

LOUIS BATTAGLIA

## Clement Greenberg: A Political Reconsideration

At the conclusion of the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the dual global superpowers. By the dawn of the Cold War, the former allies were in staunch ideological opposition to one another and immediately began jointly careening down the path towards a politically bi-polar world of black and white, all-or-nothing ideological loyalty. In the highly aggressive confrontation that arose between these two superpowers, superior military, diplomatic, scientific and economic strategies became imperative to an eventual total victory. There was also an acknowledgment that major areas of modern culture, such as art, music, and literature were also essential fronts in the ideological conflict between capitalism and communism. This political pragmatism held that whichever side had the ability to exercise a dominant cultural influence over the neutral minds in Europe, Latin American, Africa and Asia would also have a greater chance in capturing their political allegiances. The need for either the Americans or the Soviets to exude a cultural superiority over the other was an essential component within both of the superpower's overall foreign policy designs to win over the undecided hearts and minds of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the avant-garde movements responsible for creating the modern art, music and literature of this era were of vital strategic importance to both sides, even if the individual artists sometimes remained blind to the political appropriation of their art. However, due to the modern avant-garde arts possessing a contextually ambiguous, if not an intellectually impenetrable nature, enlightened cultural critics took on the necessary responsibility of ascribing a definitive cultural value to the seemingly insane mess of forms, which greatly aided in the creation of political capital for these arts. Incidentally, these cultural critics were also much more sensitive to the latent political capital of modern avant-garde art than many of the

1 Frances Stonor Saunders. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA in the World of Letters*. (New York: The New Press, 1999).

actual artists. The writings and pronouncements of these intellectual writers/critics provided the intellectual foundations for the development of cultural power and influence, which the higher echelons of the diplomatic world viewed as essential to political hegemony and the preservation of their particular way of life. In retrospect, it seems almost absurd to consider these writers and intellectual as merely 'critics' in the traditional sense of the term. In fact, their writings were theoretical components within a volatile ideological dichotomy that existed between polar political stances. This ideological dichotomy, between capitalism and communism, manifested itself within society in a myriad of ways, but one of the more palpable manifestations was through the critical interpretation of the production, dissemination, and consumption of modern avant-garde art and culture.<sup>2</sup>

The writers and aesthetic theoreticians that were responsible for interpreting and evaluating the higher strands of modern culture were indeed as much political philosophers as cultural commentators because they imbued the ideological (and therefore political) connotations within modern avant-garde art, a practice that inevitably permitted avant-garde art to become highly effective ideological propaganda. This proposal is not aiming to advance the hollow argument that the post-war cultural critics and avant-garde artists were simply imperialist stooges, but rather that post-war culture, especially modern avant-garde art, was, due to complex socio-political factors, heavily politicized, despite the attempts by many artists and critics to posture the modern avant-garde arts as apolitical.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the use of art as a tool for political philosophy and political interpretation came to its fullest fruition within the circle of a post-war group known as the New York Intellectuals, which

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2 Neil Jumonville. *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Pp. 151-186.

3 A similar argument has been previously explored by Noam Chomsky, "Politics and the Intelligentsia". Taken from *Art in Modern Culture*. (London: Pantheon Press, 1992) eds., Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris. And Francis Francina. *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*. (London: Harper and Row, 1985).

saw modern avant-garde art as *the* front line in the post-war battle over ideology.<sup>4</sup> Just as Karl Marx utilized economics and Sigmund Freud explored psychology and the Frankfurt School surveyed modern culture to develop an enhanced socio-political perspective, the New York Intellectuals were investigating modern art and likewise deducing broad political and cultural theory from their observations and criticism on the production of modern art.

The man who most clearly embodies this concept of the enlightened and politically sensitive post-war cultural critic is the preeminent American modern art critic and writer, Clement Greenberg. Greenberg's art criticism and other writings established him as the intellectual and theoretical prophet of the American avant-garde because his work provided a definition of American modernism and the standards by which American modernism would evolve. Greenberg's profound declarations on art and culture had further relevance in the Cold War era because they had contained political connotations that had real and concrete ideological consequences. Through criticism, Greenberg, like many of his contemporaries, utilized his skills to not only critique modern art, but also modern society and culture on a political level. Thus, Greenberg's penetrating perspective on modern art (which is in reality latent political philosophy expressed through the observations of a high-cultural activity) can be appreciated and understood as a prime example of the leading abstract political theory that played a conceptual role in establishing an emerging empire's claim to cultural (and specifically artistic) hegemony.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the political connotations of Greenberg's writings and the subtle ideological consequences that they may have had, Greenberg was also a serious

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4 The New York Intellectuals included, Clement Greenberg, Philip Rahy, Mary McCarthy, Dwight Macdonald, Lionel Trilling, Irving Kristol, Sidney Hook, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, and Daniel Bell. See Alan Wald. *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) and Jumonville. *Critical Crossings*.

5 The reference to Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony concept, within this context, was borrowed from Serge Guilbaut. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 85.

political player in the Cold War era. He was involved with numerous organizations and campaigns that existed far outside the realm of the art world. A reconstruction of Greenberg's actual political history reveals a side of him that participated in political discourse for the majority of his career. An examination of Greenberg's political side should shift the perspective of him from merely an influential cultural commentator to a person whose active preoccupation with politics was as pronounced as it was with art, which consequently suggests that he was in fact a Cold War personality of profound political significance. This shift in perspective on Greenberg not only recognizes his own political agency that has until now remained mostly unacknowledged, but complements the broader ongoing redefinition of the relationship between modern art, art criticism and Cold War politics by exhibiting a narrower, more focused investigation of one of the central figures involved.

#### **HISTORIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND<sup>6</sup>**

Over the years, Clement Greenberg has secured a place within the pantheon of post-war intellectuals as a writer and theorist of an elevated caliber. However, it took years of critical backlash and scholarly inquisition before Greenberg underwent a subsequent historical rehabilitation. Even today the true nature of his political personality has still remained partially obscured behind a continual overemphasis on discussing him within an aesthetic context. By tracing the scholarship based on Greenberg, it becomes clear that he has fallen under the focus of mainly art historians that have attempted to understand him as an eminent art critic through a primarily aesthetic discourse. Even the art historians that have approached Greenberg from an overtly political framework ultimately fail to provide an adequate rendition of Greenberg as a politically important personality. Their works are

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6 It should be noted that much of scholarship dealing with Greenberg is contained within writings that are primarily focused on the broader movement of the American avant-garde and Abstract Expressionism. Due to Greenberg's immense role in the movement, the discussion of him and the movement often go hand in hand. Also, by no means are all the works of significance to the historiography of this topic mentioned here. Regretfully, only a small sampling is provided.

ultimately aesthetic investigations that merely take into account certain political factors that are only a means to an end in proving an aesthetic argument. Though their works serve as the backbone for a political reconsideration of Greenberg, the perception of Greenberg as a valuable postwar political theorist has remained submerged because there has not been an adequate attempt to examine his political history. Gradually, the scholarship surrounding Greenberg has shifted to incorporate his political traits, but the perception of him has yet to shift from art critic to political theorist due to the lack of a concrete political-historical framework from which to view him in.

#### I. 1952-1977: "CLEM-BASHING"<sup>7</sup>

By the 1950s, Greenberg had established himself as the preeminent art critic in the United States, which, due to the United States' emerging political and cultural prestige, made him one of the most important art critics in the Western world.<sup>8</sup> Through his many writings for *Partisan Review*, the *Nation*, and *Commentary*, Greenberg produced a body of prose that had single handedly claimed the mantle of modernity for the New York School of Abstract Expressionist painters.<sup>9</sup> By the mid-1950s, due largely in part to the literary efforts of Greenberg, the rest of art world and general public had come to recognize the New York School as the successors to the Parisian School in defining and leading Modernism.<sup>10</sup> Greenberg's power as the voice of the emergent American avant-garde was displayed in seminal essay after seminal essay and his reviews were considered make or break judgments

7 These designated historiographical streams are at times chronologically overlapping. This is because these 'streams' are not concrete, but general designations that reflect a similar historical perspective. While the streams do not shift within a clear chronological transition, there is definitely a clear ideological and historical distinction between these streams.

8 Unlike other American critics, Greenberg's perspectives on Modern art were sought after in European publications, as seen in: Clement Greenberg "The Present Prospectus of American Painting and Sculpture," *Horizon* (London), October, 1947, p.26 and Clement Greenberg, "An American View," *Horizon*, (London) September 1940.

9 Clement Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism" *Partisan Review*, (Spring, 1948), pp. 366-69: the first instance of a critic proclaiming that American art was superior to French.

10 Abstract Expressionists included Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Ad Gottlieb and Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko.

for the artist in question. Those that he deemed unworthy of artistic value (and there were many) gradually began to coalesce as majority within the New York art world and would eventually form the ranks of a backlash that included artists, critics and dealers. These people formed a collective attempt to exclude Greenberg from the global limelight that was rapidly falling on the New York School of art.<sup>11</sup> From within these ranks, a critical consensus among art historians and critics arose that awarded the Abstract Expressionist painters with glorious literary tributes that celebrated the greatness of the aesthetic virtues of the Modern American avant-garde.<sup>12</sup> Greenberg, on the other hand, did not fit within the confines of this critical mold due to his stringent formalist standards.<sup>13</sup> Along with his views on art, Greenberg's views on politics were also diverging from the rest of the New York art world at this time. His formalist standards in art and his gradual transformation into a Cold War Liberal greatly contrasted with the staunch Leftism still practiced among most of the New York crowd. Due to political and personal reasons, Greenberg then fell victim to a collective "Clebashing", which was an attempt by his rivals within the art world to denigrate Greenberg and misrepresent him and his writings.

"Clebashers" dominated the first historiographical stage that focused on Abstract Expressionism. The tone of the writing within this period is oppositional towards Greenberg and often deliberately understates his role as a theorist of the New York School and the American avant-garde. The first work to establish a literary front against Greenberg was by Greenberg's former friend and primary rival as an art critic, Harold Rosenberg. Rosenberg's 1952 *ARTnews* piece,

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- 11 See Florence Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life*. (New York: Scribner, 1997) for details of the personal and power politics of the New York art world.
- 12 Two secondary sources that discuss this consensus: Frascina, *Pollock*, 3-18, Annette Cox, *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society*. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1977), pp. 157-164.
- 13 Dore Ashton describes a "scornful" lecture that Greenberg gave at the College Arts Association in 1951 that directly challenged the emerging consensus surrounding the greatness of the New York School. *The Florence Rubenfeld Collection of Archival Material for Clement Greenberg: A Life, 1988-1998* Appendix C - SERIES 4: Interview material. Whitney Museum of American Art. Frances Mulhall Achilles Library.

“The American Action Painters”, provided the inspiration and blueprint for countering Greenberg’s critical tenets on modernism, and then opened the door to “Clebashing.”<sup>14</sup> Rosenberg’s success at initiating a gradual campaign to discredit Greenberg by misrepresenting him throughout the 1950s becomes evident when the first histories of Abstract Expressionism began appearing in the late-1960s and early-1970s. Such books as *The Triumph of American Painting* and *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (whose titles indicate their celebratory nature) purposefully misrepresent Greenberg’s contributions to the subject they were treating by carefully painting his theories as outdated, reactionary or elementary.<sup>15</sup> Then in 1975, Tom Wolfe published his mocking work, *The Painted Word*. Wolfe’s book was a critical glance at the pretentiousness of the theory-based atmosphere of the New York City art world in 1950s and 1960s. Wolfe places Greenberg (along with Rosenberg and other major critics) center stage as the perpetrators of “the Painted Word”, which was Wolfe’s sarcastic notion that these particular art critic’s theories were the real ‘masterpieces’ of Abstract-Expressionism.<sup>16</sup>

An investigation into the writing of this period leaves one with the impression that Greenberg was an authoritative and vindictive critic who did not outlast the

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14 A close reading identifies Rosenberg making thinly veiled counter statements to Greenberg’s aesthetics. To those within the New York art world it was clear as day that Rosenberg’s real intention was “to topple Greenberg”. Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters”. *ARTnews*, vol. 51, no. 8, December 1952, pp. 22-23. Quote taken from Max Kozloff, “An Interview with Friedel Dzubas.” *Artforum*, September 1965, 50. The rancor between Rosenberg and Greenberg is well documented in countless letters that Greenberg sent to Harold Lazarus. Clement Greenberg. *The Harold Letters, 1928-1943. The Making of an Intellectual*. Ed. Janice Van Horne. (New York: Counterpoint, 2003).

15 Dore Ashton *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*. (New York: Viking, 1973). Irving Sandler. *The Triumph of American Painting*. (New York: Praeger, 1970), are just two examples of the works being produced at this time that were unabashedly celebrating Abstract Expressionism, while simultaneously downplaying or misrepresenting the contributions of Greenberg’s criticism and guidance to the movement. A full outline of the works that were “Clebashing” can be seen in Piri Halasz, “Art Criticism (and Art History) in New York: The 1940s vs. 1980s”. PhD Dissertation at Columbia. 1983. *The Clement Greenberg Papers, 1928-1995*. Series IV, Box 38, File 9. The Getty Research Institute, The Online Archive of California.

16 Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), pp. 33-58. Ironically, it seems that by initiating “Clebashing” and discrediting the seminal theoretical figure of this movement, the “Clebashers” inevitably opened themselves up to similar ridicule and caricature by writers like Wolfe.

movement that he championed. The first retrospective and “definitive” writings on Abstract Expressionism in the late-1960s are filled with the subtle “Clebashing” rhetoric. The writers of these works were professional and aesthetic opponents of Greenberg and begrudgingly grant him little recognition or credit for his role in the conceptual establishment of Abstract Expressionism or the exposition of New York School to the public.<sup>17</sup> They depict Greenberg as a writer of minor importance who suffered from his own aesthetic conservatism and was ultimately a reactionary within the art world. Thus, the formation of any sort of political perspective regarding Greenberg is nearly impossible, and even an appreciation of his value as an art critic is not allowable based on the partisan writings of this period.<sup>18</sup> It would not be until the next stage of scholarship that the discussion of Abstract Expressionism would shift from purely celebrating the aesthetics to intensely investigating the politics involved with the period. Greenberg’s political identity (and everyone else’s for that matter) would come under investigation and a political evaluation of Greenberg and the entire Abstract-Expressionist milieu could begin.

## II. 1972-1983: “ART AS POLITICS”

As a reaction to the overemphasis on the splendors of the Abstract-Expressionist aesthetic trumpeted in the “Clebashing” era, a new breed of art historians began to examine the political components of Greenberg and Abstract Expressionism in general. Emerging within the wake of the New Left historians, these political-art historians absorbed a critical perspective of United States foreign policy and were unsympathetic to the political nuances of living in the midst of the early Cold War. Their impressive investigative scholarship proved monumental in extending the previously limited aesthetic discussion of the New York School and its quintessential critic to include the underlying political components within the era.

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<sup>17</sup> Halasz, “Art Criticism”, 12-16.

<sup>18</sup> The most blatant example of partisan writing against Greenberg is, “Against a Newer Laocoon”, *Arts Magazine*, April 1977, p. 115, which is a direct attack on Greenberg’s essay “Towards a Newer Laocoon” *Partisan Review*, (Spring, 1940): 296-310, and was also the finale episode in “Clebashing”.

Ultimately, the scholarship of these art historians infused a new shade of political complexity within the historiography of Greenberg and Abstract Expressionism. However, the purpose of imposing this political complexity was primarily to allow a revision of the aesthetic consensus of the preceding scholarship, and not to view those involved, like Greenberg, through a purely political lens.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the rehabilitation of Greenberg as a figure of political importance was overshadowed by his portrayal as a somewhat shadowy political pawn within an oversimplified version of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the ability to reinterpret Greenberg as a politically important personality would eventually stem from the findings within this phase of scholarship, even if it were not the intention of these scholars to do so.

This phase began in 1973, when Max Kozloff's piece in *Artforum* "American Painting During the Cold War" began to address the connections between politics and the institutionalization of Abstract Expressionism as the symbol of American modernist achievement.<sup>20</sup> A year later, again in *Artforum*, Eva Cockcroft published an even more indicting report entitled "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War." These two articles would serve as the foundation for the revisionist scholarship directed at Abstract Expressionism and Greenberg that would try to prove that the success of those involved with Abstract Expressionism was due to the "patronage and ideological needs of the powerful."<sup>21</sup> By 1977, Annette Cox's book *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society* appeared with an entire chapter specifically focused on Greenberg's supposed attempt to impose "a reflection of the prosperity, pragmatism, and positivism of American cultural life" within his appraisals of Abstract Expressionism.<sup>22</sup> Then in 1983, Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* encapsulated almost a decade of the revisionist perspective depicting the painters,

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19 Frascina, *Pollock*, 91-102.

20 Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War", *Artforum* vol. ix, no. 9, May 1973, pp. 43-54.

21 Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War", *Artforum*, vol. xii, no. 10, June 1974, pp. 39.

22 Cox, *Art-as-Politics*, 157.

critics, dealers and curators merely as passive benefactors of their ideological appropriation by American Cold Warriors for the cause of cultural imperialism.<sup>23</sup> This string of works served as a scathing reconsideration of the assumed natural origins of America's cultural hegemony and the ensuing aesthetic consensus.

While these political-art historians seemed to be overtly politicizing the art world of the late-1940s and 1950s, in fact they were attempting to discredit the existing "cult of [aesthetic] consensus" by providing evidence of a link between the art in question and problematic politics.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, a proper political reinterpretation is not enabled because these discussions seek to undermine an aesthetic assumption of American hegemony by providing evidence of a connection to imperialistic intentions. This method directly challenges the preceding phase of scholarship that glorified the "Triumph of American Painting" as proof of American cultural superiority. The politics in this new scholarship are therefore an analytical tool or key, not a perspective from which to reinterpret the characters or the movement itself. Thus, by destabilizing the assumption of American cultural hegemony through a heavily biased political inquisition, these scholars robbed Greenberg and others involved of cultural, artistic, and political agency and the means for others to view them as important within these categorical realms.<sup>25</sup> However, their findings were now on record and their sources would remain open for others to reexamine and reinterpret with a less determined sense of aesthetic revisionism.

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23 Guilbaut, *How New York Stole*, 165-194.

24 Cox, *Art-as-Politics*, 157

25 Frascina, *Pollock*, 91-102.

### III. 1985-2006: BIOGRAPHIES/ANTHOLOGIES AND THE “SECOND WAVE”<sup>26</sup>

By 1985, two separate scholarly streams were simultaneously emerging that dealt with Greenberg as figure of historical importance. A string of critical biographies and several anthological works that presented collections of Greenberg's writings characterized the first scholarly stream. These biographies and anthologies illustrated many positive personal, social and cultural aspects of Greenberg's life and career that had been buried by the previous decades of “Clebashing.” This unearthing began when the declining significance of New York City as an art center in the 1980s inspired a new generation of art scholars and critics to look back to the glory days of Abstract Expressionism for alternative perspectives on American art.<sup>27</sup> The personal rivalries that riddled the early New York art world could no longer effectively obstruct Greenberg from this new generation, and they saw Greenberg as a voice of dissent amongst the aesthetic consensus. The perspective within the works of this new generation enabled a rehabilitation of Greenberg as a culturally significant figure and a writer with an impressive intellectual range.<sup>28</sup>

The “second wave of Abstract Expressionism's political history” represents the other scholarly stream. This “second wave” was distinct from the previously discussed “first wave” of political-art studies in the 1970s, in that these newer studies were able to draw from declassified governmental documents to clarify the discussion of Abstract Expressionism's role in Cold War foreign policy. What

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26 “Second Wave” designation taken from Nancy Jachec. “Transatlantic Cultural Politics in the late 1950s: the leaders and Specialists Grant Program”. *Art History*. Vol. 26, No. 4, Sept. 2003. (pp. 533-555).

27 A chronicle of the plight of the 1980s New York art world: Lynne Munson. *Exhibitionism: Art in an Era of Intolerance*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Lee, 2000).

28 Biographies: Caroline A. Jones. *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Alice Goldfrab Marquis. *Art Czar: The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg*. (Boston: MFA Publications, 2006). Rubinfeld, A *Life*. Anthologies: *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*. Ed., Robert C. Morgan. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2003), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism I-IV*. Ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985-1993).

emerged was a perspective of American foreign policy and avant-garde art that was less focused on aesthetic revisionism and more of an attempt to appreciate the complex nature of the post-war cultural-political milieu along with the intellectual and theoretical components of the New York School of painters and critics. However, these works were extremely large-scale in their focus, and Greenberg, along with many other personalities, is somewhat submerged beneath the broader cultural-political forces that were being investigated in the “second wave” works. Nevertheless, a less partisan and more accurate political reconsideration of the Abstract Expressionist movement emerges within the “second wave” of political-art historiography and it is within the “second wave’s” intellectual framework that one can reconstitute Greenberg.<sup>29</sup>

By synthesizing the biographical/anthological and “second wave” history, a proper political reconsideration of Greenberg is finally enabled. Biographies such as Florence Rubinfeld’s *Clement Greenberg: A Life* and Alice Goldfrab Marquis’ *Art Czar: The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg*, coupled with the new availability of Greenberg anthologies like John O’Brian’s *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Works* and Robert C. Morgan’s *Clement Greenberg: Later Writings*, allow a new personal perspective of Greenberg to arise alongside the gathering of his literary work.<sup>30</sup> The fusion of this biographical/anthological perspective with the political tracts of the “second wave”, such as Nancy Jachec’s *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940-1960* and David Craven’s *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period*, makes a political reconsideration of Greenberg not only possible, but also inevitable.<sup>31</sup> After years of aesthetic misrepresentation and personal denigration, Greenberg had undergone a successful

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29 “Second wave” works: David Craven. *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999). Frascina, Pollock and Nancy Jachec. *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940-1960*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

30 See foot note 28 for bibliographic information.

31 See foot note 29 for bibliographic information.

scholarly rehabilitation; and yet the transition of Greenberg from a mere art critic to a cultural theorist with political agency has remained unfulfilled.

#### IV. A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE (1909-1960S)

Greenberg was born in the Bronx on January 16, 1909, to Jewish immigrants who fled a Russian controlled Lithuania. Greenberg was the eldest of three sons in “a family where socialism was the only religion.”<sup>32</sup> Greenberg’s father was a successful enough middle-class businessman. He could provide his family with sufficient enough comfort, that Greenberg would later comment “I can’t remember there ever having been any worrying about money in our family.”<sup>33</sup> As a child, Greenberg showed considerable talent as an artist; however, his father encouraged his sons to become wealthy intellectuals and not to aspire to the life of romantic painters. Thus, Greenberg’s father sent his budding artist of a son to study the more respectable and useful art form of literature at Syracuse University. After some time of intellectual waywardness, Greenberg’s scholastic interests eventually improved, and he graduated as Phi Beta Kappa in 1930, much to the delight of his father.<sup>34</sup> The period between his college graduation in 1930 and his first major publication in 1939 marks a period in which the young Greenberg floated from “the lousiest job[s] ever conceived by the million commercial demons of America,” but bolstered his intellect in his spare time with furious study of philosophy, language and history.<sup>35</sup> It was during these times of independent study that Greenberg was able to sharpen the intellect and the opinions that would later become so influential in art, literature and politics.

By the mid-1930s, Greenberg was back in New York City and had begun

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32 Clement Greenberg. “A Conversation in Three Parts.” Interview with Trish Evans and Charles Harrison. November 20, 1983. Published in Greenberg, *Late Writings*, 170.

33 Ibid.

34 Clement Greenberg. “Autobiographical Statement.” *Twentieth Century Authors*. (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1955).

35 Letter to Harold Lazarus. September 9, 1930. Published in Greenberg, *Harold*, 20.

moving in the Greenwich Village circles that consisted of a slew of literary and artist types, all espousing a loose bohemian/Leftist philosophy on life. The stimulation of Greenberg's political consciousness, which until then had remained stunted, began to stem from his participation in the highly charged intellectual and cultural atmosphere of 1930s Greenwich Village. This historical intellectual community would be the birthplace of the New York Intellectuals, the Beatniks and the New York School of composers and painters; it was within this influential cultural maelstrom that Greenberg's political consciousness developed. Greenberg spent as much time as he could hanging around with future Abstract Expressionist painters in their numerous low-rent loft studios, and rubbing elbows with the emerging New York Intellectuals on their crowded Downtown apartment floors.<sup>36</sup> During all the chain-smoking, arguing, painting and drinking, ongoing discussions of the "social intrigue in Greenwich Village" mainly centered on the "crisis of consciousness" that most left-leaning people were suffering from, due to the divisive issues of the Spanish Civil War, the Moscow Trials and the impending World War.<sup>37</sup> Openly declaring oneself as a Marxist or a Communist, which so many did in this community, became personally problematic once the political betrayal of the Nazi-Soviet non-Aggression pact of 1939 and the extremity of Stalin's party purges in the Soviet Union became public.<sup>38</sup> The general unabashed sympathy for the Soviet Union's supposed egalitarian image began rapidly crumbling among most of the Greenwich Village crowd. In the wake of the now discredited anti-fascist Popular Front ideology of the 1930s, Greenberg found himself amidst a volatile political climate where the loyal Stalinists and the anti-Stalinists (who were regrouping as Trotskyites) of Greenwich

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36 See Jed Pearl. *New Art City*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005) pp. 33-85 for insight into 1930s Greenwich Village.

37 "social" quote from letter to Harold Lazarus, March 11, 1938. Greenberg, *Harold*, 181. "Consciousness" quote from: Cox, *Art-As-Politics*, 144.

38 *Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, German Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Moscow, August 23, 1939*. This treaty was received with horror by the New York Leftist community. Greenberg stated in a letter "The Russian-German pact kept me up all of the night before last....I now have an awful feeling about the world." Letter to Harold Lazarus. August 23, 1939. Greenberg, *Harold*, 207.

Village were intellectually tearing themselves apart in pre-war New York City.<sup>39</sup>

In April 1937, the Trotsky/Stalin debate that plagued the American Left for years came to a crucial juncture. Following Josef Stalin's accusation of Leon Trotsky committing espionage on the Soviet Union while in internal exile, Trotsky fled to Mexico where artist Diego Rivera and poet Andre Breton met and harbored him.<sup>40</sup> These three initiated a discourse with the New York Intellectuals (now Greenberg's inner circle) in an attempt to realign the international intellectual Left with Trotsky's version of socialism. After several letters from the triumvirate to Greenberg's associates through their newly reformed cosmopolitan modernist literary magazine, *Partisan Review*, philosopher John Dewey led a Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials (or the Dewey Commission) to Coyoacan, Mexico to meet with Trotsky.<sup>41</sup> The Dewey Commission investigated and ultimately exonerated Trotsky for the crimes levied at him by Stalin during the Moscow Trials, and the Commission found him to be innocent of espionage. This in turn discredited Stalin in the eyes of many of the international intellectual Left and initiated the "collapse of the intellectual authority of Stalinism" for (most of) the New York Intellectuals.<sup>42</sup> Greenberg's initiation into actual political activity commenced here when he was asked to directly participate in the Dewey Commission; however, he declined in order to stay in New York to help prepare a

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39 Wald. *The New York Intellectuals*, 267-295 and Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 49-102..

40 In a letter to Harold Lazarus, Greenberg expresses his hope that "Trotsky gets safely into Mexico." December 22, 1936. Greenberg, *Harold*, 171.

41 Letters to PR: Leon Trotsky. "The Future of *Partisan Review*: A Letter to Dwight Macdonald." (January 20, 1938) and Andre Breton and Diego Rivera (Trotsky did not sign this letter). "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art." *Partisan Review*, (September, 1938) and Leon Trotsky. "Art and Politics in our Epoch." *Partisan Review*. (August, 1938).

42 Greenberg wrote that he personally felt that Trotsky was "a good man." Letter to Harold Lazarus. March 23, 1937. Greenberg, *Harold*, 108. The official findings of the committee are presented in John Dewey, Suzanne La Follette, and Benjamin Stolberg *Not Guilty: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trial.*, (New York: Harper, 1938). Stalinism quote from Clement Greenberg. "The Renaissance of the Little Mag," *Partisan Review*. (Winter, 1941). pp. 17-22.

forum for the Commission's findings in *Partisan Review*.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Greenberg found himself in the middle of an international effort to redefine the character and the future of the international intellectual Left.

Greenberg, by now adamantly aligned with the Trotskyites and having already joined ranks with *Partisan Review*, began writing in earnest to help combat the general "feeling of culture being threatened."<sup>44</sup> It was within the pages of *Partisan Review* that Greenberg would publish his first influential essay in 1939, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."<sup>45</sup> "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" represented Greenberg's first attempt to synthesize his potent views on the evils of mass culture, the potential of modern art and the direction of global politics into a powerful literary model. The article struck a note with intellectuals internationally and the success of the article prompted Greenberg's swift addition to the editorial board of *Partisan Review*. As an editor of *Partisan Review*, Greenberg was now a core member of one of the most renowned intellectual circles of the era and had access to a distinguished forum for his ideas.<sup>46</sup> Under Greenberg's editorship, *Partisan Review* became a literary bastion of "cultural elitism and political radicalism" that reflected the New York Intellectual's "call for a return to [thinking about] politics" while analyzing and writing about modern culture.<sup>47</sup> Greenberg described the sense of political and cultural mission that permeated throughout the staff of *Partisan Review* when he wrote to Harold Lazarus, his longtime friend and correspondent, that "the mag must take a stand...nobody else is willing to go on record."<sup>48</sup>

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43 Greenberg discusses the Dewey Commission and the role of *PR* in a letter to Harold Lazarus. March 3, 1939. Greenberg, *Harold*, 196.

44 Interview with James Faure Walker. (1978). Greenberg, *Late Writings*, 152.

45 Clement Greenberg. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." *Partisan Review* (Fall, 1939), pp. 34-49.

46 Editors of *Partisan Review* included William Phillips, Phillip Rahv, Dwight Macdonald, George L.K. Morris and F.W. Dupee.

47 Cultural quote from Jones, *Eyesight*, 145. Politics quote from Greenberg, "Little Mag", 18.

48 Letter to Harold Lazarus. June 10, 1941. Greenberg, *Harold*, 240. The "stand" Greenberg was referring the cultural mission that he and the staff of *PR* were undertaking through their magazine. In a specific context, the "stand" refers to the then upcoming publication of Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald's anti-war piece, "10 Propositions on the War." *Partisan Review*, (Summer, 1941).

With politics as the underlying focus of the literary and arts magazine in the early-1940s, Greenberg and his *Partisan Review* cohorts set out to lead a concerted effort to counteract the previous intellectual support that the Soviet Union and Stalin had enjoyed among many American intellectuals in the 1930s. In order to alleviate themselves of the collective guilt that many of the New York Intellectual felt for previously supporting the spread of Stalinism, Greenberg and the other writers of *Partisan Review* began intellectually attacking the politics of Stalinism by harshly critiquing any manifestations of the newly despised strand of Marxism in modern art and literature. Greenberg's and *Partisan Review*'s denunciation of the brutal politics of Stalinism was a continuously interwoven theme within the magazine's reviews and editorials on modern art and literature during and after World War II.<sup>49</sup> Greenberg specifically focused on dismantling any credibility that existed for the Soviet associated painting style of Social Realism, because Greenberg felt the art to be nothing more than state propaganda, which was the lowest and most dreadful form of art. To counteract Social Realism, Greenberg fiercely promoted the modern abstract style that was beginning to emanate from Greenberg's old artist friends in Greenwich Village by the mid-1940s because of its radical and innovative nature compared to Social Realism.<sup>50</sup> Greenberg's espousal of American and Western Europe avant-garde painters as the prophets of a healthier modern culture represented a determined effort by Greenberg to ideologically enshrine the democratic, capitalist West as the home of "the most ambitious and effective...art".<sup>51</sup> Greenberg's politically inflected writings of the early and mid-1940s on modern art within *Partisan Review*, and by 1942 *The Nation* as well, symbolized the new ideological front that politically perceptive cultural intellectuals were opening in an

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49 Wald, *New York Intellectuals*, 217-226, Nancy Jachec, "Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1998), pp. 121-125 and Paul Hart. "Review: The Essential Legacy of Clement Greenberg from the Era of Stalin and Hitler." *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1988), pp. 77.

50 Greenberg described Social Realism painting as "the horror of our times." Clement Greenberg. "Art Chronicle: Irrelevance versus Irresponsibility." *Partisan Review*. (Spring, 1948).

51 Clement Greenberg, "Abstract Art," *The Nation*. (April 15, 1944).

attempt to aid in molding a positive perception of the United States and the West in the emerging post-war world.<sup>52</sup>

By the mid to late-1940s, the United States was at the political, economic and military helm of the post-war world. However, the Soviet Union emerged from World War II as a formidable opponent for the ideological allegiances of the de-colonizing third world and especially in the still smoldering Europe. Cultural intellectuals like Greenberg recognized that the United States' major hurdle to attracting a global ideological following was the perception of American culture, and thus the American character and spirit, as being materialist and shallow.<sup>53</sup> Greenberg sought to counteract this global perception by attempting to gradually shift the center of the modern art world from Paris, France to New York City. The pinnacle of this tactic came in Greenberg's controversial 1948 article, "The Decline of Cubism", where Greenberg declared, "that the main premises of Western art have at last migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power."<sup>54</sup> Greenberg based his bold announcement on the premise that the inherent superiority within the emerging modern American painting was due to its creative vitality and radical expression. This proved to be a primary theoretical component in the eventual establishment of American cultural hegemony because Greenberg "positioned American art at the front of avant-garde international modernism."<sup>55</sup> Greenberg's tactic was politically important because it greatly influenced the public perceptions of the quality and character of American

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52 Greenberg had resigned his editorship at *Partisan Review* by 1942, but remained an influential member and writer of the magazine until 1955. The resignation was due to a new job as the regular art critic in *The Nation*, which he held from 1942 to 1950. Ideological front discussed in Serge Guilbaut and Thomas Repensek. "The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America: Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of the *Vital Center*." *October*, Vol.15, (Winter, 1980), pp. 61-65 and Frances Stonor Saunders. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA in the World of Arts and Letters*. (New York: The New Press, 1999).

53 Greenberg was often guilty of making this very claim and perpetuating this image in the late-1930s early 1940s. Clement Greenberg, "Review of Four Exhibitions of Abstract Art." *The Nation*, (May 2, 1942).

54 Greenberg, "Decline", 369.

55 Jones, *Eyesight*, 378.

culture, overseas and at home, which in turn made people more susceptible to American political initiatives.<sup>56</sup>

By the very late-1940s, Greenberg's political perspective had shifted to compliment his recent championing of American art. Greenberg, along with many others within the Old Left, had shed his Trotskyism in order to adopt the more pro-American/capitalist stance of a Cold War Liberal.<sup>57</sup> This mass ideological transition of the late-1940s and early-1950s was a response to yet another philosophical crisis of the international left, in which with no American socialist revolution in sight, and the horrible prospect of a Stalinist world coming into clearer and clearer view, many within the so-called "independent" or anti-Stalinist left felt compelled to adopt the ideology of liberalism because it represented the most organized and effective response to Stalinism. While Greenberg's writings and his activities of this time reflected his newfound liberalism's intellectual distrust of communism, he was still a step removed from the widespread and pronounced fear and hysteria that began emerging during the early-1950s. While many within Greenberg's intellectual circle adopted a similar position such as Greenberg's, some clung to the hope of an eventual socialist revolution when the threat of Stalin would be defused. Into the 1950s, Greenberg increasingly saw this perspective as naïve, and even dangerous, and he ultimately saw these people as closet communists that were on the other side of the ideological fence.<sup>58</sup>

In light of the escalating Cold War abroad between the Soviets and the U.S., and the corresponding intellectual battle between Liberalism and Trotskyism at home, Greenberg continued his efforts to shape perceptions of the United States

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56 Hart, "Review", 81.

57 The best example of the Cold War Liberal political perspective is by Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s book the *Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949). Greenberg had an ongoing correspondence with Schlesinger dating from April 18, 1946 to March 27, 1951 about politics and administrative issues of *Commentary*. *The Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Personal Papers*. 1939-1989. John F. Kennedy Library National Archives and Records Administration. Box P-15.

58 Jachec, *Politics*, 108.

as the forerunner in the modern avant-garde art for the sake of supplanting the American cultural image abroad. He also became directly involved in several key political associations that addressed the perceived ideological threat at home, associations which gradually fostered an increasingly more conservative political ideology in Greenberg. Greenberg's political activities of the 1950s would largely stem from his recent arrival as an editor of the conservative and Jewish political/cultural magazine, *Commentary*. Greenberg's Jewish religion had remained in the background for most of his life, but his association as a Jew with other influential Jewish intellectuals enabled him to become a part of the prominent magazine. Greenberg's tenure at *Commentary* brought him into contact with the cultural and political philosophies of the emerging neoconservative icons, such as Irving Kristol. Greenberg began to adopt these philosophies as his own more and more in the 1950s.<sup>59</sup> While Greenberg's transformation into a Cold War Liberal reflected the wider shift of many in of the Old Left that had become disillusioned with communism and now sought, in the interest of combating Soviet influence, to propagate the tenets of American capitalism and democracy through intellectual and cultural discourse, Greenberg was one of the few that continued the ideological journey to the far right towards what would become neo-conservatism. Greenberg's budding neo-conservatism manifested most clearly in *Commentary*, which would prove pivotal in the "shap[ing of] the anti-Soviet attitudes of [Greenberg's] fellow conservative intellectuals" and "became, under [Greenberg's] leadership, required reading for Cold Warriors theorizing U.S. power."<sup>60</sup>

By December of 1950, Greenberg's influential editorship at *Commentary* resulted in an invitation to join the American Committee for Cultural Freedom.<sup>61</sup> The ACCF was an influential group of intellectuals that had formed in response to

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59 Nathan Abrams. *Commentary: 1945-59. A Journal of Significant Thought*. (New York: Mitchell Valentine and Company, 2006). Pp. 7-22.

60 Cox, *Art-As-Politics*, 142 and Jones, *Eyesight*, 84.

61 Other members of the ACCF included Daniel Bell, James T. Farrell, Sidney Hook, Irving Kristol, and Diana Trilling, Robert Oppenheimer, David Riesman, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

the success of the International Congress for Cultural Freedom overseas.<sup>62</sup> Much like the ICCF in Europe, the ACCF was a Leftist/Liberal coalition that sought to stimulate the proper cultural channels to promote the perception of individual freedom as a foundation of American culture. The agenda of the ACCF was very much an effort to aid in the political, cultural and ideological battle against communism. The ACCF provided direct funding for literature and art exhibitions that promulgated the ideological perspective of anti-communism and engaged in “the organization and execution of numerous anti-communist campaigns and programs.” In 1952, Greenberg received a nomination to the Executive Committee of the ACCF and oversaw a wide range of anti-communist political efforts that varied from direct political activity to subtle agitation.<sup>63</sup> Greenberg’s time with ACCF, from 1950 to 1953, proved to be the most politically active time in his career.

Greenberg’s newfound political conservatism often initiated collaborations with people who possessed very different cultural standards. In 1951, Greenberg found himself allied with the staunch political and cultural conservative, Michigan Congressman, George Dondero. Ironically, Dondero was famous for denigrating the very art that Greenberg was renowned for celebrating. Dondero claimed that Greenberg’s favorite art (Cubism and later, Abstract Expressionism) was communist filth and represented the cultural vacuum of the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup> While Dondero and Greenberg obviously disagreed over the nature of modern avant-garde art’s relationship to politics, the two united over a common enemy. By 1950, Greenberg had resigned from his duties at the *Nation* and under the auspices of the ACCF in 1951, Greenberg launched an attack on his former magazine that coincided with Dondero’s own ongoing campaign against the *Nation* intended to expose communist

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62 For history of the ICCF see: Hilton Kramer, “What was the Congress for Cultural Freedom?” *Twilight of the Intellectuals: Culture and Politics of the Cold War*. (Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 1999). Pp. 305-318.

63 Quote taken from ACCF website. For mission statement, brief history and complete list of activities undertaken by ACCF see: <http://dlib.nyu.edu/eadapp/transform?source=tamwag/accf.xml&style=tamwag/tamwag.xml>

64 U.S. Congress, House, “Congressman Dondero Speaking on How Modern Art is Shackled to Communism”, 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 16 August 1949, *Congressional Record*, 11584.

sympathizers within the liberal press.<sup>65</sup>

Greenberg's attack on the *Nation* began with a letter in 1951 that accused foreign editor Julio Alvarez del Vayo of using his column as a "vehicle through which the interests of a particular state power are expressed" and that del Vayo's writings "parallel that of the Soviet propaganda."<sup>66</sup> Freda Kirchwey, the *Nation's* editor-in-chief, refused to print Greenberg's letter because of its "defamatory and false...accusations", and threatened to "bring suit for libel against you and all others connected with its publication."<sup>67</sup> Greenberg defiantly responded by printing the letter in *The New Leader* (an organ of ACCF) and the *Nation* promptly filed a \$200,000 libel suit against Greenberg and *The New Leader*.<sup>68</sup> This precipitated a second attack on the *Nation* by Greenberg and the ACCF within the pages of *Commentary*, entitled "The Liberals Who Haven't Learned."<sup>69</sup> Kirchwey eventually retaliated by firing Margaret Marshall, the literary editor that had brought Greenberg into the *Nation*, because Kirchwey believed that Marshall was still an ally of Greenberg and possibly under his direct influence.<sup>70</sup> The ACCF kicked into high gear organizing an onslaught of letters from prominent intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. to protest the censorship of Greenberg's letter and "to bring Miss Kirchwey to her senses."<sup>71</sup>

Congressman Dondero observed this literary skirmish from Washington, D.C., and directly cited Greenberg as an ally in rooting out communist influence in the

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65 Insight into Greenberg's perspective on del Vayo incident: Jones, *Eyesight*, 84.

66 Clement Greenberg, letter to the editor of the *Nation*. Published in *The New Leader*, March 19, 1951

67 Greenberg quoted this statement in a letter to Schlesinger. March 27, 1951. *The Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Personal Papers*. 1939-1989. John F. Kennedy Library National Archives and Records Administration. Box P-15.

68 See Freda Kirchwey. "Why *The Nation* Sued." *The Nation*, June 2, 1951.

69 Granville Hicks. "The Liberals Who Haven't Learned." *Commentary*. (April, 1951).

70 Greenberg's influence on Marshall is debatable. It is more likely that Kirchwey fired Marshall out of spite because Greenberg and Marshall were close friends. Greenberg dedicated a book to her several years later. Clement Greenberg. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

71 Greenberg letter to Schlesinger. March 27, 1951.

press. He republished Greenberg's original letter to the *Nation* in the United States *Congressional Record*.<sup>72</sup> The rising wave of McCarthyism in Congress that Dondero symbolized had successfully appropriated Greenberg and the ACCF's campaign against perceived communist sympathizers for use in a much larger political arena. Greenberg was now on the radar as an ally of rabid anti-communists in Washington and a major adversary of anyone who sympathized with communism in New York. Greenberg clearly felt no more of his old sympathies for communism. In fact, while Greenberg and others in the ACCF acknowledged the danger of McCarthy, they distinctly believed that Stalin was by far the greater threat and, although sometimes at arms length, supported McCarthy and the more virulent forms of anti-communism.<sup>73</sup>

By the mid-1950s, Greenberg's continuous efforts within the art world to establish the Abstract Expressionist painters of New York, such as Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, as the leaders of international modern avant-garde art was beginning to take root in the minds of the American and global public. The United States now utilized the cultural magnetism that Greenberg had been so pivotal in creating around the New York School of painters as a counterweight to claims of American cultural deficiency. The instant and massive exportation of Abstract Expressionist works to Europe and Latin America by the State Department and the CIA was a strategy that aimed at building on American political hegemony through cultural persuasion. Greenberg's years of critical interpretation provided much of the needed intellectual and theoretical rationalization for the supremacy of American art and the quality of American culture. Greenberg's influence over the public's perception of modern art proved invaluable to the United States overseas.<sup>74</sup> This influence, coupled with Greenberg's domestic efforts to combat communism, established Greenberg as a person with significant political influence in the early to

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72 U.S. Congress, House, "Congressman Dondero Speaks on How the Magazine *The Nation* is Serving Communism". 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session. (May 4, 1951) *Congressional Record*, 4920-25.

73 Jones, *Eyesight*, 375.

74 See "second wave" scholarship Jachec, *Politics*, Craven, *Abstract*, Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, Jachec, "Modern".

mid-1950s United States.

By the late-1950s, the effort to establish American superiority in the political and cultural realm over the Soviet Union seemed complete. By 1957, the ACCF had dissolved due to a lack of perceived communist sympathizers within American culture and the Abstract Expressionists had taken the world by storm, proving to the doubtful masses that individual creative activity did exist in the United States. Greenberg's role in politics, therefore, began to recede. It seemed the urgency and uncertainty of the immediate post-war world was giving way to a calmer cultural atmosphere due to the efforts of the intellectuals in the early-1950s. In 1957, Greenberg lost his post at *Commentary* due to the internal politics of the magazine and retreated to begin working on several books.<sup>75</sup> While the beginning of the 1950s had been a hectic time for Greenberg's political career, the end of the decade found Greenberg rarely contributing to any political discussions or organizations.

The 1960s proved to be a conflicted decade for Greenberg. The decade began on a promising note when in May of 1960, he was asked to volunteer his essay, "Modernist Painting" to the United States Information Agency's Voice of America Forum Lecture Series.<sup>76</sup> Greenberg's authoritative voice was broadcasted to over five million listeners in Europe. Greenberg put forth his perspective on art, politics and modernism to an entire generation of up and coming European artist, scholars, critics and politicians.<sup>77</sup> However, at the same time, Abstract Expressionism was steadily in decline while Pop and Minimal art began their separate, but entwined ascensions in the world of art. Greenberg's failure to critically embrace the new art movements helped solidify the image of him as an intellectual reactionary and relic that the Clembashers were continually espousing by this point.<sup>78</sup> Then in 1967, the ACCF was exposed as a CIA funded organization and Greenberg, along with all the

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75 Abrams, *Commentary*, 189.

76 Clement Greenberg. "Modernist Painting." *Forum Lectures* (Washington, D.C., Voice of America), 1960.

77 Rubinfeld, *A Life*, 222.

78 Wolfe, *Painted Word*, 65-70.

other ACCF intellectuals, were branded as cultural imperialists.<sup>79</sup> Greenberg's years of prominence as a significant figure in art and politics had suddenly ended. He was now a figure of rebuke in both the worlds of art and politics, despite his momentous achievements and contributions to both.

By the late-1960s, Greenberg's political activity had all but ceased. Through interviews later in his life, Greenberg attempted to portray his career and his writings as apolitical, even though they clearly were anything but.<sup>80</sup> His reasons for attempting to block any sort of political interpretation of himself have remained undocumented, and therefore unclear. Perhaps Greenberg felt that future inquirers might view his political past as questionable or problematic and he was attempting to prevent his association with the wrong side of history.<sup>81</sup> By the 1970s, with the pinnacle of his political career behind him and the reach of his critical influence swiftly dwindling, Greenberg focus retreated further into refining his formalist aesthetics. Perhaps, the political dormancy of Greenberg's later years help explain the inability, or unwillingness, of later historians and scholars to interpret Greenberg as a politically important character. However, from the late-1930s to the late-1950s, Greenberg was clearly active in several significant political arenas that had lasting impact on the operating principles of the American Left, international modernism and the cultural Cold War. Therefore, the past and current scholarship that has preserved Greenberg for future generations as simply an eminent American art critic is misleading and limited in its portrayal. The legacy of Greenberg has suffered an intellectual disservice with the continuation of this limited perspective that represents him as aesthetically significant, but not politically important.

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79 The ACCF was exposed in the articles "I'm Glad the CIA is 'immoral'" by *Thomas W. Braden*, *The Saturday Evening Post*. May 20, 1967 and *Christopher Lasch*, "The Cultural Cold War." *The Nation*. September 11, 1967.

80 Interview with James Faure Walker. (1978). Greenberg, *Late Writings*, 153.

81 There is precedence for this sort of maneuver: Caroline A. Jones writes how Greenberg actively attempted to posture Abstract Expressionism as apolitical, despite the overt Leftist history of many of the painters, in order to shield the art from the rabid anti-communism sweeping the United States in the 1950s. Jones, *Eyesight*, 375. The stunning success of this maneuver may have influenced a personal application of it.

Infinitely more important than the nature of the scholarly perceptions surrounding Greenberg's personal legacy is the general perpetuation of the historical obstructions and distortions towards the underlying political nature of modern culture as a whole. In this specific case, by repressing or ignoring the political history of people like Greenberg, or movements like modern avant-garde art, the full implications of the convergence between post-war/Cold War politics and modern culture will remain disguised. In a contemporary context, when culture has become an acknowledged critical component of understanding the intricacies of political discourse and conflict, is it not imperative to understand the roots of the synthesis between modern culture and politics? Is it not vital to comprehend the instituting of modern culture as a crucial element within American foreign policy? Is it not essential to the understanding of modern culture to grasp the intersections between avant-garde art of the 1940s and 50s and Cold War politics? Shouldn't the historical understanding of Clement Greenberg as the most influential American art critic of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century extend to include an acknowledgment of the art critic's significant political agency as a central figure in the shaping of cultural and political perceptions? A proper political reconsideration of Clement Greenberg is historically important in its own right, but it also functions as a much needed piece within the much larger puzzle that is attempting to depict (in the hope of fully comprehending our culture today) the political agendas, cultural forces and artistic evolution of the not-so-distant past in a proper and balanced representation.

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*LOUIS BATTAGLIA is a native of Buffalo, New York and recently earned a Graduate degree in History from the University at Buffalo. While studying under the History department at the University at Buffalo, he focused on the ideological connections between music, art, media and politics in the late-20<sup>th</sup> Century United States and the underappreciated art of criticism. He is currently working as a freelance writer for several websites, including Popmatters.com and Venuszine.com, and a local print publication entitled Edible Buffalo. He plans to continue this line of work until he finds a PhD program that will accommodate his intellectual interests.*

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