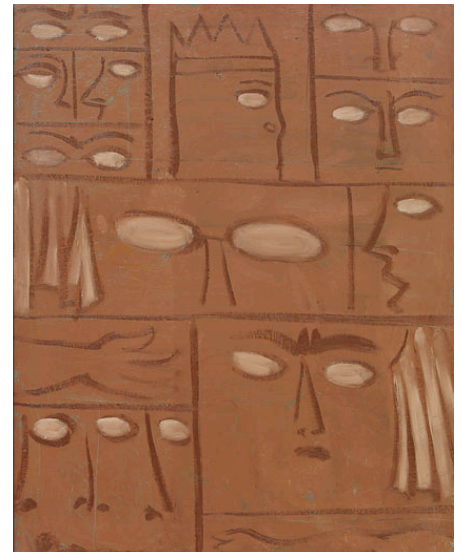


Starting with Oedipus:

Originality and Influence in Gottlieb's Pictographs

Harry Cooper

In 1941, well, the thing as far as I was concerned started with some conversations I had with Rothko in which I said, I think that one of the ways to solve this problem that confronts us [how to avoid the provincialism of American art without imitating European art] is to find some sort of subject matter other than that which is around us.... I said, how about some classical subject matter like mythological themes? Mark chose some themes from the plays of Aeschylus and I tried, played with the Oedipus myth, which was both a classical theme and a Freudian theme.¹



Adolph Gottlieb
Eyes of Oedipus, 1941

From Gottlieb's relaxed narrative, you would never guess that he is recounting the fundamental break of his career, his leap into maturity and independence. It was just as momentous as Barnett Newman's decision on his birthday in 1948 to stop working on the painting he would call Onement I declaring its single central "zip" of painted masking tape on a monochrome field to be enough for a painting. For Gottlieb, the conversation with Rothko led not only to a new theme in his work (there are seven paintings with "Oedipus" in the title over the next few years) but also to a new form, a hastily inscribed grid spanning the canvas and organizing fragmentary shapes and images into what he called a "pictograph." As Gottlieb explained to Andrew Hudson in the same 1968

conversation: “[W]e obviously weren’t going to try to illustrate these themes in some sort of a Renaissance style. So we suddenly found that there were formal problems that confronted us for which there was no precedent, and we were in an unknown territory.”

The first pictograph is generally considered to be Eyes of Oedipus (1941), a work whose primitive technique and repetitive imagery still carry a shock. Over a gray ground Gottlieb applied a smeary monochrome coat of light brown paint and then, probably with the other end of the brush, scratched a grid into it. The tracery of scratched lines revealing the gray beneath is faint but visible, coinciding with and sometimes diverging from a stronger grid of dark brown lines that Gottlieb painted next, taking the scratched grid as a rough guide. He then used the same dark brown color to paint faces, arms, eyes, and drapery within the thirteen units of the grid. Finally, in a further act of filling, Gottlieb carefully painted the eighteen eyes and two draperies white. The result is a near-total rejection of the impressive visual culture (probably second only to Guston’s among his peers) that Gottlieb had developed through study with John Sloan, an early sojourn in Europe (1921-22), and close association with Milton Avery and John Graham. As he told Hudson about the 1941 works, “I couldn’t even get a show because it just looked as if I didn’t know how to paint. I wasn’t sure that I knew, myself.”

The composition is just as simple as the facture. The grid divides the surface into three horizontal strata. At the top, the crowned head of Oedipus is set off by flanking sets of eyes that seem to command the viewer to behold, not look away as Oedipus does. His right-facing profile is counterbalanced by a left-facing one, female judging from the fine features, at the right of the middle register. Some draperies at middle left are echoed by another set at bottom right, and within the bottom stratum two arms reach out to one

another, one higher and one lower. Through such simple echoes Gottlieb achieves a dramatic interplay without resorting to a “Renaissance style,” that is, to a clear narrative linked to an illusionistic spatial order.¹

With these limited means Gottlieb also manages to convey a specific sense of the story itself. The staring, whited-out eyes capture the paradox of blindness and vision at the heart of Sophocles’s play, a motif epitomized by the blind seer Tiresias and the self-blinded Oedipus and woven throughout the text as well. The cut-off arms not only suggest blind groping but have a phallic presence that may reflect Gottlieb’s awareness of Freud’s equation, via the play, of blindness and castration.² The conglomerate head at lower left, with its three eye-sharing faces (close kin to Rothko’s imagery of the same time), may reference the many-in-one nature of the chorus in Greek tragedy or even, more specifically, the “burden of plural identities” entailed by Oedipus’s incest.³ The draperies, more than simply signifying Antiquity or creating a stage space for the image, may derive from one of two elements in the play: Iocasta’s robe, from which Oedipus draws the brooches to blind himself, or (less likely) the closing injunction that Oedipus shield himself from human sight, presumably with some kind of cloth. The uncanny way that the draperies stand up by themselves rather than hanging makes them actors in their own right, equal players in the network that Gottlieb constructs.⁴

The most memorable invention of the painting, however, is the shorthand image of Oedipus, a literal blockhead who, were it not for his jagged crown, might be mistaken for another section of the grid. With this near-collapse of image into structure, Gottlieb seems to demonstrate how, as he told Hudson, the new theme (Oedipus) demanded a new form (the grid). But that is not all. There is something almost fetal about the barely

differentiated profile of Oedipus's nose, and this implication is made explicit in the closely related 1942 painting Oedipus, which shows a fetus curled within an eye in the rectangle directly beneath Oedipus's head. It is hard to imagine a more powerful condensation of Sophocles's tale of a fate sealed by prenatal prophecy than the icon of a fetus-king.



Adolph Gottlieb
Oedipus, 1942

The attractiveness of ancient myth to vanguard American painters of the 1940s has been explored by Stephen Polcari, who saw it as a direct, natural response to the horrors of world war, and by Michael Leja, whose more nuanced account located the same response within a middle-class, mid-century humanist ideology that sought to wring some meaning and hope from unreason and chaos.⁵ Gottlieb's 1947 statement in the journal Tiger's Eye reflects the ethos that Leja identifies: "Today when our aspirations have been reduced to a desperate attempt to escape from evil, and times are out of joint, our obsessive, subterranean and pictographic images are the expression of the neurosis which is our reality."⁶ Fellow "mythmakers" Newman and Rothko joined Gottlieb in referencing the Oedipus myth, and they were not alone.⁷ The sense of time tragically dislocated or (in Gottlieb's significantly archaic phrase) "out of joint" entailed a kind of communal rummage through antiquity. Two articles relating Oedipus to current events appeared in 1941 in the Surrealist-inspired American journal View and a book on Aeschylus that "drew transhistorical parallels between archaic myth and modern cataclysm" was published in 1940.⁸

But what might have motivated Gottlieb's choice of the Oedipus myth in particular as the material through which he would discover himself as an artist? For it was indeed self-discovery that was at stake for Gottlieb: "I wanted to be my own man,"

he told Hudson, explaining the dilemma posed by the competing forces of American artistic backwardness and European sophistication. That Gottlieb's search for self issued in a mode as anonymous in some sense as the *Pictographs* is remarkable, but then the same can be said of Newman, Rothko, and Pollock: the paradox seems to be a defining one of so-called abstract expressionism. What is more surprising is that Gottlieb occasionally allowed his search for self to obtrude into the anonymity of the *Pictographs* and become a theme.

Reflection (1941) features the same sort of scratched and painted grid as Eyes of Oedipus and has almost the same number of units, but the imagery is concentrated in the center while the periphery is mostly bare. Two faces dominate the composition, staring out but turned slightly towards one other so that their gazes seem to converge on the viewer. The gaze of the left face, whose eyes are rendered in strong black contours and isolated on a brown rectangle as if looking through a slot, is intense, that of the right face muted. An arm hangs down at left, relaxed but energetic, bent at the elbow and ending, as it crosses into another unit of the grid, in an upturned hand that seems to caress the vertical edge of the brown rectangle it touches. Together these elements evoke the familiar pictorial formula of an artist at work on his self-portrait.⁹ To convey this set piece, Gottlieb returns to the kind of coherent space that he generally abjured in the *Pictographs*.¹⁰ Rather than truly fragmenting space the grid becomes part of it, evoking an easel through which we see the figure and its reflection, while the gray rectangle that Gottlieb added in the crook of the arm (traces of the larger pink rectangle are visible beneath it) suggests a primed canvas. At center is a schematic eye and eyelid just like the one in Oedipus (1942) except that it is tipped upright and contains a spiral rather than a



Adolph Gottlieb
Reflection, 1941

fetus. (So once again, as with Eyes of Oedipus, the fetal image is present in embryo.) To put it simply, Reflection shows the artist at work on his own genesis. It is the same story that Gottlieb's friend Newman would construct around his birthday breakthrough of Onement I. Given that Gottlieb made a habit of painting a self-portrait on his birthday, a habit that ended in 1940, Reflection may well be an extension of that tradition into the more symbolic register of the Pictographs.¹¹

Perhaps dissatisfied with the conventionality of Reflection's self-representation and symbolism, Gottlieb took a different took a different path to the same goal the following year in a painting that seems even more anomalous, Black Hand (1943). Here the generally blunt and artless brushwork of the early Pictographs is interrupted by a detailed set of hand- and fingerprints, undoubtedly Gottlieb's own. As in Pollock's No. 1, 1948 which immediately comes to mind, the handprints seem at once matter-of-fact in their indexicality and urgent in their flat-out gesture of pre-verbal, prehistoric self-presentation. The drama is heightened by the play of black and white as well as by the partial prints of fingers, which seem both playful and furtive. At bottom right an abstracted face stares out at the viewer, helping to deliver the freight of self-portraiture. Its triangle nose and target eyes recur separately elsewhere in the composition, just as the handprints get dissected and scattered. This schematic face together with the sense of a brick wall on which fingers and fingertips cling recalls "Kilroy Was Here," the graffiti scrawled by American G. I.s on walls throughout Europe featuring a rudimentary figure whose fingers and nose hang over a ledge while his eyes peer at the passerby. (Kilroy's droopy nose can perhaps be found in such Pictographs as E of 1949). The Kilroy



Adolph Gottlieb
Black Hand, 1943



Adolph Gottlieb
E, 1949

reference gives an urgent, wartime context to the self-assertion of Black Hand. Whether Gottlieb was also making an Oedipal pun (Kilroy = kill the king) is anyone's guess.¹²

The simplest answer to the “why Oedipus” question, then, is just that it is a story, *the* story, of self-discovery. But it is also a story of rivalry between fathers and sons, of violence in the passage of generations, and here it is hard not to think of Gottlieb's struggle to overcome the weight of tradition that he had internalized by 1940. His most immediate Oedipal relationship as an artist was to Milton Avery, who enthralled him for most of the 1930s. As he told Dorothy Seckler, “He was a good ten years older than I and at that point the difference meant quite a bit. I was influenced by him but I can't say it did me any good because, in a way, it was sort of a weak period. I finally broke away from that and I started going to much better things.”¹³ The fact that the break only began to occur after a cross-country move prescribed for Gottlieb's wife's health, to Arizona in 1937, shows how strong the attachment was. The Avery infatuation can be seen in turn as Gottlieb's gentle way, given Avery's own stylistic Frenchness, of getting some distance from French modernism. “I didn't want to kill them,” he said of Picasso and Cézanne. “I just wanted to kill what I thought were the false values,” he told Hudson.¹⁴ At other times Gottlieb located his Oedipal drama differently: “Abstraction the father, surrealism the mother – we were the offspring of both,” he told Martin Friedman, adding “bastard offspring” in the version of the line he told Irving Sandler, thus spicing the family romance with rejection and rebellion. It was Gottlieb's worry about the mother that led to the abandonment of the Oedipus theme itself. “It immediately became apparent that if you are dealing with the Oedipus myth, you're involved in Freud. In this case you went to surrealism and there are all sorts of implications.”¹⁵ In consorting with

Oedipus for a while, Gottlieb was reflecting “both his awareness of Surrealist dominance [given their interest in Freud] and his need to break with that system,” as Sanford Hirsch writes.¹⁶ In short, if Gottlieb’s plan was to use Oedipus as a symbol of his rebellion, there was a problem: it already belonged to one of his “parents.”

Given all this Oedipal thematizing, one might figure that Gottlieb was in the grip of such feelings himself – that his attitude to Rothko, for example, the other disciple of Avery, would be full of rivalry, especially after they both made their break with the father figure. In fact, the two remained close friends until rather late in their careers, when Gottlieb came to resent Rothko’s greater success. The only hint of friction in the 1940s is Gottlieb’s painting Cerulean Bull (1945), whose odd title must be a pun on Rothko’s Syrian Bull (1943), a painting well known to Gottlieb because it was reproduced along with his own Rape of Persephone (1942) in the letter that the two wrote to the New York Times with Newman’s help in June 1943. Gottlieb’s humor has been overlooked by most commentators, who have no doubt been blinded to it by all his talk of expressing “terror, loneliness, isolation” as he told Sandler.¹⁷ In addition to the pun of the title, whose excuse is the work’s uniform (cerulean?) blue background, the painting has other comic elements. A rather debonair and arch-looking bull with a finely coiffed eyebrow presides critically over his own deconstruction in the adjoining rectangles while the bits of red that wander across the grid, accenting it here and there, seem to deflate any sense of violence that the theme might imply. That Gottlieb had Rothko’s painting in mind is indicated by the faint striations Gottlieb uses to depict the bull’s hump in the center of the composition, striations similar to those Rothko employs throughout his painting, segmenting its forms. Otherwise the paintings are miles apart. Where Rothko jams



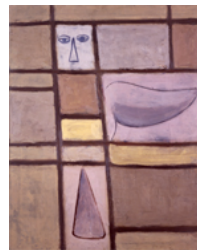
Adolph Gottlieb
Cerulean Bull, 1945

shapes together in the center of the composition, as if centrifugal pressure might account for the odd morphology of the creature, Gottlieb keeps his fragments away from each other, preferring to convey transformation and association as a matter of implied sequence. This difference in compositional mode is broadly true of Rothko's and Gottlieb's work of the early 1940s. It seems that, having decided to mine the same thematic vein, they stayed out of each other's way in formal terms. No surprise, then, that Gottlieb's swipe at Rothko in Cerulean Bull is so good-humored.

But if Gottlieb did not feel much competition with his artistic "brother," what about the various "fathers" from whom he had to escape, not just Avery but the entire modern European tradition that Avery channeled for him? Here there is more evidence of rivalry. True, Gottlieb was happy to locate the Pictographs in general terms between abstraction and surrealism, as we have seen. Yet he also insisted, contradicting himself, that they were a clean break with both Europe and America, a leap into the unknown, a violently new form. "I felt that what was necessary for me to destroy was the concept of what constituted a good painting at that time," he told Sylvester. "We had to start from scratch We had to take a big jump," he told Sandler, and proceeded to deny a whole compendium of influences on the Pictographs, from cubism to surrealism to Northwest Coast Indian art to Joaquin Torres-Garcia.¹⁸ He told Friedman that "the source of my images never came from other works" but qualified it with "as far as I knew." If certain derivations could not be denied (witness a recent exhibition that drew convincing connections between the Pictographs and Gottlieb's own collection of tribal art¹⁹), at least Gottlieb could claim a degree of unconsciousness.

The inconsistency in Gottlieb's attitude about influence and originality is no doubt typical of artists struggling to find themselves, but it also reflects a certain split unique to the Pictographs. On the one hand, the images painted within the grid units are often derivative, representing a "digest" or "storehouse" of motifs, however reworked, from prehistory, antiquity, the Renaissance, and modernity, from Egyptian hieroglyphs to Picasso's Guernica, from Western and non-Western traditions, from high and low culture.²⁰ On the other hand, Gottlieb's idea of using the grid as vehicle for more or less freely associated and randomly organized images was original. These two sides of the coin, taken together, suggest that what Gottlieb invented in the Pictographs was a machine to process the most diverse sources into a nonhierarchical, decentralized array – a cultural leveling device, a destroyer of distinctions. Gottlieb used the word "alkahest," Paracelsus's name for his alleged universal solvent, for one of the Pictograph titles, but he might well have applied it to the whole series.²¹

The division of the canvas by an explicit grid in itself was, of course, nothing new. Here Gottlieb admitted the influence not only of comic strips and Italian predellas but even of Mondrian, an artist who was the whipping boy for many of Gottlieb's peers. (Gottlieb paid tribute to him in Minotaure of 1941, in which the grid units are filled with shades of yellow, brown, and gray in imitation of Mondrian's 1918 manner) The originality of Gottlieb's grid lay not in its form but in its operation, and even here he acknowledged a kind of source in surrealism – not mainstream surrealist painting but surrealist automatic writing and, to the extent that it was done at all (Masson for example), automatic painting. He explained to Friedman that "the whole idea of automatism ... was in the idea of having a free association of images I didn't want to



Adolph Gottlieb
Minotaure, 1941

control the imagery, and I set up a system on the canvas whereby I could let unrelated images appear next to each other.”

There is a strong echo here of T. S. Eliot’s definition of the mind of the mature poet as a “medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.”²² Gottlieb’s talk of surrealist literary models has overshadowed the possible influence of Eliot on the development of the Pictographs. Eliot had been important to Gottlieb ever since he read “The Wasteland” in its first American publication in The Dial.²³ Gottlieb proceeded in 1929 to make a rather literal-minded painting named after the poem showing three men in a grimy landscape, and another one titled Man and the Sea. As Gottlieb told Seckler, he was not trying for “any correlation between what writers were doing ... and my own work” – not, he specified, “in that period.” It seems likely that Gottlieb returned to “The Wasteland” as a model when he was developing the Pictographs, not only for the poem’s famous montage technique and its closing declaration of the power of the fragment (“These fragments I have shored against my ruin”) but also for its reliance on an eclectic range of Western and non-Western myth. Even Tiresias makes an appearance.

One stream of imagery in the poem, that of transformation by water (“Those are pearls that were his eyes,” Eliot writes of the drowned sailor in the deck of Tarot cards) may have been on Gottlieb’s mind just prior to the Pictographs in a group of paintings inspired by some wooden boxes with compartments, probably fishing-related, that Gottlieb found on the beach in Provincetown after his return from Arizona. Untitled (Box and Sea Objects) of 1940, the most important work of the series, shows a number of shells, bones, and other found objects arranged within the box and a piece of coral on



Adolph Gottlieb
Box and Sea Objects, 1940

top of it resembling a listless hand. Although the illusionistic style of the painting is Dali-esque, the fact that Gottlieb placed or propped the box parallel to the picture plane so that its compartments act like divisions of the canvas strongly anticipates the abstract grid of the Pictographs, as Gottlieb himself later observed.²⁴ In a related sketch, Gottlieb seems to make a point of this placement by including a small piece of driftwood as a kind of prop behind the box. From the shell game of the boxes it was a small but momentous step to the (flatter) board game of the Pictographs, in which chance and repetition were allowed to play across a much greater range of elements.



Adolph Gottlieb
Untitled, 1938

It is this combinatory aesthetic – “They were fragmented pieces of things ... that had no connection with each other But then there was a ... sort of total combination,” Gottlieb said of the box series²⁵ – that ties him to the Eliot of “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” But it is not just the single poem that functions for Eliot as “a medium ... in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.”²⁶ He proposes that the entire history of poetry works in similar fashion, that no poem is meaningful except as it enters into combination with past poems, joining a tradition that is altered by the addition. For Eliot, to be individual and to conform to tradition were dialectically linked poles: “We are hardly likely to find that it [a valuable poem] is one and not the other.”²⁷ Had Gottlieb been an essayist, he might have found a similar formulation to express his paradoxical feelings about the tradition of painting. I have only dealt with the earliest Pictographs, the ones in which Gottlieb was cleaning his historical slate. In 1945 in *The Enchanted Ones*, with its alternation of explicitly African and Picassoid motifs, Gottlieb began to admit a much greater range of imagery and to convey it with much richer pictorial effects. From here this essay ought to proceed



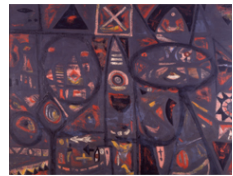
Adolph Gottlieb
The Enchanted Ones, 1945

through the mature Pictographic production, weighing its moments of startling originality together with its negotiations of Klee (see T, 1950), Miro (see Symbols and a Woman, 1951), Dubuffet (see Plutomania, 1951), and possibly Henry Moore (The Prisoners, 1946) and even Pollock (Dark Journey, 1949), before considering the reasons for Gottlieb's gradual abandonment of the series in the early 1950s. Rather than embark on that journey now, I will simply hazard a guess about the end of the story.



Adolph Gottlieb
Symbols and a Woman
1951

Gottlieb himself, when pressed by Seckler to explain what she saw as “a more deliberate aesthetic manipulation” in the later Pictographs, admitted that he “became very adept” and “was no longer surprised.” A parallel explanation would point to his increasingly explicit debts to other painters, including the ones I just mentioned. If this is indeed the case, then Gottlieb's invocation of Oedipus as his starting block turns out to be more appropriate than he could have imagined, for Oedipus is, finally, the story of a man with no past whose past eventually overwhelms him. This was the fate Gottlieb faced in 1951 when, heroically, he had to reinvent himself again.



Adolph Gottlieb
Dark Journey, 1949

Notes:

¹ Gottlieb told Irving Sandler: “I used the pictograph in an attempt to relate to 14th-century Italian painting, where they used boxes to tell a narrative, but I didn't want to tell a story but to present several aspects simultaneously.” “Conversation with Adolph Gottlieb, August 12, 1957 at his summer home in Provincetown,” Irving Sandler Papers at the Getty Research Institute Special Collections 2000.43, Box 10, Folder 4, unpaginated, courtesy of Sanford Hirsch.

² Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’” [1919], in Freud, Collected Papers, trans. Joan Rivière (New York: Basic Books, 1959), vol. IV, p. 370.

³ Edward Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 170, quoted in Peter L. Rudnytsky, Freud and Oedipus (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 16 and 356. Rudnytsky points out that Oedipus's plurality (husband/son, father/brother) is foreshadowed both in the riddle of the Sphinx (four/two/three legs) and in the discrepant accounts of Laius's murderer (a band of robbers/a single man), a discrepancy famously unresolved in the play and one that leads Oedipus to proclaim, in an ultimate moment of dramatic irony, “I am not the killer: for one could not be made equal to many.” Anfan makes a similar point concerning the triple head in Rothko's Oedipus, relating it to the line from Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy: “Oedipus the murderer of his father, the husband of his mother, the solver of the riddle of the Sphinx! What does the mysterious triad of these fateful deeds tell us?”

⁴ The is even clearer in the drapery at the bottom of *Oedipus* (1941), reproduced in Lawrence Alloway and Mary Davis McNaughton, *Adolph Gottlieb: A Retrospective* (New York: The Arts Publisher, 1981), plate 34. The connection of drapery to brooch is made more explicit in *Cerulean Bull* (pl. x), whose lower register carries images of hands, a pin, and drapery.

⁵ Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁶ “The Ides of Art: The Attitudes of Ten Artists on Their Art and Contemporaneity,” *The Tiger’s Eye* I: 2 (December 1947). Leja (pp. 68, 72, 80) relies on a 1943 dialogue that Rothko and Gottlieb had on radio station WNYC as “the most concise statement” of a strategy that “started from the modern experience of terror and projected it back onto the primordial human condition, a tactic that naturalized it.” (p. 71)

⁷ See the 1940 painting by Rothko titled *Oedipus* as well as the 1944 *Tiresias* and Newman’s unpublished 1947-48 statement in which, referring to “the tragedy of action in the chaos of society,” he wrote: “We are living, then, through a Greek drama; and each of us now stands like Oedipus and can by his acts or lack of action, in innocence, kill his father and desecrate his mother.” Quoted in Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, p. 75. Rothko referred to himself, Gottlieb, and Newman as a “small band of mythmakers” in his essay for a Clyfford Still exhibition at Art of This Century gallery in 1946.

⁸ See Mary McNaughton, “Adolph Gottlieb: His Life and Art,” in *Adolph Gottlieb: A Retrospective*, p. 36; and David Anfam, *Mark Rothko*, p. 47. The book Anfam cites is Gilbert Murray, *Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy* (Oxford University Press: 1940). Anfam shows that Rothko paraphrased Murray in his 1943 statement for a Sidney Janis catalogue.

⁹ There is an element as well of Picasso’s 1932 painting *Girl Before a Mirror*, which became a touchstone for many painters after the Museum of Modern Art acquired it in 1938. McNaughton (“Adolph Gottlieb: His Life and Art,” p. 33), suggest that this painting by Picasso “was the probable model for Gottlieb’s fusion of grid and circular forms” in such 1941 paintings as *Female Forms* and *Pictograph – Tablet Form* (pl. x).

¹⁰ “I could not visualize the whole man on canvas,” Gottlieb told Dorothy Seckler in 1967. Cited in Charlotta Kotik, “The Legacy of Signs: Reflections on Adolph Gottlieb’s Pictographs,” in *The Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1994), p. 65.

¹¹ My thanks to Sanford Hirsch for the information about Gottlieb’s birthday self-portraits. The exact dating and sequence of Gottlieb’s works within 1941 is unclear, so it cannot be determined whether *Reflection* was indeed painted anytime near Gottlieb’s birthday (March 14), but it is certainly possible.

¹² My thanks to Sarah Boxer for the last suggestion. Rosalind Krauss has adduced Kilroy in relation to Pollock’s work as exemplary of the indexical sign in its confrontation of past and present. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. tktk. This is interesting since Gottlieb’s interpolation of Kilroy makes its indexical nature explicit through the use of handprints. For other sources for Gottlieb’s use of handprints (Picasso, Miro, and cave painting), see McNaughton, “Adolph Gottlieb: His Life and Art,” p. 39.

¹³ “Interview with Adolph Gottlieb Conducted by Dorothy Seckler in New York, October 25, 1967,” unpaginated transcript courtesy of Sanford Hirsch. The fact that this relation began just when Gottlieb got married in 1932 may be significant from a psychoanalytic point of view. So, perhaps, is Gottlieb’s misstatement of their age difference, which was 18 years, not ten. While in Arizona, Gottlieb wrote (no doubt partly referring to Avery): “Perhaps having someone else comment on your work every other day tends to sidetrack one, and also having a sympathetic commentator close at hand may be a form of self-

indulgence.” Cited in Sanford Hirsch, The Beginning of Seeing: Tribal Art and the Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb (New Britain, Connecticut: New Britain Museum of American Art, 2002), p. 5.

¹⁴ Gottlieb, who was never psychoanalyzed, seems to have resisted Oedipal theories and styles of development. He criticized Gorky for swinging wildly from adulation to condemnation of Picasso: “After having a father image of Picasso, he had to get rid of it and he tried to destroy Picasso with a manifesto.” Of his own rebellion against his father and the family business, he told Seckler, “I don’t think it was Freudian. I think it was just a strong urge that I had to be independent,” although he added, “Maybe there was a Freudian explanation of it, I don’t know.”

¹⁵ “Transcribed from Telephone Recording (BBC) ... Adolph Gottlieb interviewed by David Sylvester, Transmission: Saturday, 8th October, 1960: Third Programme,” unpaginated transcript courtesy of Sanford Hirsch.

¹⁶ Sanford Hirsch, “Adolph Gottlieb and Art in New York in the 1930s,” in The Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb, p. 22.

¹⁷ An exception is Linda Konheim Kramer. See her essay “The Graphic Sources of Gottlieb’s Pictographs” in The Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb, pp. 54 and 56.

¹⁸ It is possible that Gottlieb was piqued by Sandler’s inveterate source hunting, but since this section of the transcript is in the form of fragmentary notes (made from a conversation that occurred after the catastrophic fire in Gottlieb’s 23rd Street studio in 1966), this remains a guess.

¹⁹ Sanford Hirsch, The Beginning of Seeing: Tribal Art and the Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb (New Britain Museum of Art, Connecticut, 2002).

²⁰ Hirsch, “Adolph Gottlieb and Art” (p. 11), uses the term “digest.” Lawrence Alloway, “Adolph Gottlieb and Abstract Painting,” in Alloway and McNaughton, Adolph Gottlieb (p. 55), uses the term “storehouse of culture.”

²¹ The reference to alchemy is of course pure Jung, whose concept of the collective unconscious lay behind the Pictographs. But for Gottlieb this implied no comfortable lexicon or static reservoir: the archetypes had to be forged anew with each picture. The energy with which Gottlieb attacked the idea of a collective unconscious saved the Pictographs from being illustrations of a dubious concept. Gottlieb told Seckler: “I was interested in reading Jung at the time and the idea [of a collective unconscious] interested me,” but added “I decided to restrict myself to those shapes which I felt had a personal significance to me.” More than once he reports discontinuing the use of an image once he learned its alleged meaning.

²² T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” [1919], in Frank Kermode, ed., Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 41.

²³ It is noteworthy, given Gottlieb’s strong defense of obscurity in his 1948 talk titled “Unintelligibility” (transcript courtesy of Sanford Hirsch), that the Dial version of “The Wasteland” did not contain the numerous footnotes that Eliot added later, much to Ezra Pound’s displeasure, to fill out the poem for its publication as a book.

²⁴ See the next note.

²⁵ Gottlieb cited in Jeanne Siegel, “Adolph Gottlieb: Two Views,” Arts Magazine 42 (February 1968), p. 30, quoted in Kotik, “The Legacy of Signs,” p. 61.

²⁶ Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” p. 42.

²⁷ Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” p. 39.

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