

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Digital Institutional Repository

Theses

5-22-1981

Generative systems & the sense of vision

James Bouchard

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Bouchard, James, "Generative systems & the sense of vision" (1981). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact repository@rit.edu.

Generative Systems
&
The Sense of Vision

by James Bouchard

APPROVALS

Advisor: Fred Meyer

Date: 7/8/81

Associate Advisor: Bauy Walson

Date: 4/29/81

Associate Advisor: Name Illegible

Date: 6/1/81

Graduate Academic
Council

Representative: Fred Meyer

Date: 7/8/81

Dean, College of Fine &
Applied Arts: Dr. Rob Johnston PhD

Date: 7/13/81

I, James Bouchard, hereby grant permission to the
Wallace Memorial Library, of R.I.T., to reproduce
my thesis in whole or in part. Any reproduction will
not be for commercial use or profit.

Date: 5-22-81

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Generative Systems and the Sense of Vision

by

James Bouchard

Thesis Proposal:

All expression is organized, voluntarily or involuntarily, occurring in more or less perceptive sequences of form. As my thesis, I would like to organize the sequences of my own particular vision in the architectural form of screens, as screens are quite immediately perceived as units, each with an integral function within the artwork, the work of art itself having a function in the environment. As to the "Generative System" of the artist, the generation of an image is a system of personal vision; it is presented as a scemata of perception. The visual development of the artist's image is an abstraction of the essentials of a sense of place. The idea of generative systems is reflected in this organization of expression as the general tendency of the whole of humanity to generate systems by which it understands itself and its relation to the world.



I

Definition of screen, the noun, from Webster's

1. device used as protection from heat or drafts, or
as ornament...
2. something that shelters, protects or conceals...
- 3.b. a system for examining and separating into
different groups...
4. something that receives or retains a mental image
or impression...

Somewhere in the back of my conscience, I have implanted the tendency to try and avoid talking about art in the so-called "spiritual" sense, in the sense of a "Divine Spark". Such an understanding of art is not wrong, I suppose, but it may be more edifying to concentrate on the more practical, pragmatic aspects of the action of the artwork. There is the most obvious reality of Ideas transmitted through art, that is not so much the ennobled sense of joy, as a humble sense of duty. The "making noble" of emotions seems to me rather false and frivolous, as the attribution of qualities of aristocracy is an exclusivying and deadening non-sense. To avoid approaching those ideas transmitted through art, by casting about in the shadows of the genii for some sort of noble spirit, is to avoid refining sensibilities in art in any sort of universal way.

The original intention of intelligible forms was not to entertain us, but literally "re-mind"us.

-A.K.Coomaraswamy

1.

I believe in the advancement of humanity; not what man is, but what humanity could be. I want my painting to be a model for what humanity could be; not an easily accessible "divertisement" but a challenge

to sharper thinking, sharpened perception. I suppose that the root of my contra-spiritual tendencies is this faith in evolution, if, as is commonly thought, the spiritual means something eternal and changeless. Tying up the tendencies of the contemporary painter with the spectre of "spiritual" forebearers seems to lock art into a cosmic treadmill.

There is a link between form-making, problem-solving, abstraction, art and evolution. The link may be more in the Development of Understanding than in the Ambiguous Spiritual Thread, but then understanding may be the un-ambiguous spiritual manifestation. Art makes for the understanding of Life. Art is other than feeling or thought, a different form of evolving/involving different sensibilities; mapping out visually a way to understanding. History is just knowing where one is going by knowing where one's been. Too often it is used to glorify what one is doing to go absolutely nowhere, as in the vain effort of many painters to remain true to the somewhat vague spiritual vein of the "Masters". It usually results in the hypertrophy of one aspect of the art, usually that furthest from the actualities of real life. It is the actualities of life which are real in the end; where art fits in is as George Kubler put it in "The Shape of Time":

...Aesthetic inventions enlarge human awareness

directly with new ways of experiencing the universe rather than with new objective interpretations.

2.

The idea of useful art is not far from the essence of generative systems as I see it. Interpretation is a manipulative process; conceived in the light of an individual belief, judgement or process. Generation is the process of bringing something into being. Use is a method of applying something to experience. A Useful art then applies art to experience by generating a new way of using the world around oneself. The spectator goes from being used as a receptacle of an interpretation, to being user.

Looking at art as something in which the spectator goes from being used to being user, the sense of painting can be found in the various sequences of vision that painting operates in. In order to be able to consider any sense of validity in a painting, it is necessary to know its position in the sequence of Painting, its relation to the events which cause it to be. The emotive quality of the painting as a thing in-and-of itself is important in the sense of the temporal appeal of encounters with artwork, but the making-sense of the artwork is what gives it the quality of validity. The most personal or abstract image-making of the artist is more comprehensible in the context of its sequential placing, made evident. In a

Generative Systems artwork, the operation of the system is made evident, crucial to the successful explication of the artist's creative action, a machine in which all the moving parts are exposed. The system is an exoskeleton for the personal, abstracted perceptio of the artist. The perceptual machine of the artist is the "used" article in the operation of art considered generatively.

It is the beauty of human constructions that I wish to represent in my painting; the basic cohesive form shared in the creation of any human image. Part of any creation is the setting-up of a system, and the alterations which occur in the system due to the inventive urge. In a sequence that I set up in a screen painting, the bends and breaks in the sequence lend to different relative positionings of form and the creation of a mystery of sequencing that always is interrupted and altered in some way. It is not exactly an off-hand operation, but the alteration of a sequence of formal positionings in a structure is what lends the work a sense of invention and meaning.

It occurs to me that painting in itself is not all that important. We pluck some hairs off a pig and take some colored glue-y sort of stuff to a surface. So may people justify it, glorify it to the point that fine art has no relevance to anyone in general, but only relevance to the mind, and even then not so much in the mind, but in some vague emotional "spiritual" consciousness. In my own personal experience paintings are somethings that get piled up against the studio wall, not even so fine as sound or light, not to speak of the fine-ness of thought even. Paintings are things that I like having around, of course, so I keep making them, but their relevance has to extend out of some artificial value system, to enter into the normal course of things. Artificial value systems may have been beneficial at one time when society relied on image-making to record events and scenes, but the level to which situational documentation has risen due to technological advances, such as in photography etcetera, has rendered for all practical purposes such artifices contradictory and useless. It seems to me that most contemporary art exists in relation to other value systems, that all these "fine art" movements complement each other, cancel each other out, until the only relevant art is that which documents the "Artist at Sea" amidst contrary

waves of all this fine-ness which is claimed to be art.

There is the system of art, the subject matter, of the representation of the artist's studio, which is what all those nudes are, all those figures portraying the physical reality of the study of art being the obvious study of humanity, and the humanity to the artist. The study of the human figure is one of the most human things that an artist can undertake, as a study of a selected vision of what the artist sees; and it is the most obviously relevant artificial system that the artist can assume, but what occurs to me is that the artifice may not be so strong if the vision is less selective and more inclusive. If my painting can be less an object on the wall, less removed from what goes on around me, then the value system by which it operates will be less artificial, less hierarchal in relation to what I am.

From "Existence, Space and Architecture" by
Christian Norberg-Schulz:

To possess a system of values means that one wants and is convinced that the world ought to have a certain structure. ...A modern pluralistic society where different value systems interfere, makes great demands on the intentional depth. We therefore ought to have knowledge of value systems other than the one we personally profess, and be able to change attitudes when necessary.

Somehow the idea of changing attitudes for different value systems is part of my intent in creating generative systems, at least in the symbolization of the structures of the physical object of the painting, which changes attitudes in relation to the situational changes in the environment. The relationships of different value systems in modern contemporary society is very complex and not to be shrugged off. It is an Inter-connected and Integrated network, a tricky circuit; much is to be gained in being eclectic. I am convinced that the world ought to have a certain structure, or at least be seen with a certain structure, so I try to structure my painting to a certain system of values. Hopefully this structuring will have some relation to other systems of value, for example, in abstract or non-objective work, the relationship of that system to a pictorial, literal work would be effected by its absence of referent. Abstract art always has had a meaning in that it does not contain a pictorial representation of immediate reality, however negative that may seem. That was what Ad Reinhardt was getting at in his paintings of negation; it would seem that by constructing another system of values altogether in art has the effect of making the world more aware of the multiplicity of value systems by which the world

is described. Paintings of black squares have no less fantasy than paintings of cherubs, and the fantasy is what constructs a broadly cognizant value system.

Ever since I can remember thinking about being an artist, I have found myself in the process of approaching the problems of my art in a serial fashion, working and re-working the attributes of a situation or thing or idea, realizing the greater satisfaction in the artwork approached from many angles or at least brought through a sequence of changes that would approximate a thorough-ness of investigation. Of course in the earliest stage of this kind of involvement in expressing myself visually, in early student work, it would seem most unsystematic, and more like searching in the nooks and crannies of visual expression for a personal form, than any investigative involvement. I would be satisfied with such an explanation of my work at the time, except for the fact that the most personal forms that I could come up with were quite derivative and multi-referential, at least to my own hindsight. It probably was during the period of study that I spent in Tours, France, that it occurred to me that personal form is arbitrary and acquired, molded by the culture into which one happens to be dropped.

Searching for a personal form is just about as sensible a searching for a personal Mind. I don't wish to deny any metaphysical possibilities but when one is talking about physical actualities as expressions of "Mind", one must recognize that the vocabulary for expression is acquired, influenced by motives entirely exterior to the said "mind". Rather than preoccupy myself with the rather hopeless task of developing a consciously personal form, I decided to occupy myself with the conscious adoption of extra-personal forms as an investigative procedure for making art. Almost any artist would agree that it doesn't pay to wait for inspiration to hit, and especially when one is waiting for an inspiration of a personal nature. Artists work continually with conventions.

When I first came to Rochester, I was most concerned with re-building the foundations of my art, since obviously I had some sense of vocation in art, something to say; since the forms couldn't be more refined in the sense of visual purity, the structures of communication would have to be refined. It was a point like that in a conversation when one asks oneself, "Are these people getting the point?", when all the words are right and still there seems to be a gap in the grasp of meaning. Life at times looks like a Minotian maze and all the

artist is to do is to build walls that close-off those dead ends on the way out. There is a Minotaur of Ignorance on the other end, after all. The walls I was building seemed rather ineffective for all the gaps they left. This of course is concerned with systems of aesthetics, and the mind, but every artist no matter what visual persuasion deals with some sort of personal aesthetics. Aesthetics is something that quite naturally works towards its own end, in that it builds walls to lead one out of the maze of its own walls. That is how the aesthetics of the Minimalist movement could make sense in its anti-aesthetic development of concept. I could see how an anti-aesthetic position could be taken for a variety of reasons, out of cynicism or out of the urge for freedom to build one's own aesthetic system, and in a sense that is what I decided I should try when I came to Rochester.

The way I decided to approach creating my own personal system of aesthetics was to adopt a neutral grid image, and to limit my expression to that direct orientation. The main thrust of the painting that I've done since is a development on that grid orientation. I'd read an article in Artforum by Amy Goldin called "The Body Language of Pictures" which stated "Form is the grammar of artistic utterance." and went on to ex-

plain many artists' interest in the involvement of linguistics in their art, the form of knowledge as would be expressed in books. This led me to the thought that a grid structure in painting is actually a way of referring to the kind of communication as is found in books. Each of the units of information of a body of painting is like a page of a book, a sequence of perceptive events which add up to a more-or-less easily assimilated perception of life in general. When I began to see a body of artwork as being done in those terms, as a sequence of perceptive events, I figured that the perceptive events that I was interested in were concerned with how one thing changes into another, sequences of events being the occurrence on a field of a certain color shape, and the chance alterations in the sequence. The alterations in a sense become the subject of the painting, though they are invisible, more an implication than an outright subject.

This seems to operate as a readable system when it is read very closely, as close as my own aesthetic vision of that whole thing that I consider my painting. It is a quieter sort of art than most since I am playing my cards very close to my chest in not demanding attention to the aesthetic system I've cooked up, since the paintings come off, I believe, as a sort of deco-

rative, non-cognitive, almost-crafty work. The grid system enabled me to avoid a central theme being read into the painting, to disperse the attention of the viewer so that the totality of the work as an entity would be considered a unique artistic experience, not allowing for subjective flights of fancy. I wanted to state information in painting that would be understood in itself. The subject of the painting is how the painting is read, and the reading could be done in layers of depth as opposed to linearly, as in books, from front to back.

As I was getting interested in the units of information ideas I was developing in my approach to painting, my attention was directed to an article in Afterimage, Summer 1980, about the work of the Generative Systems Workshop at Columbia College in Chicago, consisting of xerox-type artworks, mainly in the form of books, mostly dealing in a very personal form of information transferences. The Nexus with my work which was very removed from such personal forms and the very personal form evinced in the reproductions accompanying the text was in this quote:

Practice in both linear and associative thinking in the Generative Systems workshop takes the forms of group and individual brainstorming, of working systematically with the attributes of any idea or thing and combining those attributes into a syn-

thesis which can be acted upon in successive steps, or generations, from the original idea.

5.

It actually was this kind of idea that I was trying to get at, investigating the attributes of an idea and organizing my observations into units of information. It was originally the resonances of color that interested me as ideational attributes to organize, but when I realized that the grid structure was not as important as a visual unit, that the real interest lay in the recognizable re-working of an idea that would be linear and rational at the same time it would be associative and irrational. This was in line with things I was reading at the time, such as this from "The Mathematical Basis for the Arts":

The subject of our investigation is the morphology of creatorship... up to now we have not had such a theory; thus we are unable to formulate the kind of regularity which controls the appearance of new ideas in the world.

6.

And this from a footnote in "The Selected Writings of A.K. Coomaraswamy":

Delight or satisfaction may be either aesthetic or intellectual (rational). Only the latter pertains to "life", the nature of which is to be in act; the satisfactions that are felt by the senses being not an act, but a habit or passion; the work of art then only pertains to our "life" when it has been understood, and not only when it has been felt.

7.

The former quote reinforced my resolution to center my thesis on generative systems. The latter reinforced the nature of the forms that I would use in expressing, or

denoting, the generative system in effect.

All these readings drew together a lot of disparate elements in art, the traditional versus the avant-garde, the abstractionist versus the realist, for example, when I realized that art could be thought of as a generative systems' expression, the following-through of an idea. All art is a manifestation of an alteration or addition to the environment that generates some sensation, either intellectual or emotional. Evidently the sensation generated in me caused me to attempt to generate systems of art manifestations. The systems operating in any normal situation are quite veiled and to most people (myself included) are quite obscure, it seems, and I want my art to remain true to the normal situations of life, so the painting system I want to generate should be more-or-less obscure and veiled, at least to avoid the appearance of dogmatism. Making the paintings was one way to veil the painting, with all those ornamental, architectural, decorative references, was to make it in the form of a home furnishing, an immediately environmental object, and then to bring in additional themes on the painted surface, such as diagonal lines as an expression of an attribute of perspective, an environmentally oriented motif.

The first primary sign one can reasonably be sure of is rhythm, sequences of overlapping animals highly suggestive of an effort to create a sign of behavioral smoothness.

8.

-Morse Peckham,
"Man's Rage for Chaos"

I wanted my painting to be readable, though without any overt tendencies towards restrictions on form at the same time as it avoided arbitrariness. So I was concerned with primary signs, and as the above quote from Morse Peckham states in a chapter discussing the signs in painting, the first primary sign of a generative system is the perception of rhythm. The rhythm in the painting on screens that I wanted to make manifest was a Kinesthetic movement, something that would be related to almost humanly, in the sense of the mechanics of anatomy. Like a dancer, I want to express an idea through a relation of parts, the movement of parts, different physical positionings, in my case of paint, as opposed to the dancer's physical positionings of the body. The configurational relationship of the parts of my painting hope to express the attributes of a situation, at the same time that the situation is the painting. For me, the rhythm set up by the positioning of the screen is interesting in itself, a form of daily architecture.

In an essay by Raymond Bayer called " the Study of Rhythm", I came upon this statement, italicized:

Phenomena of the aesthetic order are all characterized on every level, by a certain constancy: and this constancy is revealed to us in the study of rhythms.

This seems to me to be rather close to the wording of my thesis proposal, in a much shorter form, having reduced "the organization of sequences of form" to a certain constancy, and the "study of generative systems" to the study of rhythms. The author of the article goes on:

In the first place, rhythm has the contradictory privileges of being both perceptible and inward. It undoubtedly participates in duration, as this is incorporated in the movements of consciousness, but it can also be perceived as a scansion of space. Rhythms are images of reality that take their place in space and audible time. The plane of rhythm is therefore at the true intersection of the interior domain and the realm of things.

9.

In the pursuit of the study of generative systems, "reflected in this organization of expression as the general tendency of the whole of humanity to generate systems by which it understands itself and its relation to the world", I wanted to study the perceptible and the inward, which could be in the study of rhythm. I can remember walking through the darkened streets of the small town where I grew up, when I was younger, all by myself, singing a song to the rhythm of my steps; making up that song was a way of coordinating my inner world

to that exterior world, as dark and foreboding and mysterious it seemed. Almost anyone would admit that the secret to surviving in daily life is in developing a rhythm in one's activities.

The art of living is based on a rhythm--on give and take, ebb and flow, light and dark, life and death. By acceptance of all the aspects of life, good and bad, right and wrong, yours and mine, the static, defensive life, which is what most people are cursed with, is converted into a dance, "the dance of life", as Havelock Ellis called it. ...The acceptance of the situation, any situation, brings about a flow, a rhythmic impulse towards self-expression.

10.

-Henry Miller

It would seem that art is meant not so much to provide succor, but to be a reminder of the activity of doing as consciously as possible, the consciousness of the dance of life as an awareness of the rhythmic impulse that lives in the abstract..It is a relief to shut off the alarm that would wake one up to life, and there is succor in the rhythmless-ness of sleep, that sleep that most people walk around in, but it would seem that art has a nobler function than that of "succor" and it is not even to say that art has to be an altogether radical activity, depending on pre-conceived notions of true emotions. It is enough to deal with thought, with the abstracting process that is foremost in human evolutionary capacity, to co-ordinate the interior with the exterior realms of humanity.

A fuller clearer vision- not more safety
appliances!

11.

-Henry Miller

An acceptance of one or another aspect of life is a characteristic of the successful artwork, an acceptance because we have been made aware of an aspect of life, a vision of which we had previously been unaware. It implies an ongoing evolution as well as an involution, something progressive, in being Art that makes us more aware of movement through life, "the Dance of Life".

The Portable Opera

An object is a system of perceptual images endowed with a constant spatial form throughout its sequential displacements and constituting an item which can be isolated in the causal series unfolding in time.

12.

-Christian Norberg-Schulz,
quoting Jean Piaget

This, to me, is a good summation of my idea of generative systems of arts concentrating on a constructive world-view, as opposed to the idea of arts that rely on a dormant view of the world, the restive, decorative arts. Any coherent sort of art is somewhat meditative, but sometimes it is less obvious in some forms than in others what it is to be meditating on. Recognizing the generative system of an artwork, in its "object-ness", is a coherent development of the meditative creativity of the arts.

In addition to the theoretical aspect of the quote, there is a similarity in a purely literal and descriptive sense of the object of my generative system, in its being bare-bones perceptual images with shared basic forms, repeating in sequential changes, revealed over a over a large space relating to a large space in time. In the stream of time, the screen-form folds and

unfolds, relating to the causality of the environment.

I've always wanted to make the awareness of horizontality and verticality very obvious. Emphasizing the objectness of the painting is one way to do it, especially when the painting falls into the traditional rectangular format. To quote Jack Burnham, "Intrinsically, works of art are devoid of meaning; as signs their meaning lies in becoming a segment of a larger context." Placing the work of art in the world of objects places the work of art in a larger context. I can't see that placing my artwork closer to the popular conception of reality could make it any less an essentially effective work. The drama of gravity is played out by the object of the painting.

13.

In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" from the book, Signs, the following sentence struck me:

The whole of spoken language surrounding the child snaps him up like a whirlwind, tempts him by its inner articulations, brings him almost up to the moment at which all this noise begins to mean something.

14.

As far as I could remember, the complexity and interrelationship of things in general did seem like a whirlwind to me, and by limiting the study of the whirlwind to linguistics, as Merleau-Ponty was saying that Saussure did, a general pattern of structuring can

be deduced; as in:

The untiring way in which the train of words crosses and re-crosses itself, and the emergence one unimpeachable day of a certain phonemic scale according to which discourse is visibly composed..."

15.

All that I felt was the role of the painter was crossing and re-crossing of vision, "organized in terms of itself, that has an interior and ends up laying claim to meaning." The idea of a generative systemization of the artist's vision being a claim to meaning pivots on the apparent esotericism of the imagery, the terms of itself, the rules that it plays by. Playing is the correct word, too, since the sense of play is very specific while it is tonally ambiguous, there being serious play and jovial play at the same time is an accurate example of the breadth of activity summed up in the word.

The play of the rules in the artist's generative systemizing is generally thought of as the essence of imaginative art, though in the sense of the rules as component parts of the system, the mortar between the bricks, then it is obvious that all a greater agitation does is rock the edifice, destroy the system. And any generative system of the artist will be personal, referring to itself, no more in need of being shaken

than any system of perspective dreamt up by the Renaissance artist, and if anything would be an accurate observation about art, it is that the perpetual shaking-up of systems set up in the past by other artists is the chief activity of most artists. Not only does this activity take place on the level of the artwork in relation to itself being an affront to past systems of artwork, but also in the existence at all of any artwork being part of that past system. Twentieth-Century art is contradictory to almost all the art of the past in general, if not in spirit, yet it is part of the same system. In another sense the work of the artist one day after another is the same contradiction, a signature on the failure of the work in the past, an ongoing system, that is always in need of regeneration.

The intersection of the interior and exterior domains would seem to be the realm of art, since the process of looking at art, to use a primary example, has to do with observing a manifestation of the exterior sort and making an interior judgement of aesthetic or non-aesthetic nature in relation to a certain assumed or stated context. Probably the most solipsistic, fully self-realized and created context of art forms is found in music, and the study of rhythm

easily touches on music. The passage of time is an obvious mechanism for reading the work of art, for establishing the relationship between perceiver and perceived. In most traditional music, the relationship between the performer/composer is very clearly defined, but in certain contemporary composers there is a tendency to make the interior domain of the audience more involved in the sensible experience of perceiving the art. An example is 4'33" by John Cage, that amount of silence, filled only by the thoughts and actions of the audience; or the disjunctive repetitions of Steve Reich or Terry Riley or Phillip Glass. In the same way, I wanted to make the interior domain of meanings of the painting less solipsistic, less aesthetic in the painting itself, and more dependant on the aesthetic judgement of the viewer. Part of that aim is served by the form of the screen, as an architectural and almost-craft character, but part is also served by the form of the painting-as-application-of-paint-to-a-surface.

In studying the music of Phillip Glass and Terry Riley, I discovered in it the structure of art in sequences of rhythms that would be rather repetitious in character, yet altered in some way over long periods of time, to produce washes of sound, highly allusionistic. There also was a string quartet by a contemporary

composer whose name escapes my memory, which consisted of a series of notes played over and over again as fast as possible until a mistake is made, and the resultant phrase with the mistake is then to be repeated until another mistake is made, and so on, ad infinitum. The resulting imagery seems rather humorous, if only for its freneticism. A simulacrum of modern society. Before I began to work on screens, I was interested in puzzles, the imagery and nature of puzzles, constructing paintings on a grid in the context of newspaper crossword puzzles, roughly symmetrical, yet altered by shifts in placement and color relationships. The mystery was in the alteration of the symmetry and the reciprocity of the color relationships. The shifts in one construct to the next led me to think in terms of sequences, and the understanding of those sequences. At the same time, probably in anticipation of the thesis work as a public statement, I wanted to avoid the implication that the self is the only existant thing in an art experience. I wanted to take the puzzling experience out of the mind and put it into the painting. In the words of Morse Peckham:

The hypostatization (of categorical constructs, such as "Baroque Style") serves as a defense against the problems and disorientation which are elicited in the individual when he notices disparate data, when he becomes aware of the gap between the behavioral pattern and the demands made by interaction with the environment.

It was this sort of painting that I wanted to paint, of a hypostatization of constructs in rhythm; of a constancy of a generative system.

In some way. I want to make art with some aspect of performance in mind, just as one may make a painting that strikes some sympathetic note, either in the mind or in the heart, and creates an environment, a spatial orientation of spectator to object. A performance draws in an element of temporal change in spatial orientation placing the artwork in the more immediate realm of the spectator. The artwork is a little more true to the everyday existence of the audience of the workings of art if it is more than a representation of a moment in time. If it weren't so, then there would be no reason for the study of the history of art, since all art history is an attempt to take art out of a frozen moment, icicle-paintings on museum walls. Photography, the art of frozen moments, has been obviously submerged in social commentary in such attempts to qualify it, to connect it to the existence of the audience. It seems that it may be advantageous to utilize this connecting process in the artwork, to start with that as the real subject matter in doing any artwork.

I have always thought of myself as a traditional painter, actually, concerned mainly with putting colors

in a certain form on a surface, but it is this concentration on the performance of the artwork that distracts me now, from the rather dumb submission to assumed principles of making art of painting. Subject matter is something you have in joke-telling, light is what happens when you flick a switch, form is only part of performance. Everything is actually a lot plainer than it sounds in art theory, which may be hard to believe, considering the dullness of most essays on aesthetics, but for example, all those elements of good artistic composition are never meant to compete with the most everyday experience outside of it, but only to refer to it. On the other hand, when I consider the sequence of my artistic concerns as a sequence of performances, it creates an everyday experience directed towards a search for meaning. I think that every artist is concerned with the performance of showing of the artworks in a sense, in that it is an exhibit as much of the sequence of works as a search for meaning. than an exhibit of individual works, the relationship between which is unimportant.

I definitely don't want it to seem that I am being unromantic in concernig my thesis with "generative systems" since it is only in the sense that my painting concentrates on avoiding subjective emotional interpretations of what is romance. One of my definitions

of romance is knowing what to do in awkward situations. In a sense, every situation is awkward, has that potential for disorientation; every situation is a tempering flame. The disorientation, to the point that it inhibits the functioning of the individual, is avoided when the individual is aware of the system which is in operation. Part of what I hope to do, then, is to create a model of a system to be deciphered, according to both linear and associative modes of thought. In a way I am trying to further the cause of romanticism, in an abstractly allegorical way.

It is in the same way that you can think of the prime example of a generative system as being the family. There is definitely something romantic about the lineages in geneology, the study of generation. The biologically defined familial bonds are the most sacred in most cultures, for most people. There are complex generative factors at play in the development of familial boundaries. Concerning the painting with "generative systems" is one way of edifying the processes by which one unit generates another. It seems to be an un-romantic way to talk about it, but the subject is romance, the kind of stuff epics are made of. If only in that a Generative System painting is about the inter-connections of things, it is about romance. Romance is about relationships.

The form of my painting, by the way, is not meant to be implicated as the only form of generative systems in art since all painting could be said to be about the making of relationships; my painting is only more specifically about the "making" of relationships.

"Makin' Whoopee", so to speak.

In painting Generative Systems, I hope to create a new mode of seeing art. The hierarchal ordering of perception in art is in large part taken for granted, as paintings are seen in a more-or-less "assumed" context; while the seeing is a work as important as the act of creation. The process of reading a book is quite similar to looking at a generative work of art, in that the turning of pages, the scanning of units containing meaning in a sequence, creates impressions concluding in meaning of the work; the actual activity of collecting the impressions of the work is shared equally by the creator and the spectator. This collection of impressions is organized in the order of repetitive images that create overlapping patterns, at once dissimilar and complementary, not so different from the "push and pull" theories of Hans Hofmann, in that every form has a spec-

ific, if unstated, place in the painting, operating on the level of its related forms. The hierarchy of the painting is not assumed, but created in the eye of the spectator. The imagery of the painting avoids the referential assumption of meaning, but creates the reference to meaning by the assumption of relationships between the images of the painting. It is the order of art that creates meaning in a work of art, since a poorly ordered work of art will rarely be a well-understood statement, and will only be understood in the context of the drama of the artist's life. Making a drama out of the artist's life makes the creating of art an exclusive thing, since dramas are definite things, with beginnings and endings and a particular point of view, which for the individual involved in everyday existence is remote and unreal. Perception is always multi-faceted, if it is faceted at all, and everyday existence is a continuous sequence of events, departures and arrivals, changes in perspective, and if there is any drama at all, it is in the declension of the process of perception.



A general ungentlemanly agreement that "artists should not talk" prevents artists from twinging each other's consciences nowadays.

16.

-Ad Rheinhardt, 1960

I am led to believe that my preoccupations with painting are not entirely what is thought traditionally as visual concerns, which is why I chose to speak of my concerns in terms of generative systems. The implications of the term are not strictly visual, in fact rarely visual, except as a representational model, an illustration. Painting may exist for its own sake alone, but a few words can't hurt in explaining a generative system. I have a conscience, as an artist, and want to admit that the conscience of art is not something separate from an everyday conscientious-ness. In my everyday approach to making paintings there are certain thoughts I have in mind around which I organize what I want to represent. The relationship between those thoughts (especially as expressed in a verbal form) and the resultant paintings is another aspect of the generative system. Perhaps it is one worth perusing. The following pages are concerned with making available some material for perusal.

Thought in "Doing the Puzzle"

I had been working on a series of works in gouache, one a week for a number of weeks, and for a change, I decided to break out of that particular sequence of works, and do something more representative of the current flow of things. In my current flow of vision was Lisa doing the puzzle in the newspaper, which seemed to extend itself allegorically into various aspects of my life, the intellectual and practical problem-solving that goes on all the time. I suppose that when I think of myself as an artist, I think of it in terms of solving problems, practical or intellectual, as they all amount to the same quality of action. And instead of aesthetic judgement, I am tempted to look at art in terms of quality of action, the action and its "doing" process, the quality of intellectual action it produces and the equivalency between them. I look at Lisa's doing of the puzzle as a very artistic activity, though it may not fit into everyone's definition of "aesthetic". At any rate I have never been very good at puzzles from the newspaper, though I suppose that I have come up with puzzles of my own to do. One of the puzzles in my current flow of vision was the sequence of work I had found myself in, and how it fit into my life.

The abstraction that I was toying with from a sketch of Lisa doing the puzzle was becoming the form of the puzzle of my current vision. So I took the basic elements of the abstraction and repeated it over a screen structure, eleven times, an odd number (for asymetry's sake); working mainly on the possible interpolations of these basic forms, adding elements of punctuation, references to letter-forms, and breaking out of sequence-resembling patterns, to something I hope is a little more free; to be understood to be a representation of reality, in a poetic, abstracted, painted work of art.

Opera Moves Puppet Implicate

I wanted to develop in a gouache study the moving aspect of the three-dimensionality of a screen painting, that is, I wanted to explore the idea of movement in art, and how it relates to the more-or-less stationary way in which painting is generally seen. It is hardly a new idea to make paintings that are meant to be flexible in their inter-positionings, to note, the medieval triptych; nor is it new to make paintings that refer to movement, for all those paintings that refer to dancer's and dance proliferate through the ages. For example, there are the depictions of movement in the capture of Degas' dancers, or the Hindu depiction of the Dance of Shiva; one can see in a swiss music box, or the mystery of movement in the hidden strings of a puppet show. I had started to think of painting as something you move past, in some studies for a very long painting to be placed in a hallway, compelling the spectator to move or to resist movement, but nonetheless to think about movement. The most immediate movement that I could refer to, though, was in the painting itself, as a part of the environment, like the table with folding leaves on which one may place the feast.

Somewhere along the line, I became interested in the idea of folding (no pun intended as in "along the dotted..."). I had seen some sketches by Mondrian done on the insides of cigarette packs and realized that I got the most enjoyment out of the drawings when I imagined them folded back into the original cigarette-pack shape. It is like a door opening and closing, seeing a potential for one sort of function change into something else altogether. Like the twists and turns of a novel's plot line, the sidetracks I find myself on, a fold is the addition of an unknown element, and conscientiousness is only the unfolding of those unknown elements.

In "The Decorative Arts of the Forties and Fifties" by Bevis Hiller, I came upon a short chapter on the motif of Frames in post-war design, as a product of "the war-time habit of separated people communicating through photographs accustom(ing) them to people and scenes within frames." Frames are definitely stationary placements of points of view, in the painting with the frame, a frame is directing the vision, declaring the confines of the painting. At the same time, it would seem on the other hand to be rooted in the development of photography in communicating forms of popular vision. Frames are less essential in contemporary, possibly-post-modern art. The communication of contemporary popular forms now are

more the forms of movement, video-izations.

The plural of opus is opera; a set of compositions usually numbered in the order of its issue, by definition, and in the gouache study for "Opera Moves Puppet Implicate", the set of compositions is "moved", seen other than from its flat position. I wanted to develop a set of contrapuntal patterns, a sort of interweave that would have a number of possible readings. Then I wanted to present a certain vocabulary of "frames" for relations of forms with a certain relative similarity, as part of the generative implications of form. Generating the movement of the opera form, produces the implication of puppetry.

Richard Says It Looks Like A Bi-plane

All the time I am having these ongoing discussions with Richard on high art and low art. It is an odd discussion since we are always trying to be of the "high art" camp in discussing what we do refers to, high or low. I had done this painting that contained a cross-shaped element, an "x" shape made by the intersection of the underlying diagonal grid. It looked to refer to a tilted cross, a "high" subject matter, though it was only the result of the mechanics of the drawing. Richard said it looked like a bi-plane. What we do in painting always refers to something, even though it is art, an artifice, the work of art in itself. The problem with being Post-modern is mainly painting's problem, since the art of painting is more in its ideational sense, as opposed to sculpture which is more tactile. The nature of the two-dimensional work is linear, the nature of the three-dimensional work is associative. Associative thoughts cross linear thoughts in generative systems and the intersections create the aesthetic judgement. Bi-plane or not, it refers to something, it maintains a personal vision, in painting as a development of Painting. If the problem of Post-modernism is in the relationship of art to the pragmatic systems

of culture continually in change, then the frivolity of the nature of painting as static representations of the world, a series of museum pieces, is questionable. Painting does not alter the immediate environment in a spatial or tactile way as do sculpture or architecture; it relies on ideas. Perhaps Post-modern painting relies on rarefied ideas, refers to the pragmatic interpretation of generative culture, generative systems.

Lisa Lying Down

Diachronic: of, or relating to, or dealing with phenomena especially of language as they occur or change over a period of time.

Synchronic: concerned with the complex of events and personages existing in a limited time period and ignoring historical antecedents.

In that the diachronic is concerned with change, it is possible to think of it as dealing primarily with "action". The synchronic, on the other hand, would seem to have another character altogether, by example, one can site the synchronic nature of the experience when one's attention comes to rest on an effective artwork. "Rest" is the other half of the "action" duality, and though it implies absence of judgement, synchronic, does as well, in "ignoring historical antecedents".

The main impulse in doing a painting called, "Lisa Lying Down" came from observation of the cyclical nature of most activity, in the sense of an ever-altering sequence of rest/action, the utter reality of seasonal change, the inevitable glove of sleep following whatever barehanded activity one may involve oneself in. It is a natural pattern of things, underlying the nature

of experience, just as synchronic/diachronic understandings underline the patterns of comprehension. In developing a work towards a thesis, I have tried to take those things around me that form the stage of my life and put them in their proper philosophical perspective. The action of Lisa lying down has a meaning in its portrayal of "rest/action", and in taking an abstracted sketch and putting it in a sequence of change relates to a portrayal of "synchronic/diachronic". I want to cover all the bases, in a sense, I want to portray a more than synchronic work, to avoid leaving out possible ways of understanding the work of art. Perhaps it is academic, painting-as-formal-symbolic-theory, but it comes out of the things around me; at any rate, painting has always been the changeless academicism of a changing world, and in that sense, placing my painting on a changeable screen structure is counter-academic. I am less concerned with capturing a moment than with portraying an event, portraying change, diagramming the nature of change. Isn't that what a philosophical perspective does?

The Terrain in the View from Cold Mountain
(Pictured)

The most recent of my studies in gouache, for a screen painting, is taken from a Chinese poem, by Han Shan,

me/ i'm satisfied with the everyday way
like mist settling
into twisted/ rockstrewn ravines
my long friends/ the white clouds/ drift off
there is a road that leaves the world
mindless/ who can be disturbed by thoughts
at night i sit alone among the rocks
while the round moon shines above cold mountain

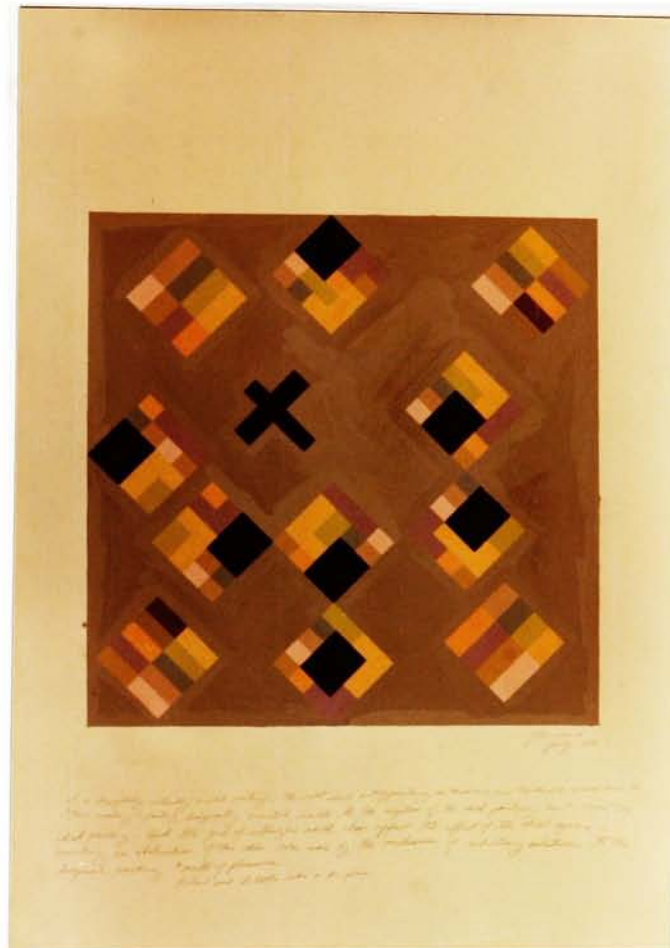
I want to represent nature in that sense, of the twists and turns of the various systems. How particular systems cross, interweave, and develop alternate relationships and alternate meanings.

This is meant to be an afterword and an introduction at the same time, having finished the main text of the thesis and needing to re-concentrate my attentions in painting. There is a certain unconscious tendency to consider the thesis as a closed series, when it is perhaps better thought of as an open sequence. I want to deflate that text a bit in being over-wordy for what should be a rather simple idea. The painting is meant to show in "The Terrain..." a rather meandering sense of perspective paths and the phenomenon of recognition

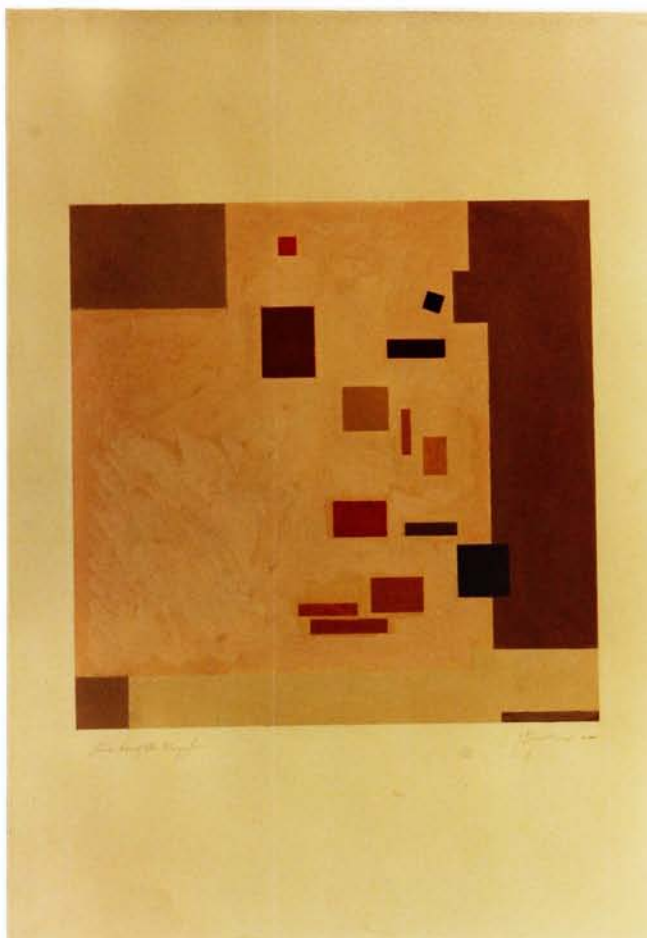
of rhythmic patterning of certain color/shapes. It is the same meandering sense that occupies the text of this work. I don't want my concept of the utility of generative systems to be seen as dogma, I just want it to be seen as a view, "like mist settling", to clarify the contexts of how we see.

The clarifying of contexts is the role of generative systems, attempting to paint them has to do with overlapping contexts. Attempting to paint them and also to write about them is to invite contradiction. So there is much that is implied in being contradictory. The terrain (pictured) is a combination of contradictory views, of "the everyday way" while "my long friends/the white clouds/drift off".

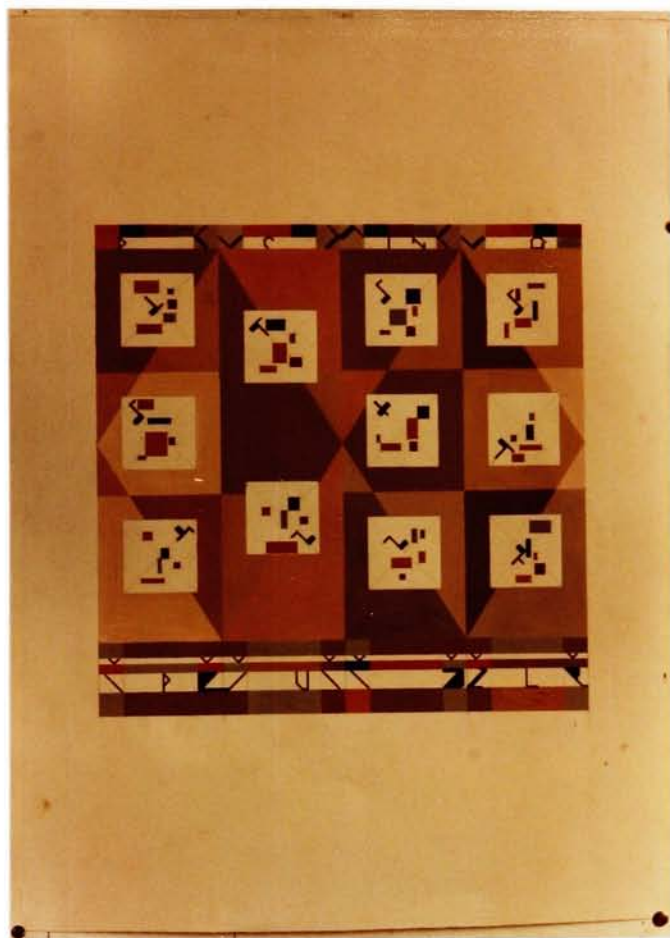
Illustrations



Richard Says It Looks Like A Bi-plane, gouache on paper
1980 22 x 30 inches



Lisa Doing the Puzzle, gouache on paper, 22 x 30 inches, 1980



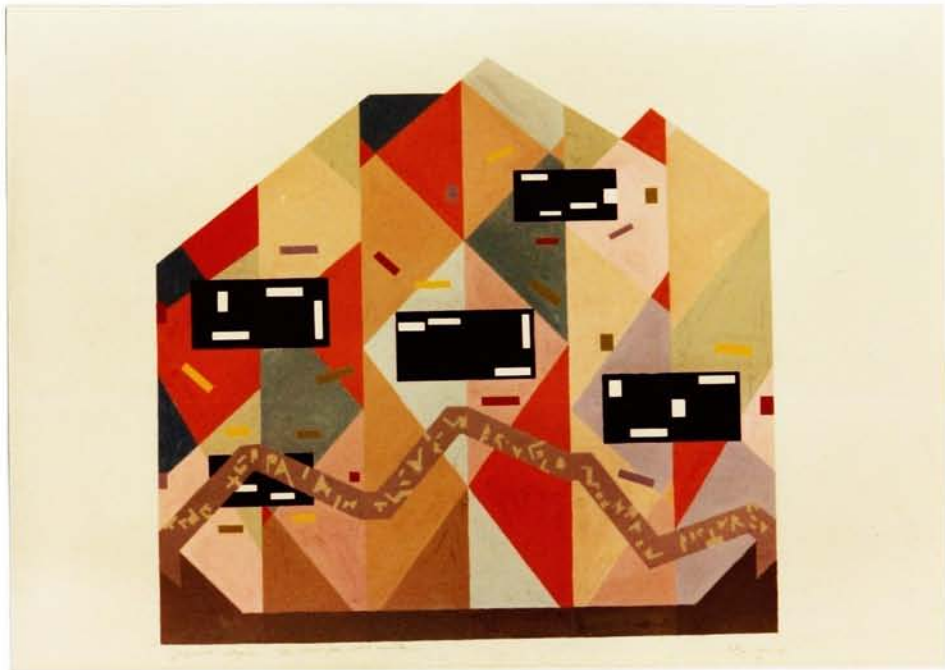
Doing The Puzzle, gouache on paper, 23 x 29 inches, 1980



Lisa Lying Down, gouache on paper, 23 x 29 inches, 1980



Opera Moves Puppet Implicate, gouache on paper, 23 x. 29 inches
1980



The View from Cold Mountain, gouache on paper, 22 x 30 inches
1981



Brooklyn Bridge Painting, oil on masonite, 70 x 70 inches
1981



Altered Rhythm, oil on masonite, 68 x 72 inches, 1981



The Function is...a Combination of Things, oil on masonite,
1981 84 x 72 inches