form then reduced interferences with the aesthetic.

Another refinement was toward the treatment of the individual fragments and encompassed three major considerations (plates No. 15-20). First, the importance of the inside and the outside of the vessel began to be emphasized. Each piece consisted of two fragments; one was enameled on the inside, the other on the outside, both of different colors. Second, a relationship between the shapes inside the glass and the surface image was achieved by sandblasting the overall surface and leaving a clear area or "viewing window" where the shapes could be seen. The third consideration dealt with the importance of the rim as a means of defining the boundary between the inside and the outside.
16) Squig's Duplex in the Winter
17) Squig's Quarters
The three major concerns that I started with, (1) material (2) process and (3) image were beginning to shape a personal style.

Understanding the aesthetic functions of form underline my feelings about the use of the vessel.

According to Stolnitz, the first aesthetic function of form is that:

"Form controls and directs the spectator's perception, guiding his attention along a certain course so that the work will be clear, understandable, and unified. The first function of form is to bring about unity. This is achieved through familiarity in form. The viewer can recognize and relate to the form as the structure of the object." The function of the form has set the stage for what is important."9

He feels that form also "arranges the elements as to point up and vivify their sensory and expressive value."10 "Without form to guide and regulate the elements understandable, it also dramatizes and heightens their appeal."11

He continues by saying that "formal organization itself possesses intrinsic aesthetic value."12 Aesthetic value of form is only part of the total composition. The attention of form is directed both toward the past and the present.

According to Carl G. Jung,

"An important fact about modern art: The artist is, as it were, not so free in his creative work as he may think he is. If his work is performed in a more or less unconscious way, it is controlled by laws of the psyche, and vice versa. Consciously, or unconsciously, the artist gives importance to the values of his time."13

The thought process toward the use of the vessel is based on metaphor. According to Silvano Arieti, Aristotle wrote, "The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor; it is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; it is also a sign of genius, since a good
metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in the dissimilar."14 Arieti continues, "There are other factors to be considered in the study of metaphor: (1) accessory techniques, (2) multiple meanings and (3) the university of metaphor in symbolism."15 "The successful metaphor, even when it seems to subtract from reality, adds to our understanding and confers aesthetic value. The metaphors have enlarged the realm of possibilities within our understanding."16

Erich Neumann expounds on the symbolism of the vessel and relates that to the feminine nature.

"The center of the feminine, elementary character in which the women contains and protects, nourishes and gives birth, stands the vessel, which is both attribute and symbol of the feminine nature. The clay vessel, and later the vessel in general, is a very characteristic attribute of the women. It is one of the primary work implements of the man's water-gathering, fruit-picking, food-preparing household companion, and therefore, a symbol of the female deity."17

In pre-agricultural society, women provided as much as 80 percent of the food, and they shaped the containers necessary for gathering and storing the food. Hedges and Wendt write, "Shaping the container, decorating the pot, could thus become a symbolic as well as a practical act: it could be a form of prayer, or a form of celebration. Pattern and design are orderly, to give order to a mysterious, inexplicable world. Thus, art consoles, gives courage, reinforces group identity. And thus could women's work, originating in the practical, physical needs of the moment, serve also large spiritual and emotional needs."18 "Crude and incomplete, though it may be, the vase comes to symbolize that deep and enduring need for self and life expression which lies within us all."19
18) Coral House
Vessel and female are connected by the archetypal symbol of each, to shelter and nourish that which is within. Neumann further states, "Only when we have considered the whole scope of the basic feminine functions—the giving of life, nourishment, warmth, and protection—can we understand why the Feminine occupies so central a position in human symbolism and from the very beginning bears the character of 'greatness.' The Feminine appears as great because that which is contained, sheltered, nourished, is dependent on it and utterly at its mercy. Nowhere, perhaps, is it so evident as in the case of the mother."20

Symbolic interpretation improves the conveyance of a message. I am intrigued with symbols and how they function. Carl G. Jung refers to a symbol as "... a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotation in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden to us."21

Throughout my graduate study, I have explored three phases: (1) applied objects, (2) internal images and (3) breaking and mending. Objects, either collected or made of glass, were incorporated on the surface of the glass piece. Consideration was extended to the interpretation of signs and symbols. For example, in Sea Cups, it was more suitable to hand craft the cup and saucer, whereas in Andy's Ticket, the use of the commercial toy was appropriate.

The second stage, interior surface, is quite distinctive from the applied objects stage. In it, the surface objects were transformed into internal images. These images were pieces of glass that were incorporated between the layers of glass during the glass-blowing process,
as opposed to the objects which were applied after the blown vessel was completed.

Along with the changes in technique and images, the type of symbolism also changed. Universal symbols that represent energetic movement and rhythm within the interior walls were employed.

A relationship between the interior and exterior was achieved by covering the internal images with a protective tape, then sandblasting the remaining part of the fragment to create a lightly frosted, textured surface. The taped areas create a clear window which reveals the interior image. Thicker glass in these pieces allowed creative manipulation of optical qualities to reinforce this idea.

Internal images became part of a natural progression in the work. The outline of each fragment created a division within the interior wall. Clear vessel forms and enamels, in conjunction with surface dimension, defined and created space.

The third phase, the breaking and mending, represents the aesthetic process that allows intuition to come into play. Carl Jung writes,

Imagination and intuition are vital to our understanding. And though the usual popular opinion is that they are chiefly valuable to poets and artists (that in 'sensible' matters one should distrust them), they are in fact equally vital in all higher grades of science. They play an increasingly important role, which supplements that of the 'rational' intellect and its application to a specific problem. Even physics, the strictest of all applied sciences, depends to an astonishing degree upon intuition which works by way of the unconscious.²²

This process of breaking and mending or reconstruction is in line with thoughts on the history of women's culture. Hedges and Wendt say,
The nature of the everyday work is done only to be undone: the food cooked in order to be eaten, the dishes washed so that they may be used again, surfaces cleaned only to accumulate more dust. One impulse behind much art is surely the desire to outwit time and to capture a fleeting moment and memorialize it.  

In another sense, the use of fragments is a way of connecting different parts to create a unified whole. The parts represent different images in that they stand apart as complete units. This is similar to quilt-making, which creates a metaphor communicating the world of the quilter. Creating a quilt is based on making connections: "connecting the parts of one's life and connecting to other women--creating a sense of community and wholeness." Patchwork quilts originated out of necessity. Scraps of fabric were saved, salvaged, and used to create something new. The top half of the quilt offers an endless possibility for design while the stitching of the layers offers the technical challenge of the structure within the format of the utilitarian purpose. The balance of the three major concerns--material, process, image brings clarity to the aesthetic.
20) Star Burst
TECHNICAL PROCESSES UTILIZED

1) Blowing Techniques
2) Cane Making Techniques
3) Controlled Breaking Technique
4) Stenciling and Sandblasting
5) Enamels
6) Firing Enamels and Re-Annealing Process
7) Glass Restoration Techniques
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has honed and fine-tuned my outlook and decision-making process which is required in the creation of art. During these past two years, I have developed a glass technique which fulfills an aesthetic and applied style.

Through my graduate study, I have learned my strengths and my limitations, both emotional and physical.

Respectfully submitted,

CONCETTA MASON
PLATES

1) Fear of Survival
2) Horseshoe Crab
3) Islamic Architecture
4) Persian Glass
5) Lalique
6) Is it or Isn't It?
7) Black Pins
8) Home
9) Self-Portrait
10) War Games
11) Breaking Through to Contentment
12) Sea Cups
13) Andy's Ticket
14) The Skeleton
15) Passion Bowl
16) Squig's Duplex in the Winter
17) Squig's Quarters
18) Coral House
19) Gun Caps
20) Star Burst
NOTES


5. Ibid., p. 19.


7. Ibid., p. 156.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 230.

12. Ibid., p. 236.


15. Ibid., p. 139.

16. Ibid., p. 144.

17. Erich Neumann, The Great Mother. New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1974, p. 120.


20. Erich Neumann, op. cit., p. 43.
22. Ibid., p. 82.
24. Ibid., p. 5.
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