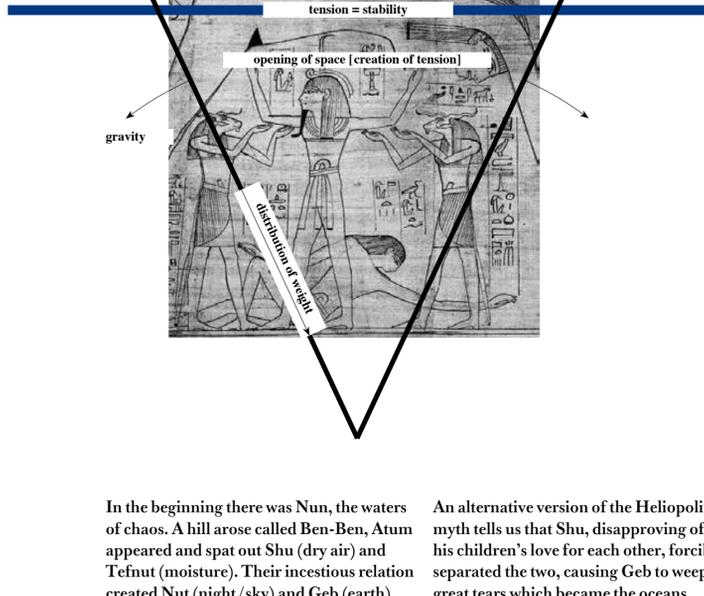


Preliminary Notes on
Some Formal Aspects of the Letterform V

[Performance; ball of wool,
pair of scissors, “table V”]

I



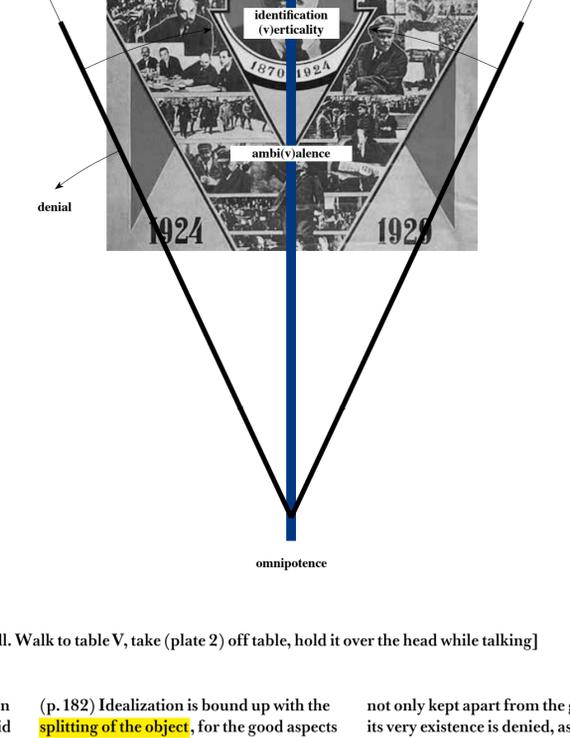
In the beginning there was Nun, the waters of chaos. A hill arose called Ben-Ben, Atum appeared and spat out Shu (dry air) and Tefnut (moisture). Their incestuous relation created Nut (night / sky) and Geb (earth). (p. 51) “The birth and subsequent quarrel of the visible gods Geb and Nut from the invisible Shu and Tefnut caused the world as we know it to come into being with a sky and an earth separated by the atmosphere.

An alternative version of the Heliopolitan myth tells us that Shu, disapproving of his children’s love for each other, forcibly separated the two, causing Geb to weep great tears which became the oceans. A third version tells us that Geb and Nut initially lay so close together that their children could not be born. Only when Shu forced them apart could Nut give birth.”

J T, Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt, 2011

Stable space, protected space. Use of form in postwar modernist architecture.
[Arms outstretched over head, string fixed by foot, creating triangle]

II



[Let string fall. Walk to table V, take (plate 2) off table, hold it over the head while talking]

M K, Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms, 1946

(p. 182) Idealization is bound up with the splitting of the object, for the good aspects of the breast are exaggerated as a safeguard against the fear of the persecuting breast. While idealization is thus the corollary of persecutory fear, it also springs from the power of the instinctual desires which aim at unlimited gratification and therefore create the picture of an inexhaustible and always bountiful breast—an ideal breast. We find an instance of such a cleavage in infantile hallucinatory gratification. The main processes which come into play in idealization are also operative in hallucinatory gratification, namely, splitting of the object and denial both of frustration and of persecution. The frustrating and persecuting object is kept widely apart from the idealized object. However, the bad object is

not only kept apart from the good one but its very existence is denied, as in the whole situation of frustration and the bad feelings (pain) to which frustration gives rise. This is bound up with denial of psychic reality. The denial of psychic reality becomes possible only through strong feelings of omnipotence—an essential characteristic of early mentality. Omnipotent denial of the existence of the bad object and of the painful situation is the unconscious equal to annihilation in the destructive impulse. It is, however, not only a situation and an object that are denied and annihilated—it is an object relation which suffers this fate; and therefore a part of the ego, from which the feelings towards the object emanate, is denied and annihilated as well.

III

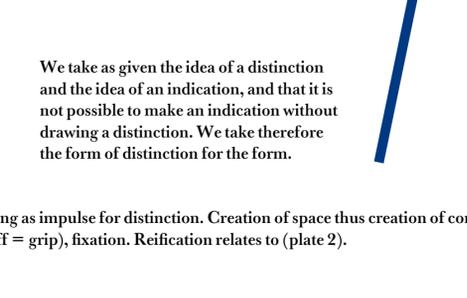
Connects with myth of origin (plate 1), creation of space, unmarked space, inbetween, does not connect to idealization in (2), since unmarked space there is losing relevance.

[Cut the string, hold over the head at upper end, foot still resting on strings]

G S B, Laws of Form, 1968

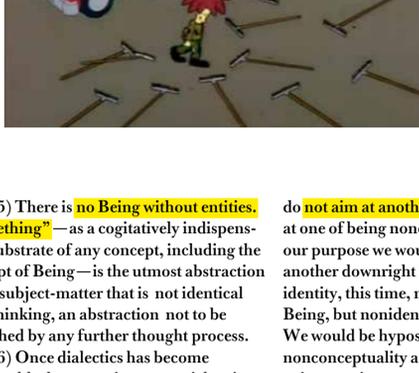
Draw a distinction, and you create a uni(v)erse.

Draw a distinction. Call it the first distinction. Call the space in which it is drawn the space se(v)ered or clo(v)en by the distinction.



We take as given the idea of a distinction and the idea of an indication, and that it is not possible to make an indication without drawing a distinction. We take therefore the form of distinction for the form.

But: Something as impulse for distinction. Creation of space thus creation of concept. Primacy of the object. (Begriff, Griff = grip), fixation. Reification relates to (plate 2).

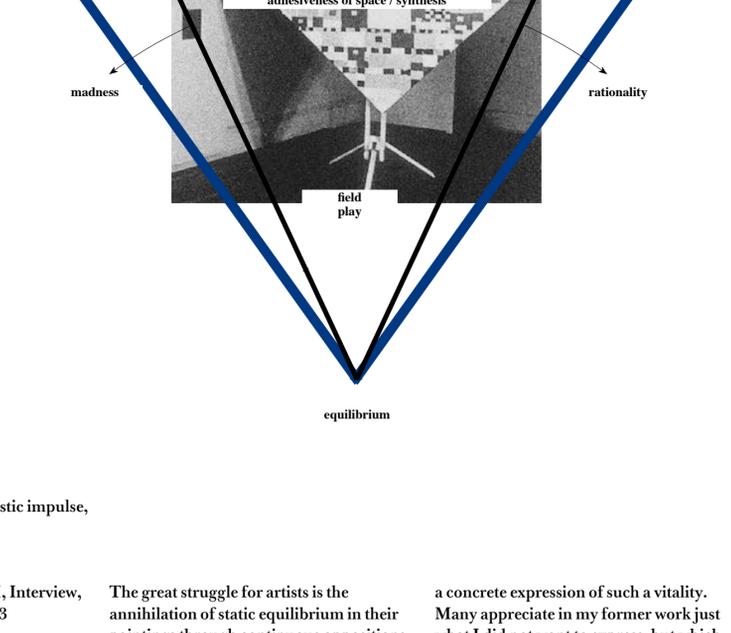


TWA, Negative Dialectics, 1967

(p. 135) There is no Being without entities. “Something” — as a cogitatively indispensable substrate of any concept, including the concept of Being—is the utmost abstraction of the subject-matter that is not identical with thinking, an abstraction not to be abolished by any further thought process. (p. 136) Once dialectics has become inescapable, however, it cannot stick to its principle like ontology and transcendental philosophy. It cannot be maintained as a structure that will stay basic no matter how it is modified. In criticizing ontology we

do not aim at another ontology, not even at one of being nonontological. If that were our purpose we would be merely positing another downright “first”—not absolute identity, this time, not the concept, not Being, but nonidentity, facticity, entity. We would be hypostatizing the concept of nonconceptuality and thus acting counter to its meaning.

IV



Artistic impulse,

P M, Interview, 1943

The great struggle for artists is the annihilation of static equilibrium in their paintings through continuous oppositions (contrasts) among the means of expression. It is always natural for human beings to seek static balance. This balance of course is necessary to existence in time. But vitality in the continual succession of time always destroys this balance. Abstract art is

a concrete expression of such vitality. Many appreciate in my former work just what I did not want to express, but which was produced by an incapacity to express what I wanted to express—dynamic movement in equilibrium. But a continuous struggle for this statement brought me nearer. This is what I am attempting in Victory Boogie Woogie.

A K, V is the War Aim, 1944

(p. 9) Not everybody who carves a sign is necessarily understood by his neighbour. Only the artist succeeds in imposing the product of his fantasy on his fellow men. Due to his superior creative imagination he also expresses their latent desire. The artist creates the “style” of a period, for style is, at first, the product of one, stylus, the individual style of the inspired. In creating he divines the half-dreamed, vaguely realized visions of his contemporaries and hands back to them, clarified in his synthetic design, the sight of their

own ideas. Synthesis, in Greek, like the corresponding derivative from Latin, composition, stands for what has been placed together and joined. “Symbol” is the intensifying Greek expression (symballein, meaning not merely to place, but to throw together). Every good artistic composition has implicitly symbolic force. So strong has become the appeal of the symbols of script, since we agreed to their standardized meaning, that we, who rapidly assimilate it by reading, forget that once the significance of the separate signs was much less clear.

Coming back to (plate 1), consider Aby Warburg’s “thought space” (Denkraum) mediating madness and rationality. Both Warburg and Kallir show the necessity of a Denkraum to protect the personality from inner-psychic threats, as well as to establish an institution against the potential and actual violence of the worlds they wanted to be a part of. It appears to be not accidental that the obsession Kallir demonstrates corresponds to the objective madness of the year 1944.

Exhaustion. But would it not be beautiful to let it all go?
[Arms outstretched over the head, eyes closed, relaxation of the body, releasing of the two string ends: let them fall like breathing out]

- (1) Detail from the Greenfield Papyrus (Book of the Dead of Nesitanebtashru). From the burial of Nesitanebtashru, Deir el-Bahari, Thebes, 21st Dynasty, around 1025 BC.
- (2) Poster commemorating the 5th anniversary of Lenin’s death.
- (3) Venus flytrap.
- (4) Piet Mondrian, Victory Boogie Woogie, 1944. His last painting, displayed in Mondrian’s studio after his death.

Joyce Tyldesley, The Penguin Book of Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt, 2011
 Melanie Klein, Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms, 1946
 George Spencer-Brown, Laws of Form, 1968
 Theodor W. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, 1967
 Piet Mondrian, Interview, 1943 (published in the Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art 13, nos. 4—5 [1946])
 Alfred Kallir, V is the War Aim, 1944